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	<p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p> <h2>Narrative Space as a Site of Broken Belonging and Evolving Estrangement: A Critical Reading of Spatial Aesthetics in Ahmed Taibaoui's Fiction</h2>
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<p>Keywords</p>	<p>Narrative space; estrangement and exile; linguistic poetics; narrative description; central place.</p>
<p>Abstract</p>	<p>Narrative space in the contemporary novel constitutes far more than a mere external frame for events; it becomes a structural force that participates in shaping characters and defining the contours of their identities. The novel does not simply summon the imagined city as a site of belonging and aspiration, but extends beyond it to reveal the manifold faces of estrangement and exile, where the bond between the self and its roots begins to fracture. Through its oscillation between interior and exterior spaces—between dream and reality—the narrative space emerges as a living memory and an arena of conflict, reflecting the dialectic of belonging and loss while endowing the narrative with its symbolic and human resonance. Narrative space is one of the most significant aesthetic structures upon which the act of storytelling rests. It is no longer a passive container in which events unfold; in the modern Arabic novel, it has evolved into a generative site of meaning and a key component of identity, shaping characters' perceptions and their relationship to the world</p>
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Introduction

The specificity of space is especially pronounced in the works of writers who transform it into a mirror that reflects the tremors of both individual and collective consciousness. This is particularly evident in the fiction of **Ahmed Taibaoui**, whose narrative spaces are built on the tension between belonging and estrangement, and on the complex interplay between interior and exterior realms—between the imagined city and the suffocating city, and between homely spaces and those of exile.

From this standpoint, the study poses a central question:

How does narrative space manifest in Ahmed Taibaoui's novels as a semantic and aesthetic structure shaped through language and description, and how does it reveal the transformations of the self as it navigates between belonging and estrangement?

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Several subsidiary questions arise from this overarching inquiry:

- What is the nature of spatial construction in Taibaoui's narratives?
- How does narrative language contribute to shaping space and imbuing it with poeticity?
- What roles does space play in intensifying estrangement and generating the symbolic architecture of the text?
- How does the narrative proliferate from the central place to engender other spaces and their associated meanings?

Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve several key objectives:

1. Uncover the aesthetic and semantic structures of space as an active agent in shaping narrative meaning.
2. Analyze the relationship between space and the narrating self, and examine manifestations of estrangement and exile in Taibaoui's works.
3. Clarify the role of narrative language—poetic, descriptive, and suggestive—in constructing the fictional world.
4. Trace the mechanisms through which secondary spaces emerge from the central place and assess their impact on plot development.
5. Highlight the value of spatial construction in shaping the narrative architecture of the contemporary Algerian novel.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a combined analytical–descriptive approach based on:

- Analyzing the novels through the theoretical frameworks of spatiality as articulated in narrative theory (Propp, Kristeva, the Paris School, among others).
- Employing a semiotic and aesthetic approach to uncover symbolic and spatial configurations.
- Applying stylistic analysis to reveal the role of language in constructing space and generating meaning.
- Integrating textual analysis with thematic inquiry to examine the novel's principal spaces and the narrative strategies associated with them.

Through this integrated methodology, the study aspires to offer a rigorous scholarly reading that reclaims narrative space as a fundamental key to understanding the discourse of estrangement, the question of identity, and the worldview embedded in Ahmed Taibaoui's fiction.

Definition of Place

Place can be approached as a concept of multilayered significations. Linguists have associated it with the locus occupied by an entity. Lisān al-ʿArab defines al-makān and al-makāna as synonymous, referring to “the locus; its plural is ʿamkina, and amākin is the plural of the plural.” Thaʿlab notes that the word makān cannot function as a verb, citing common Arabic usages such as kum makānak (stay in your place), qum maqāmak (rise to your position), and iqʿud maqʿadak (sit in your seat). These expressions show that the term is derived from the verb kāna or from its semantic field, thereby denoting a specific spatial domain or an existential source through which a being is defined in relation to its spatial setting. (Manzūr, 2005)

Other scholars view place as the locus of being, while some regard it as the site of stability. Linguistically, makān is “a term derived from the root (m-k-n), signifying possession and firmness,” (Jibrīl, 2006) or it is “the container of what is settled within it—such as a person's seat on the ground, or the site of standing and reclining.” (Aqīl Zaghlūl, 2006)

