

Children's Suffering in Mohamed Dib's work entitled Dar Sbitar

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Introduction

The indigenous Francophone Algerian novel dates from the early 1950s and since then has been a political manifestation of uneasiness. The anticolonial undertones of this literature demonstrate the sufferings and harsh realities of life under an oppressive colonial regime; meanwhile the postcolonial novel continues the representation of this suffering through the residual effects of colonialism and the impact of the bloody decolonization war. This dissertation contributes to the discourse regarding children's suffering as a result of French colonial oppression in light of François Hollande's official recognition of the trauma of colonialism and the acceptance of the events from 1954-1962 as a war rather than an internal conflict².

This dissertation analyses the power and effects of suffering in the colonial and postcolonial Francophone Algerian novel through violence and poverty, the plagues of colonialism showing children presentation through Mohamed Dib's work of *Dar Sbitar* or *La grande Maison*. In doing so, it looks at the role of suffering children in this literature and its effects on narration and character development. The themes of violence and poverty plague the colonial novel inasmuch that the children's actions become directly tied to their suffering; whether leading to despair or hope, death or revolution. In looking at the role and effects of suffering this dissertation analyses the works done by Mohammed Dib.

This dissertation analyses how these particular colonial literary texts represent this oppression and trauma, whether explicitly or allegorically and the implications of that suffering on the postcolonial novel. In looking at the representation of oppression in this literature, this dissertation also demonstrates the specific roles the thematic elements involving suffering play on the characters and their actions rather than their portrayal as mere descriptive background information.

This dissertation, in light of France's recent official recognition of suffering inflicted upon the Algerian people, thus aims to demonstrate and bring to the forefront these sufferings through the colonial and postcolonial Francophone Algerian novel. This dissertation, thus, provides another lens through which the

unjust machine of colonialism can be viewed sociologically and historically because just as Hollande argues, "l'Histoire, même quand elle est tragique et douloureuse, doit être dite." James D. Le Sueur likewise argues that, "Due to the severity and importance of the Algerian crisis, there is a sense of urgency to research on the French-Algerian War because it continues to affect France and Algeria, and by extension Europe and North Africa"

Mohamed Dib's works

The corpus for this dissertation focuses on the writings of Mohammed Dib, whose initial work was published near the beginning of the 1950s. This author, who can be considered as one of the founding fathers of the Francophone Algerian novel, possessed the means and abilities to demonstrate a prise de conscience to a wide, primarily French readership. Before the 1950s, Pied-noirs authors like Albert Camus had been writing and contributing to the Algerian narrative, but in 1950, the first widely accepted novel from an indigenous Algerian not of European descent emerges as *Le fils du pauvre* by Mouloud Feraoun. In describing the significant role of these authors, Leïla Sebbar states: "Je suis la fille de ces fils qui écrivent des livres si loin de la maison qu'ils ont quittée pour n'y plus revenir et, parce qu'ils sont partis, parce qu'ils ont subi l'épreuve du passage pour tous les autres, nous écrivons, j'écris. Mohammed Dib est de ces fils-là, dont je serais comme l'une des filles" (Sebbar 95). Sebbar's acknowledgement of the influential role played by these authors supports the decision to use them as the basis for a literary analysis of suffering in the Francophone Algerian novel. I have intentionally omitted Pied-noir authors, as well as others who publish later, in order to limit the corpus to the founding fathers of the Francophone Algerian novel. In delimiting this corpus, I also acknowledge the impact of other authors such as Jean Sénac, Rachid Boudjedra and especially Assia Djebar on this literature.

Mohammed Dib, born in 1920 in the city of Tlemcen, began writing at a young age and continued until his death in 2003. His last works published consisted of a book of poetry entitled *L.A. Trip*, which recounts his stay in Los Angeles as a Regents Professor at the University of California at Los Angeles from 1976 to 1977, as well as two other novels: *Simorgh* and *Laëzza*. He is well known for his prolific writings, which include more than thirty novels, short stories and collections of poetry, and in 1998 he won the Prix Mallarmé for *L'enfant-jazz*. According to Jean Déjeux, Mohammed Dib in 1949 devised the idea to write "un roman aux proportions assez vastes qui devait présenter une sorte de portrait divers de l'Algérie" (Littérature, 145) which would later become what is now considered as the Algerian trilogy, a collection of semi-autobiographical novels based around the life of a young boy named Omar. Through the observant eyes of Omar, these novels recount the struggles of Algerian life, whether in the countryside or the urban centre under French colonial rule. Dib, in these novels

uses a social realist lens to portray the suffering of not only Omar and his family but those around him in Dar-Sbitar, the grande maison, which summarily describes the whole of Algeria.