Although the linguistic definition approaches a delimitation of the term place, it nonetheless encompasses multiple meanings and connotations. It is, after all, “impossible to conceive of the human being without place; for this reason, place precedes human existence itself.” Consequently, most studies concur in liberating the notion of place from its rigid geographical frame and in re-examining it. Place cannot be reduced to geometric dimensions or material volumes; rather, it transcends these to become a system of abstract relations in which symbolic, social, and cultural meanings intersect. In this sense, place extends beyond tangible spatiality into a network of connections that shape human existence and orient its representations (Ismā, 2009)

1-2 The Significance of Place

Place holds profound importance in the novel, for it endows abstract realities with depth and symbolic resonance through an inexhaustible enrichment that transcends the visible image toward artistic dimensions capable of enhancing the effectiveness of narrative illusion. It stands as one of the novel’s essential aesthetic components and a force that shapes human relations and narrative events. (Ḥāfīz, 1986)

Moreover, the figuration of place is what grants the fictional event its plausibility in the reader’s perception. It provides a tangible realism that renders the action possible within a defined spatial frame. This is precisely what Henri Mitterand emphasizes when he considers place the anchor and pivot of narration, the medium through which the imagined text acquires a quasi-real character as it moves from the realm of fiction to the horizon of reception. (al-Muslim, *pireut*)

From this perspective arises the growing prominence of place in the modern novel, where it has become a fundamental structural element without which narrative architecture cannot stand. The novel, as an artistic construct, achieves completeness only through the presence of a spatial environment that contains events and guides the trajectories of characters—whether this environment is a realistic space rooted in concrete geographical references or an imagined one emerging from the writer’s creative vision and drawing its legitimacy from the internal laws of the text.

It thus becomes clear that the interrelation of place with the other narrative and artistic elements is indispensable. The significance of place cannot be confined to a single locus, for places often intersect and overlap, generating new configurations of space that reveal dynamic interactions and give rise to other places. In this sense, place becomes akin to a secondary character—one that must function as an active, constructive force within the narrative. Otherwise, when reduced to a mere inert mass, place becomes a burdensome element that adds nothing but stagnation and heaviness to the text.

Conversely, in well-crafted novels with agile narration, place transforms into a vital component fulfilling essential functions. It often emerges, at times, as a central protagonist rather than a silent backdrop, actively participating in shaping meaning, directing the course of events, and intensifying the narrative’s symbolic charge. (al-Muslim, *pireut*)

1-3 Types of Place

Place has acquired considerable significance despite the multiplicity of concepts it has accumulated through the diversity of its forms—forms that exceed thirty types, differing according to the criteria adopted by each scholar based on his or her analytical perspective. Among the most prominent classifications are the following:

Types of Place according to Vladimir Propp (Shākir, 1998)

- **The Original Place** (l’espace originel):

This usually refers to the birthplace, the familial space, and the domain of intimacy and familiarity. Yet it can also transform into a site of harm or disruption, compelling the hero to depart in pursuit of repair, transformation, or accomplishment. Greimas calls it the initial place or the primal origin, for it constitutes the point of departure from which the remaining narrative trajectories unfold.

- **The Heterotopic Place** (espace hétérotopique):

A space that differs from the normative or central space and stands in contrast to it.

- **The Paratopic Place** (espace paratopique):

A provisional or transitional space situated at the margins of the central place—what Greimas refers to as the “paratopic” space that accompanies or borders the dominant locus.

- **Non-Place** (non-lieu):

A space inhospitable to biological life, such as deserts or outer space.

Types of Place according to Julia Kristeva (al-Ḥamdānī, 1993)

Geographical Space:

Corresponds to the conventional notion of place, yet it is regenerated and reconfigured through narrative discourse itself.

- **Textual Space:**

The typographical area occupied by the written text on the page.

- **Semantic Space:**

The image shaped by the language of narration and the metaphorical dimensions that arise from it.

- **Space as Stage:**

The manner in which the narrator’s control over the narrative functions as a front-facing theatrical frame.

Types of Place according to Mohl and Romeo

- **My-Place:**

An intimate, private space associated with the self.

- **The Place of Others:**

A space that limits one’s agency and remains subject to the authority of another.

- **Public Places:**

Spaces governed by collective authority or communal regulation.

- **The Infinite Place:**

An open, indeterminate expanse such as wilderness or vast plains

- **2. Place and Narrative Language**

Language constitutes the fundamental component of narrative; it is the source of pleasure and suspense, freed by the novelist from constraints and obstacles, and endowed with the capacity to assign to every

place its own linguistic hue and stylistic inflection. Undeniably, language is the sole medium through which the novelist constructs the fictional world—its events, its characters, and its atmosphere.

Yet narrative language does not refer merely to the denotation of words, nor solely to the meanings of sentences, expressions, and paragraphs. Rather, it encompasses all of these at once, in addition to the interplay between the signifieds embedded in the narrative and the signifiers that articulate them. In this sense, language forges a tangible presence for place, employing stylistic freshness that resists formulaic expression.

- Ahmad Tayyibawi's narrative style exhibits a refined and carefully woven texture, grounded in associative movement and retrospection. We feel the presence of place emerging through language, particularly when he resorts to a simple, direct idiom, as in the narrator's reflection: "Not only that—I wanted to know what Algeria looks like when viewed from afar... Is it beautiful and alluring, a homeland that outloves all homelands? Or a paradise ruined at the hands of its own people?" Through this narrative moment, it becomes evident that the narrator employs rhetorical devices and metaphorical writing to produce evocative imagery capable of engaging the reader's imagination and rendering place vividly present. The tone of hope and yearning emanating from the language suggests that place does not merely frame the events; it reverberates within the narrator's consciousness, for "between language and space lie relations that are more or less concealed."
- Tayyibawi further enriches his narrative with a significant infusion of poetic discourse, which enhances the radiance of his stylistic expression. This poetic use of language is far from arbitrary; rather, it is deliberately placed in specific scenes, especially those revolving around the book-filled library—a domain that invites linguistic creativity. As the narrator describes: "Books... books... books. He sits among their shelves and piles, his head ablaze, thick glasses on his face, and at his feet a heater warding off the blows of winter. Uncle al-Husayn is a library standing on two legs, an encyclopedic mind and knowledge... Who cares?"

Here, the author mobilizes a lyrical and artistic language that elevates the reader's sensibility, allowing emotional immersion in the spatial setting of the events. He indeed cloaks the narrator in the mantle of the poet, merging poetry and narration in an aesthetic tendency revealed through the unfolding of events. This tendency oscillates between the fluidity of space within the narrative energy—facilitating the reader's imaginative participation—and the rhythmic musicality that fractures place into expressive segments, each charged with symbolic resonance.

- Thus, the language of the novel is not merely functional; it establishes complex relationships both within the internal architecture of the narrative and with diverse external contexts. A single page may contain dialogue tinged with the sociolect of a specific class, a paragraph of realistic narration, and a descriptive passage of a natural scene—each requiring its own linguistic register.
- The events of the novel unfold across multiple spaces, articulated through words imbued with a vision that lends language its authority. The literary employment of language attains a high degree of craftsmanship, constructing a vivid portrait of the narrated place through aesthetic, artistic, and rhetorical strokes. The narrative voice often appears spontaneous and fluid, especially when the author employs direct language to fulfill an informative function, as in the narrator's admission: "What was frightening me? Who knew us that I should fear the unveiling of what I denied? No one knows me in this city that inhabits me while I do not inhabit it. I was imprisoned within the citadels of deprivation that held me captive inside them. I was the prisoner who accepted his captivity as a fate of sweet bitterness. I remained always haunted by cities without ever truly living in any of them."

Here, the text presents the city as an ambiguous, ambivalent space—one that shelters the self yet denies it belonging. The narrator appears to live an existential paradox: the city "inhabits" him, yet he is unable to dwell within it. This fracture between interiority and exteriority reveals an acute sense of alienation, where the city transforms into an oppressive psychological structure, converting freedom into an illusion and belonging into an unhealed wound. The imagery—"citadels of deprivation," "a prisoner who accepted his captivity"—invokes a symbolic dimension that casts the city as a suffocating force.

- As the narrative relations unfold, a resonant voice emerges, accompanied by a declarative tone that shapes the spatial experience through heightened linguistic consciousness, as in:

"I go down to the city center... the main street is teeming with movement, and my mind teems with overwhelming boredom. I step forward, then sit in a café beside the old mosque facing the Fountain's Eye, a newspaper in hand. Nothing stirs my appetite this morning, and my soul is laden as though carried by a vessel of tedium."

Through this passage, the narrator transforms place into a palpable presence via language that binds scene, event, and character in a unified sensory picture. He employs a reportorial tone to prepare the reader for entry into the crowded space, using direct sentences with minimal rhetorical embellishment to maintain the stylistic coherence of the expressive mode.