The trilogy tells the story of Omar's upbringing in these tumultuous times surrounded by inevitable suffering and war as the veil shielding him from reality of life falls from before his eyes. The trilogy begins with Omar as a ten-year old boy living in Dar-Sbitar⁷ with his mother and two sisters. His mother desperately and tirelessly works to provide food for her children, but often comes up empty-handed. Dib's opening novel displays the harsh conditions of not only the adults in this Manichaean world, but of the children as well. The following novel, *L'incendie*, continues Omar's narration as he travels to Bni Boublen, a village in the Algerian countryside, with Zhor, a neighbor from Dar-Sbitar. In Bni Boublen, Omar, as an observer and witness, describes the horrible conditions of the fellahs who have become dispossessed of their lands and have become a resource of cheap labor for the Europeans. He also becomes a witness to the prise de conscience of the fellahs in which emotions run high and result in not only a strike, but an incendie which symbolizes the fellahs' fervor and, thus, cannot be put out. The final novel of the trilogy, *Le métier à tisser*, continues to follow the story of Omar who is now fourteen years old and has left school and become an apprentice weaver. This novel demonstrates that the prise de conscience that had occurred in the countryside likewise has taken place back in the urban centers of Tlemcen. Aoudjit argues that, "Through a masterful description of the setting and selection of characters, Dib, in his early trilogy, presents a microcosm of colonized Algeria: cities, countryside, peasants, and laborers".

Qui se souvient de la mer, in contrast to the Algerian trilogy, is an allegorical representation of the Algerian war told through the lens of an unnamed narrator. The novel exhibits surrealist symbols and mythology in an attempt to describe the indescribable trauma of war. Mohammed Dib himself, in the postface to the novel, compares this work to Picasso's painting *Guernica* as it portrays the horrors and trauma of war without any blood or realist imagery. The novel takes place in an unnamed hostile city that resembles Algiers and the Casbah during the Algerian war, ruled by minotaurs and mummies while tormented by iriaces and spyrovirs. This novel, as well as *L'opium et le bâton* by Mouloud Mammeri, are the only two major Francophone novels which centrally deal with the Algerian war, and "yet the words 'Algeria' and 'revolution' never once appear in the text". The narration of *Qui se souvient de la mer* often resembles a dream-like state in which unpredictable events unfold in an illogical sequence. Louis Tremain, the translator of the English version, argues that the reader "who looks to this novel, then, for a factual understanding of how and why the Algerian revolution came about or was won will likely be disappointed.

But the reader who takes up this book in anticipation of experiencing revolution as it is actually lived will find that Dib understands, not only his fellow Algerians, but his fellow human beings very well indeed”³.

Dib’s critique of colonialism and the Algerian war resulted in his expulsion from Algeria by the French government. Instead of fleeing to Egypt, like many other political refugees at the time, he moved to Mougins and lived with his wife’s parents, where he stayed for five years and published four novels. After the war, Dib, rather than returning to Algeria, relocated to the Parisian suburbs where he continued to write. Dib holds great importance and significance in this literary period, as he is considered the greatest and most prolific Maghrebin writer.

2. Methodology and Theory

In order to analyse this author and his works, this dissertation will use methodological devices based on a historical and sociological reading, which is revolutionary by nature and inherently linked with the historical and social milieu of the time. Because of the social milieu of this literature, Mouloud Mammeri declares: “je considère qu’écrire un roman, c’est raconter une histoire et à travers l’histoire racontée, avoir des choses à dire, quelles que soit ces choses” (Payette 59). Likewise, Mohammed Dib argues that, “Je suis écrivain dans la mesure où j’ai quelque chose à dire. Je ne voudrais pas devenir fabricant de livres” (qtd. in Déjeux 169). The literature of the time, especially for Mouloud Mammeri and Mohammed Dib, has something to say, a voice to be heard, a story to tell and a history to be understood; it is a littérature engagée in the historical and social realm.