- Tayyibawi succeeds in crafting a language that derives its contours from the space the narrator occupies at each moment. Narrative language thus becomes a foundational pillar of the novel, resonating with the narrator's inner purity. Spatiality in the text is constructed only through language and the relationships emerging from evolving events and character movement. The more language interrogates place, the more vividly it maps its contours, infusing it with aesthetic energy and mythical overtones. Consequently, place becomes a generator of a distinctive discourse—what may be termed the poetics of place—where words and expressions convey meaning across multiple layers: direct, suggestive, and symbolic.
- Accordingly, narrative language does not adhere to a single pattern; instead, it manifests in diverse modes. The narrator offers rich, imagistic language that captures the essence of place in eloquent rhetorical clarity, as in:
"On the way, and then as she climbed the stairs carrying her spoils, your image faded from my mind, as if you had never been in my life at all. Along with it faded the image of 'Allāwa Draz—the composed, dignified one... There was only her, and then nothing."

In this passage, psychological depth overshadows physical space. "The road" and "the stairs" are not presented as neutral locales; they function as thresholds between two states of being: from the presence of the other in memory to the complete effacement of that presence. The upward movement aligns with the act of forgetting, as though spatial motion restructures memory and dissolves former attachments. The disappearance of "Allāwa Draz" signals the collapse of a symbolic anchor that once sustained the narrator's internal balance, leaving a single overwhelming presence: "her, and then nothing."

- Thus, place shifts from being a mere stage for action to an existential arena that reveals the self's transformations and proclaims a definitive rupture with the past

2. Place and Narrative Language

Language constitutes the essential component of narrative; it is the element of pleasure and suspense, liberated by the novelist from constraints and obstacles, granting each place its own linguistic tone and chromatic stylistic imprint. There is no doubt that language is the only medium through which the novelist constructs the fictional world, with all its events and characters.

However, narrative language does not refer solely to the lexical meaning of words, nor merely to the meanings of sentences, expressions, or paragraphs. Rather, it encompasses all these dimensions simultaneously, in addition to the dialogic interplay between the signifieds of the narrative and the signifiers that articulate them (al-Sindī, 1977). Thus, language establishes a tangible presence for place through stylistic freshness that resists conventionality.

Ahmad Tayyibawi's use of language reveals a refined, carefully crafted style woven through association and retrospection. The presence of place becomes perceptible through language, particularly when he adopts simple, direct phrasing, as the narrator states: "... Not only that. I wanted to know what Algeria looks like when viewed from afar... Is it beautiful and attractive, a homeland that surpasses all homelands in affection, or a paradise ruined by the hands of its own people?" (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015)

Through this narrative scene, we observe the narrator's reliance on rhetorical devices and metaphorical writing to provide the reader with a vivid and affective visualization of place. A tone of hope and optimism emanates from the narrative language, offering suggestions that transcend words and expressions, revealing the influence of place

on the narrator's inner self, for "between language and space lie certain relations that are more or less neglected" (Lefebvre, 1986)

Tayyibawi also enriches the novel with a substantial poetic dimension, which enhances the brilliance of its narrative language. This use of poetry is far from accidental; it is intentionally positioned in specific scenes. The book-filled library, for instance, becomes a space that invites linguistic creativity, as the narrator describes: "Books... books... books. He sits amid their shelves and piles, his head ablaze, thick glasses perched on his face, and a heater at his feet pushing away the blows of winter. Uncle al-Husayn is a library standing on two legs, encyclopedic in understanding and knowledge... Who cares?" (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 33)

The author demonstrates a poetic and artistic language that elevates the reader's sensibility, provoking emotional engagement with the spatial setting of the events. He cloaks the narrator in a poet's mantle, intentionally seeking a more exquisite mode of expression. Consequently, this fusion of poetry and narrative becomes an aesthetic tendency that reveals itself through the rhythm of events. This tendency oscillates between the fluidity of place within narrative energy—which allows readers to reconstruct complete narrative scenes—and the poetic musicality that fragments place into expressive segments. The narrator thus utilizes linguistic markers with firmness and eloquence, investing the symbolic dimensions and referential presence of space.

Therefore, the language of the novel is not purely functional; it extends far beyond functionality, forming complex relationships—whether internally within the structure of the novel or externally across various contextual circumstances. A single page may contain a piece of dialogue echoing the speech of a particular social class, a paragraph of realistic narration, or a description of a natural setting. The narrative thus employs diverse linguistic registers simultaneously (al-Sa'āfīn, 1989)