Rabah Soukehal argues that « L’écrivain doit subir une fonction sociale ; du moment qu’il devient écrivain, qu’il choisit librement de l’être, il doit assumer un rôle, une fonction ; il cesse d’être un individu « normal » au sein de la masse ; il possède une arme redoutable : la parole ; il doit s’en servir pour défendre les plus démunis au nom des droits les plus fondamentaux de l’individu. »⁴

The authors of this corpus fulfill, as Soukehal argues, a social function. They possess the weapons, the ability to put pen to paper and write words, which allow them to be spokesmen for society. Aoudjit agrees that Dib’s novels are more than historical or sociological documents.

Literature does not provide just information; it can do a great deal more. In addition to describing the objective conditions that prevailed in Algeria in the fifties, these Algerian novels reveal how Algerians experienced colonialist oppression and how they responded to it from a subjective, insider’s perspective, as no historical or sociological report could do⁵.

The thematic elements and motives used by the authors in this literature are inherently linked to the representation of society, including the demonstration

of the cultural, political and social milieu which encompasses the literary movement for “[n]ovels do not work in isolation” (Aoudjit 69). Edward Said argues that a literary analysis “isn’t, as in the case of the New Critics, just to turn up wonderful figures for their own sake, like metaphors and ironies, and so on, and so forth (although, certainly, one should be aware of those aspects of a literary text), but always observe these things functioning in a setting and a locale that, so to speak, is commanded at the top”⁶

The methods used here look through a historical lens in order to fully comprehend the role of this literature and thematic elements in the social and historical setting which through realism represents the milieu of the time.

The theoretical approach used here derives from primarily anticolonial theory and the beginnings of postcolonial theory. I will use the theories developed in the works of Frantz Fanon, including *Les damnés de la terre*, as well as *Pour la révolution africaine*, with a minor emphasis on *Peau noire masques blancs*; Albert Memmi’s *Le portrait du colonisé précédé de Portrait du colonisateur*, Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* and finally Michel Foucault’s *Discipline & Punish, Society Must be Defended and Security, Territory, Population*⁷.

The theoretical approach used here derives from primarily anticolonial theory and the beginnings of postcolonial theory. Michel Foucault stands out among these theorists as he does not focus on colonial nor postcolonial theory, but his concepts revolve around the genealogy of power. Michel Foucault begins this genealogy of power in *Discipline & Punish* with a demonstration of the sovereign’s power over the body through extremely physical means including torture and its accompanying spectacle. The power over the body later moves from the spectacle of the scaffold into private chambers but does not become less significant. The power over the body, according to Foucault, then, no longer focuses on vengeance, but on punishment for the crime. The aim for this discipline and punishment is to create docile bodies, which for Foucault are those that are malleable and may be subjected, used, transformed and improved. A docile body is one that has minimal risks of revolt but still produces maximum productivity. The four methods Foucault provides for creating docile bodies includes: drawing up timetables, prescribing movements, imposing exercises and, finally, arranging tactics.

In his genealogy of power, Foucault moves from the physical control of the body to what he terms as “biopower” and “biopolitics” in *Society Must be Defended*. He argues that biopower is seen as the ability to make live or let die rather than the sovereign’s authority to kill or let live. The control over the body changes and transforms its tactics and now looks at man as a living, breathing being which can then be controlled by biological means at the hands of the State. With

this change, the technology of power transforms from disciplinary to non-disciplinary in what Foucault defines as biopolitics. This non-disciplinary form of power looks at man-as-species, rather than man-as-body, and, therefore, looks to control the body through birth, death, production and illness. This dissertation will use Foucault's theories to demonstrate the means which the French used to oppress and inflict suffering upon the Algerians in order to maintain and uphold the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

I have attempted to provide a primarily Francophone theoretical baseline as the reference points remain in the same sphere. This baseline provides a starting point to which other theoretical tools will be added such as the newly emerging field of trauma studies and postcolonial theory. I have chosen Fanon, Memmi and Césaire, as their theoretical paradigms align with the anticolonial movement, a central element in this literature.

3. Objective of the study

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief chapter outline and general context of the format and logic of this project. The first part looks at the plague of violence among children, in the colonial Francophone Algerian novel and asks the following questions: To what end do these authors portray violence? What is the role of violence on children in the narration of the novels? And, finally, how do the children deal with this suffering? In looking at these questions, the main section of the study will actually explain the pivotal role of violence, not only as a by-product of colonialism, but also as a crucial thematic element in this literature. The primary role of violence from the perspective of the colonizer here is to maintain and uphold the status quo in the relationship of power. Violence, however, is a multifaceted sword, which not only encompasses physical acts but, as Martin Thomas argues, it might be cultural, social or psychological. This study looks at not only the physical forms of violence that affect the body, but the cultural, social and psychological forms of violence ever present in the life of the colonized population.

The colonizer in Dar Sbitar uses violence through psychological complexes, the violence of the classroom and torture, to maintain the power relations. In reaction to this violence, the colonized exhibit mimetic violence, as well as a resistance against the colonizer. The youth in colonial Algeria grew up with colonial violence surrounding their everyday activities, resulting in the commonality and banality of violence that no longer possesses any shock and awe, its traumatic effect. They in return, began to mimic that violence, as they perceived the outcomes of the colonizer's violence to be beneficial for the colonizer. The youth create their own colonial-like society in which they redraw the lines and establish their own system of power based on the theory of

violence. This chapter shows the role of mimetic violence among the youth and the extent and prevalence of this violence acted out among the colonized while ignoring the colonizer. This section also looks at the role of physical violence against the colonizer as a form of resistance against the colonial regime. The complication with violent resistance is that it is met by even more violence from the colonizer who possesses greater power.

4. Poverty

The aftereffects of the colonial regime inflict many kinds of suffering on the native population; one primary problem is the poverty that results when the means of providing for their families are removed from the people who had been independent agricultural producers. The case of poverty outside the colonial realm primarily results from natural and economic means. Meanwhile, the suffering from poverty in this corpus is derived directly from the colonial administration's lack of concern for the needs of the colonized subjects. This oversight creates seemingly insurmountable difficulties for the colonized in their struggle to survive. Without money or a means to acquire money, the colonized in this literature inevitably suffer while the colonizer capitalizes on this suffering. In the previous chapter, the issue of the superiority/inferiority complex was discussed in detail, and these complexes continue to have an effect on the well-being of the colonized in relation to poverty in this corpus.

As a young journalist for the *Alger Républicain*, Albert Camus received the assignment. This part will discuss the literal and allegorical suffering endured by the colonized through poverty, hunger, famine, manual labor, unemployment, and the expropriation of land. The same questions found in part1 will be asked: To what end does Mohamed Dib portray poverty in this literature? What is the role of poverty in the narration of the novels? How do the characters deal with this trauma? In looking at these questions I will explain the pivotal role of poverty as a crucial element in this literature and as a driving force. This chapter will use the works of Albert Camus and Pierre Bourdieu to provide cultural and historical context. Although the publication of Bourdieu's findings postdates these novels, his insights and research are linked with the context of colonial Algeria. His research, therefore, reinforces the realistic social depictions used by the authors of this corpus.

Like violence in all its many forms, poverty plagues the colonized, and the suffering resulting from poverty not only affects the physical body, but also the mental state of the individual and the collective. Poverty is a complex issue, caused by various factors implemented by the colonial regime and through natural economic causes. However, in contrast to natural causes the colonizer inflicted great suffering by intentionally manipulating elements relating to the economic well-being of the colonized. Lazreg eloquently declares that

"Expropriations, unemployment, education policies that denigrated and dismissed local cultures and history, police brutality, and rampant poverty were all manifestations of colonial force". The colonizer continues his demonstration of power, through means other than physical violence, which subjugates the colonized and disrupts his society. Bourdieu argues that⁸:

By reason of their functional interconnection, the economic and the social structures were doomed to a similar, parallel disintegration: the emigration of the uprooted, poverty-stricken proletariat to the towns and cities, the destruction of the economic unity of the family, the weakening of the ancient solidarities and of the restraints which had been imposed by the group and which had protected the agrarian order, the rise of the individual and of economic individualism which shattered the community framework, were all so many breaches in the coherent fabric of the social structures. (The Algerians)⁹