The events unfold across multiple places, articulated through words imbued with a vision that grants language its authority. The author's literary craftsmanship creates a vivid tableau of the depicted place, drawing attention to it with aesthetic and rhetorical finesse. The narrative is also marked by captivating spontaneity, as the author employs direct language to fulfill the communicative function, illustrated by the narrator's reflection: "What was frightening me? Who knew us that I feared they would uncover what I denied?! No one knows me in this city that inhabits me while I do not inhabit it. I was imprisoned in the citadels of deprivation that held me captive within them. I was the prisoner who accepted imprisonment as a fate of sweet bitterness. I remained always haunted by cities without ever living in any of them (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 42)

The text presents the city as an ambiguous, ambivalent space—one that shelters the self yet denies it belonging. The narrator appears to inhabit an existential paradox: the city "inhabits" him from within, yet refuses to grant him the right to inhabit it. This rupture between interiority and exteriority reveals a profound sense of alienation, transforming the city from a collective open space into an internal prison that confines the individual and intensifies his solitude.

Images such as "citadels of deprivation" and "a prisoner who accepted his imprisonment" evoke symbolic depth, depicting the city as an oppressive space where freedom becomes illusory and belonging an unhealed wound. The city is therefore not merely a physical place but a psychological structure manifested through alienation, fear, and the search for a lost identity.

As narrative bonds develop, certain passages resonate with a strong voice accompanied by a declarative tone, illuminating the comfort or discomfort of place. This is evident in the narrator's description: "I go down to the city center... The main street is teeming with movement, and my mind teems with overwhelming boredom. I take a few steps forward and sit in a café beside the old mosque facing the Fountain's Eye, a newspaper in hand. Nothing stirs my appetite this morning, and my soul is laden as if carried upon a vessel of tedium (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 72)

Through this passage, the narrator transforms place into a perceptible, almost tactile presence through language that unifies event, place, and character. He adopts a reportorial tone to portray place, preparing the reader to enter its crowdedness. Direct sentences with minimal rhetorical embellishment maintain stylistic consistency with the chosen expressive mode.

Tayyibawi succeeds in crafting a language that draws its contours from the place inhabited by the narrator at each moment. Narrative language becomes a foundational pillar of the novel, resonating with the narrator's inner essence. Spatiality in the text is constructed solely through language and the relationships shaped by evolving events and character movements. The more language interrogates place, the more vividly it delineates its features, infusing it with aesthetic vitality and mythic overtones. Thus, place becomes a generator of a distinctive discourse—the poetics of place—in which words and expressions convey meaning at multiple levels: literal, suggestive, and symbolic

Narrative language, therefore, does not adhere to a single pattern; rather, it manifests in diverse expressive modes. The narrator provides powerful, imagistic language that captures the purity of place with luminous rhetorical clarity, as in:

“On the way, and then as she climbed the stairs carrying her spoils, your image faded from my mind, as though you had never been part of my life at all. Along with it faded the image of ‘Allāwa Draz—the composed and dignified... There was only her, and then nothing” (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 45)

In this passage, psychological depth overwhelms physical place. “The road” and “the stairs” are not portrayed as neutral spaces but as transitional thresholds between two states: from the presence of the Other in memory to its complete effacement. The act of ascending coincides with the act of forgetting, suggesting that spatial movement reshapes memory and dissolves former attachments.

The disappearance of “‘Allāwa Draz” signals the collapse of a symbolic anchor that once provided the narrator with inner balance, leaving only a singular, overwhelming presence: “her, and then nothing.” Thus, place shifts from being a mere stage for movement to becoming an existential arena that reveals the self's transformations and marks a decisive rupture with the past.

2-1 Employing the Technique of Description in the Service of Place

Place in Tayyibawi's novels is a linguistic construction shaped and erected by the narrator's imagination, which fulfills specific functions within the narrative structure. Among the most prominent of these functions is **description**, which plays a fundamental role in the novel. Through description, language absorbs all the scenes and images it can contain and transforms them into meaningful representations. Thus, place in the narrative text is not a direct reflection of physical reality, but rather an artistic construct created through words—a fictional space that carries its own features and expresses the author's creative vision (Badri, 1986)

In the narrative text, place is nothing but an imagined space and a linguistic structure brought into being by words according to the requirements of narration and the necessities of fictionalization. Consequently, place becomes the product of multiple expressive methods and diverse linguistic techniques that converge to shape it within the text. (al-Ḍub, 1998)

When Ahmad Tayyibawi resorts to description, he exerts great effort to demonstrate his ability to render things clearer and more vivid. This is evident in the narrator's words: “Do these rooms not speak to tell how many fighters gathered here to plan new feats? And why is this basement mute, refusing to speak of those who hid within it for days and nights? And this spacious hall—could it conceal its testimony? Could it fail to reveal the honor it held for two years or more when the noble women gathered to exchange awareness and love for the homeland under the guidance of Madam Fatima before she was imprisoned for a year and a half?!” (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 123)

This scene is not accidental; it represents a sensory and conceptual fusion with place. The use of place in this narrative unit aligns more with descriptive painting than with ordinary narration, for the narrator becomes preoccupied with depicting the thing as it is, with its states and outward forms. (Ja'far, 1935)

The narrator succeeds in specifying the features of the basement—its walls, pillars, and floor—while also evoking its atmosphere of humidity, heat, and smell. Here, description transforms from rigid and static depiction into a panoramic scene that pulses with aesthetic expressiveness throughout the novel. This stylistic deployment aims to enhance credibility and render the basement's physical appearance similar to reality by investing its physical

elements. In doing so, the narrator enables us “to perceive the topographical images of place, which inform us of its external appearance” (Baḥrāwī, 1999)

Thus, description becomes an instrument for portraying place and clarifying its details and dimensions. By employing the tangible elements of place, the narrator seeks “to bring the external world with all its small details into the imagined world of the novel,” making the reader feel as though they inhabit the real world rather than a fictional one. This creates an impression of authenticity and a direct effect of reality (Qāsim, 1985)

In Tayyibawī’s novel, the description of place sometimes focuses on a single locus, while at other times it expands to encompass an entire spatial scene or multiple scenes. The narrator’s aim is to “calm the turbulent rhythm of narration and soften the intensity of oppressive events through the infusion of visual images tinged with romanticism... images that instill serenity and tranquility the moment the eye falls upon them.”

This is evident in the following narrative passage:

“Poor city—she has not missed a single year waiting for joy, waiting for happiness. She wears her dazzling white... the bride’s gown,

Awaiting her knight who betrays his promise every year.

She is astonishing... She never tires of loyalty, just as he never tires of betrayal.” (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 30)

In this scene, the narrative gaze successfully depicts the city with specific visual and symbolic qualities. The city is portrayed as a woman—a bride—dressed in white, a symbol of purity, delight, and anticipation. This comparison transforms place from a geographical entity into a human, feminine being pulsating with emotion and longing.

However, the paradox emerges in the contrast between her unwavering loyalty and the knight’s persistent betrayal. The city clings to hope, renewing her vow to wait, while the “knight” breaks his word year after year. Thus, place becomes a carrier of meanings related to deception and abandonment on the one hand, and steadfast devotion and expectation on the other.

This portrayal reveals the ability of narrative language to charge place with psychological and symbolic significance. The city becomes a mirror of the fraught relationship between dream and reality, fidelity and retreat. It reflects the emotional structure that governs the narrative and directs its semantic trajectory

2-3 The Oscillation of Place Between the Closed and the Open in Narrative Structure

When examining the spatial details in Tayyibawī’s novel, we observe that the narrator begins from a specific place—the house—and eventually returns to it. This movement allows description to unfold contemplatively within the confines of the home in the present time, while also enabling the reactivation of absent or remembered places from the past. The narrator elaborates on the features of his house, adding new descriptive details each time, giving the place increasing completeness and narrative depth.

As the narrator states:

“We wondered, as we inspected the house—the memory, the anchor—whether its walls and ceilings still acknowledged the debt, or whether they had been infected by the same disease afflicting a homeland steeped in ingratitude (Aḥmad Ṭayyibāwī, 2015, p. 123)

This passage reveals the narrator’s precision in describing the house’s details, reinforcing a well-defined spatial pattern and cementing its presence within the narrative structure. The house thereby becomes an imagined space that transcends its physical reality, transforming into a semantic construct filled with symbolism and interpretive possibilities.

Ahmad Tayyibawi, in the cited passage, situates the house at the heart of the narrative, drawing it close to suspended spatial cues and opening its unified doors to reveal its aesthetic dimension. Through meticulous visual and sensory delineation of both its major and minor features, the house emerges as a clear spatial image capable of absorbing the unfolding events and sustaining the narrative's progression. Initially presented as a suspended or uncertain place, it gradually transforms into an open, intimate space, revealing an ongoing tension between its inherent dignity and the multiplicity of other places in the novel.