Not only God, but resistance against the colonizer, can provide hope. Some, however, like Aïni, the mother of Omar in *La grande maison*, are too lost in despair to see the light at the end of the tunnel; they have become too docile. Aïni accepts her inferior status and refuses to resist the powers that subjugate her. She easily declares "*Nous sommes des pauvres*" without any desire to change or question her lot. Omar, on the other hand, asks the simple question: "*Mais pourquoi sommes-nous pauvres?*". No response is given to this seemingly simple question other than "*C'est notre destin*" or "*Dieu sait*"; these responses provide no logical reason for the suffering of the poor. Omar is befuddled by the abundance of poor, like his family and those who live in similar places like Dar-Sbitar, who do nothing to change their situation. He declares: "*Et personne ne se révolte. Pourquoi ? C'est incompréhensible. Quoi de plus simple pourtant ! Les grandes personnes ne comprennent-elles donc rien ? Pourtant c'est simple ! simple !*". The docility of the indigenous population as a result of colonialism prevents them from recognizing the causative agent of their inferior economic situation. This, however, is not the case for the colonized body as a whole, for the fellahs in the following chapter discuss their discontent with the insufficient wages. The discontent begins to bubble to the surface and changes the tone of the trilogy, leading to the strike and incendie in the second novel.

The discussions of the fellah leading up to the incendie openly attack the unjust colonial system that has placed the colonized in inferior economic standing. Slimane Meskine expresses his discontent as he argues:

Bon messire Kara, bon messire, dans les vieux temps... cela n'est pas vrai... tout n'était pas mauvais. Peut-être y avait-il mauvais, mais tout ne l'était pas. Aujourd'hui, que voyons-nous ? La fin du monde pourrait venir. Les temps sont bons pour les riches et les étrangers. Peut-être cinq ou six familles...

Certainement pas plus d'une dizaine. Et les pauvres ?... Que leur nombre est grand ! (Dib, L'incendie 69)¹⁰

Just like Omar, Slimane Meskine recognizes the abundance of the poor in relation to the rich. He does not come out directly and declare that colonialism is the source of this disparity, but he argues that not all was bad in the old days. Les vieux temps of which he speaks predate this rampant suffering of the poor due to colonialism, a time when suffering did exist but to a limited extent. Poverty in this novel, among other factors, pushes the fellah beyond their breaking point. It is a catalyst that ignites and accelerates the incendie. Poverty plays an integral role in the Algerian Trilogy, as it is a driving force which affects the characters' actions and development.

Poverty inevitably leads to suffering. Aïni, Omar's mother, tries to teach her children the value the colonizer places upon her work, as the narrator introduces the scene by stating "Aussi, l'argent qu'elle touchait en fin de semaine, le montrait-elle à ses enfants. Elle voulait qu'ils voient le salaire de sa peine. C'était peu? Ils savaient maintenant ce que valaient la force de leur mère, sa santé, sa vie..." (Dib, L'incendie 147). The amount that she is paid for her work can barely provide the necessities of life. The insufficient wages paid to the colonized laborers barely keep them alive and do not shield them from misery; it is, in fact, another form of misery recognized by the fellahs, in L'incendie, when they become aware that "les salaires offerts par les colons sont une misère" (Dib 30). During the meeting in La grande maison, the orator, later recognized as Hamid Saraj, exclaims, "Les travailleurs de la terre ne peuvent plus vivre avec les salaires qu'ils touchent. Ils manifesteront avec force"¹¹. He continues, "Des salaires de 8 et 10 francs par jour. Non, ce n'est plus possible. Il faut une amélioration immédiate des conditions de vie des ouvriers agricoles. Il faut agir résolument pour atteindre ce but".

5. Hunger

The themes of hunger, starvation and famine persist through the novels of this corpus as a result of poverty and injustices inflicted by the colonizer. Dib's trilogy opens with La grande maison, whose primary theme relies strictly on the hunger of Omar and his family. The novel begins with Omar declaring, "Un peu de ce que tu manges" and, likewise, ends with the narrator explaining, "Omar s'accroupit lui aussi avec les autres, devant la meïda, et surveilla sa mère qui rompait le pain contre son genou". Not only do the first and last lines convey the theme of suffering due to hunger but what lies in between these lines demonstrates the complexity of the issue. Characters are defined by whether they eat or not and by what they eat; the poor have limited means of acquiring food sufficient for their needs and are often left eating roots, while the rich eat couscous with meat and other delicacies. As is the case here, the hunger of the

colonized is not necessarily a direct result of insufficient food at the national level, for some have food and others lack¹². Sen argues that what I define as hunger “is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes”

The narrator explains the means by which Omar procures food: either through begging other students or helping his widowed neighbor, Yamina, who rewards him with food. The fact that Omar, as young boy, has to go outside of the house to acquire food for himself, indicates the inability of the family to provide sufficient nutritional assistance. Omar’s concern for filling his belly constantly preoccupies him and also the narration of the novel. Following the introductory chapter, Omar’s dialogue with his mother opens the second chapter with a concern for the next meal: “C’est le déjeuner ?” (Dib, *La grande maison* 11). Aïni is in the process of preparing cardoons for lunch, an agricultural product which further illuminates the family’s economic status; a meal consisting only of cardoons does not provide sufficient nutritional value. Omar expresses his discontent with this meager meal by declaring: “Maudits soient les père et mère de ces cardons”¹³.

Back to school, the narration moves forward with a brief description of the students who attend that place of learning. Among them are the poor like Omar, but also students from wealthier families, such as the sons of merchants, land owners and civil servants. These wealthier students had protectors who generally shelter them from the violence of the school yard. As a result, they would boast of their meals and treats. One of these students, Driss Bel Khodja, not only ate bread, a delicacy in and of itself for Omar, but also cakes and candies. The poor students would follow him around hoping to get a taste of the crumbs that fell behind. In observing this, Omar wonders why such a person would gain the respect of his peers as he thinks to himself, “Était-ce l’obscur respect que leur inspirait un être qui mangeait chaque jour à sa faim” (Dib, *La grande maison* 14). Driss further torments the poorer students every morning by recounting his meal from the previous evening, claiming to have eaten “[des] quartiers de mouton rôtis au four, [des] poulets, [du] couscous au beurre et au sucre, [des] gâteaux aux amandes et au miel”¹⁴. Omar’s insufficient meal consisting of cardoons pales in comparison to the copious meals consumed by Driss.

Later, Omar runs away from home after an argument with his mother, and upon returning, he hears her calling for him, but his weary legs are unable to keep up. This simple incident is a jab at the injustices of colonialism, as the narrator explains that he has not eaten anything since morning. Through these opening events, the reader becomes aware of Omar’s inability to acquire his daily bread

easily, as well as the inequality among the population. The novel begins many chapters with the descriptions of meals prepared by Aïni which Omar views as insufficient because of a lack of an essential element: bread. The narrator describes such a scene by stating, "Aïni versa le contenu bouillant de la marmite, une soupe de pâtes hachées et de légumes, dans un large plat en émail. Rien de plus, pas de pain ; le pain manquait" (Dib, *La grande maison* 51). Omar shows his unhappiness by angrily arguing with his mother, asking how he is supposed to eat the soup without bread while ignoring the utility of a spoon; meanwhile, in the background, the daughters contentedly lap up the soup with a spoon. However, there is not a sufficient amount of soup to fill their bellies, and for this purpose, Aïni uses cayenne peppers to make the meal spicy, requiring the children to drink a copious amount of water which fills their stomachs, avoiding the necessity of bread and larger meal portions.

The issue of hunger consumes Omar's thoughts as he notices that "Il y a aussi les riches ; ceux-là peuvent manger. Entre eux et nous passe une frontière, haute et large comme un rempart" (Dib, *La grande maison* 113), but he does not understand the difference between those who eat and those who do not. The narrator describes his confusion as he notes that, "il voulait savoir le comment et le pourquoi de cette faim. C'était simple, en effet. Il voulait savoir le pourquoi et le comment de ceux qui mangent et de ceux qui ne mangent pas" (Dib, *La grande maison* 163). What Omar fails to understand in his youth is that the issue surrounding those who eat and those who do not is a complex relationship of power. The colonizer intentionally creates a gap between the rich and the poor, which allows the rich, the colonizer, to prosper while forcing the poor, the colonized, into abject misery and starvation. The colonizer, however, does not wish to completely starve the indigenous population, as it would almost immediately result in revolt. Mansouria, Omar's cousin, echoes this as she declares that the colonizers "ont peur de ceux qui ont faim. Parce que d'avoir faim donne des idées pas comme celles de tout le monde"¹⁵