The narrator's confinement within the narrow spatial domain of the house limits his perception of other locations. Yet paradoxically, this restricted presence expands the novel's overall spatial scope, revealing the effectiveness of spatial employment in the text. This becomes evident in the narrator's words:

"The sky of Sétif rained that day with astonishing generosity... it shed cascading tears upon its dutiful daughter until her last breath. The great ones are mourned by the sky, and welcomed by the earth upon their return to it with the joy of a tender mother" (Ahmad Tayyibāwī, 2015, p. 182)

In this passage, we witness the interplay of open and closed spaces in the depiction of the city of Sétif. The sky—an expansive, open space—is invoked to share the earth's grief through the image of heavy rain resembling tears. The natural scene thus becomes a sentimental language that conveys the pain of loss. Conversely, the earth—a closed space that embraces returning bodies—assumes the form of a nurturing mother receiving her children with warmth and compassion.

Here, time and place intertwine to express a profound existential experience: the sky weeps, the earth embraces, and Sétif becomes a living entity performing the role of an ever-faithful mother. This symbolic transformation turns place into a semantic space expressing collective sorrow and highlighting the intimate bond between individuals and their city. Nature and emotion fuse into a ritualistic image that reflects the harmony between loss and belonging.

4. The Proliferation of Narrative Through the Central Place

There is no doubt that Ahmad Tayyibawi's novels—Bab El Oued, for example—originate from and return to a central place that forms the nucleus of the primary narrative. From this core space, multiple other places are generated, each documented through the events that occur within them. These, in turn, contribute to the fluid expansion of the narrative, unveiling the trajectory of the story as it unfolds from charged signs that move beyond static perceptions and rigid patterns. Thus, the intensification of narrative grounded in the theme and force of place becomes a driving mechanism, structuring the narrated events as micro-units emanating from the crucible of a primary event fused with a dominant central place.

The events of the novel originate from Bab El Oued, and from it all other events that occur in different spaces are recalled. As the narrator states:

"Kamal found the door ajar and pushed it open. The other was waiting for him... For a few moments, he stood hesitant before him. The light was not sufficient for him to discern his features clearly, so he stared closely and examined his face. He almost reached out his hand to touch him and confirm he was real, but a voice within him told him it was him. He seemed vigorous despite his long years..." (Tayyibāwī, 2022)

Here, "the door" is not merely a physical boundary; it is a symbol of Bab El Oued, the neighborhood that represents for Tayyibawi the primordial cradle of Algeria's fractured narrative. From it, all other places emerge like shadows of a fragmented memory.

In the fictional world, Bab El Oued is not simply a geographical space but a narrative epicenter that memory summons as the birthplace of pain, the source of transformation, and the crucible of collective consciousness.

When Kamal stands before the half-open door, he is in fact standing before the door of Algerian memory—one that opens onto the past just as it opens onto the unknown.

From this threshold, the narrative proliferates: the story begins in one place and branches into others— the prison, the café, the room, the street—yet all carry the imprint of the original door and return to it at moments of awareness or confession.

The proliferation of narrative from this door resembles the branching of a river from its source; every narrative detail springs from the central place that generates meaning and reconstitutes it in other spaces. And as Kamal scrutinizes the face of “the other,” we witness another kind of proliferation: place begets memory, memory begets questions, and the questions return the narrator to the very first point.

The spatial dominance in Tayyibawi’s narrative points to a vision that transcends geography and moves toward ontology; for place is not merely the frame of the story—it is its embodied essence.

From Bab El Oued to “the half-open door,” the text constructs a major existential threshold, wherein place becomes a generative force that embraces time and reshapes it.

This dynamic extends into another narrative scene in which the room appears as follows:

“The room was lit by a small lamp emitting a soft white light. His mind, ablaze past midnight, moved in every direction until it exhausted its thought, then returned to take another path. The window, wide open, allowed into the heart of darkness the smoke of cigarettes he no longer counted, and from it seeped a light chill that stole warmth and lethargy away” (Tayyibāwī, 2022, pp. 197-198)

In this scene, the room becomes a symbolic extension of the central place in Tayyibawi’s narrative. It transforms from an enclosed physical space into an inner theater where thoughts and memories proliferate.

It is not merely walls sheltering a body, but rather the vessel of consciousness that ignites in the heart of darkness, where narrative forms just as embers form beneath the ashes of night.

The “small lamp” with its faint white glow becomes the eye of the narrative, flickering in the darkness of the self, illuminating only enough to write the idea—not to see the world.

Meanwhile, the “open window” represents the sole outlet to the outside—a dense night where smoke mingles with cold and memory—its role akin to the lung of the central place through which the novel breathes.

From this room, the details of the story proliferate, as the character’s mind shifts “from one direction to another,” mirroring the narrator’s movement across spaces and times in a generative rhythm that resembles existential wandering within a besieged space.

The darkness outside the room is not merely a backdrop; it is an inner counterpart, echoing the political and social darkness from which—and toward which—Tayyibawi writes.

The smoke drifting from the window becomes an image of the self slowly dissolving, or the remnants of the suspended Algerian dream caught between combustion and extinction.

In this scene, the central-place concept within the novel is reproduced: after Bab El Oued served as the collective space, the room emerges as the individual space—yet one that carries within its details the echo of the collective as a whole.

It becomes a microcosm of the homeland itself: dimly lit, open to a dense darkness, breathing its own smoke, struggling to withstand the cold creeping in from the outside

First: Findings**1. The Transformation of Place into a Central Structural Element**

The study reveals that place in Ahmad Tayyibawi's novels is not presented as a neutral external frame. Rather, it functions as a central structural component that directly shapes characters, their orientations, the construction of the plot, and the production of meaning.

2. Dominance of the Duality of Belonging and Alienation

Place often becomes the locus of internal conflict. It embodies the individual's crisis within the social and political environment, turning cities into suffocating spaces, homes into wounded memories, and rooms into mirrors of a fractured self.

3. The Poetics of Language in Constructing Place

Tayyibawi's narratives rely on a stylistically dense, poetic language that employs metaphor, simile, and rhetorical displacement. This transforms place from a physical structure into an evocative, psychological space where symbols intertwine with poetic imagery.

4. The Use of Description to Create Narrative Credibility

Description in Tayyibawi's work is not ornamental but functional. It highlights the realism of places and makes them vibrantly alive. It moves from physical detail to symbolic depth, granting the narrative strong representational power.

5. The Central Place as Generator of All Other Spaces

The analysis shows that places in his novels often proliferate from a single central locus—such as Bab El Oued—and then branch into multiple sub-spaces. This creates a narrative architecture that begins with a primary spatial origin and returns to it, functioning like a circular or fan-shaped narrative structure.

6. Expansion of the Narrative Space Between the Closed and the Open

Spatial settings oscillate between the confinement of interior spaces (the house, the room) and the expansiveness of exterior ones (the city, the sky, the street). This spatial duality mirrors an existential tension between entrapment and the desire for liberation.

Second: Recommendations**1. Treating Place as a Semantic, Not Merely Geographical, Structure**

Critical readings should approach place as a bearer of meaning rather than a mere setting, especially in contemporary Algerian fiction.

2. Developing Comparative Studies on Place in Algerian Literature

The research recommends comparing Tayyibawi's use of place with that of other Algerian writers—such as Wassini Laredj, Tahar Wattar, and Amine Zaoui—to trace the evolution of narrative spaces across generations.

3. Giving Greater Attention to Stylistic Analysis

Since the poetics of language is integral to the construction of place, any study of spatiality should be accompanied by a careful analysis of linguistic and rhetorical transformations.

4. Emphasizing the Functions of Description in Algerian Narrative

Description reveals the identity of place and mirrors the socio-political context in which characters operate. Its role deserves sustained scholarly attention.

5. Encouraging Research on the Relationship between Place and Identity

Place embodies collective consciousness and individual existence. Understanding this relationship is essential to interpreting the deeper layers of meaning in these novels.

Third: Suggestions for Future Research

1. A Comprehensive Semiotic Approach

Conduct a semiotic study of spatial symbols in Tayyibawi's works, integrating visual, psychological, and cultural sign systems.

2. Analysis of the Structure of Alienation in Post-Black Decade Algerian Fiction

Given that place serves as a primary medium for expressing the memory of collective trauma, a focused study on alienation is particularly relevant.

3. Exploring the Dialectic of Space and Time (Chronotope)

Investigate how space and time interact to shape narrative consciousness and the formation of identity in Tayyibawi's fiction.

4. A Comparative Study between Space in Algerian Narrative and Cinema

Such a study could reveal compelling intersections between visual and written storytelling, particularly in the representation of the city and exile.

5. Analyzing the Impact of Social and Political Backgrounds on the Formation of Narrative Place

This includes examining settings related to migration, social oppression, and urban transformation, and how these contexts shape fictional spatiality

Below are fully polished sections suitable for inclusion at the end of the article, written in formal academic English and compliant with Elsevier / Scopus-indexed journal standards.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with standard ethical principles of academic scholarship, ensuring integrity, transparency, and intellectual honesty. All sources utilized in the study were properly acknowledged, and no copyrighted material was reproduced without permission. The analysis is interpretative and theoretical in nature and does not involve human participants, personal data collection, or sensitive subject matter requiring institutional ethics approval.

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