6. Welfare

The colonial situation concerning welfare, whether in Algeria or elsewhere, can be analyzed in light of Michel Foucault's theory on biopower and biopolitics. The colonizer literally creates relationships of power over bodies, and such is the case with the hunger, starvation and famine of the colonial population; however, restricting nourishment, in effect, diminishes the happiness of the subjected body, which in turn creates hostile rather than docile bodies. Through the theory of biopower chronicled by Foucault, the colonizer enacts a form of economic control based on welfare. Such is the case in these novels as the colonizers provide a distribution de blé, supposedly to supplement the diet of the colonized. The colonizer creates the impression that he is helping the colonized by issuing food rations in the form of food stamps. This aid, however,

is not sufficient and only manages to keep the colonized in a temporary docile state.

Aïni and Omar reveal the mechanics of the distribution of welfare when she asks: "As-tu revu le tableau de la mairie : on n'annonce pas de distribution de farine?" to which Omar replies, "Non, rien. Il n'y a de marqué que l'huile et le savon, que nous avons touchés. Si on compte comme la dernière fois, on aura de la farine dans huit ou dix jours" (Dib, *Le métier* 41)¹⁶. This conversation demonstrates the frequent irregularity of the welfare system on which a large population heavily relies. With this distribution, the colonizers have the ability to appease a discordant colonial population, with which Mansouria agrees as she argues, "Pourquoi n'aurions-nous pas, nous aussi, notre part de bonheur ? Et si on pouvait seulement manger. Ce serait notre bonheur. Si ce n'est que cela, le bonheur, pourquoi ne pourrait-on pas manger un peu ?" (Dib, *La grande maison* 160)¹⁷.

7. Labor/Workforce

The complication with issues of labor and workforce derive from the previously discussed topics in this chapter, including poverty, expropriation, hunger, starvation and famine. The expropriation of land caused the labourers to relocate from arable lands to untillable ones, eventually contributing "to the creation of a rural proletariat, a mass of dispossessed, uprooted individuals, fit only to provide a reserve of cheap labor" (Bourdieu, *The Algerians* 121). With the complications caused by expropriation, the colonized were thus forced either to move to the urban centre, relying on the charity of others to survive, or to find employment on the lands of the colonizer as a reserve of cheap labour. Unfortunately for the colonized, with a growing population and the modern technology employed by the colonizer, it became difficult to find a proper, consistent, wage-earning source of employment. Thus, due to the scarcity of jobs, especially low-skilled jobs, there would be much competition described as "la forme première de la lutte pour la vie, une lutte qui, pour certains, recommence chaque matin, dans l'anxiété et l'incertitude et qui ne connaît pas plus de règles qu'un jeu de hasard" (Bourdieu, *Le désenchantement* 81). The availability of employment in an overpopulated agrarian society in which a select few possessed suitable land for cultivation was rare. Bourdieu elaborates upon this as he quotes a chauffeur from Oran¹⁸:

Parfois, je travaille, parfois dix jours, parfois quinze jours, mais jamais comme ça, d'un seul coup, de façon continue. Je suis actuellement dans un chantier comme chauffeur. Il faut du pain pour les enfants. Et pour ça, n'importe quel métier plaît. Mieux vaut ça que de tourner en rond, pour rien, sans rien leur rapporter. Vous voyez mes enfants, ils sont tout nus. Vous voyez ma maison, une écurie, ce n'est pas une maison. Je ferais n'importe quel métier pourvu que

je gagne bien pour nourrir mes enfants. Je n'ai pas d'autre métier. C'est ça ma vie, il n'y a que le salaire qui ne va pas. Le reste, nous sommes faits pour ça. (Travail et travailleurs 503)

The issues of labor and workforce are the culminating problems which derive from poverty as imposed through colonialism; therefore, this section will bring together these issues and demonstrate the interconnections, as well as the implications poverty has on this literature. This section will use the findings of Pierre Bourdieu to provide the social context of the milieu of this corpus.

Dib intertwines the narration of the life of Omar with the introduction of these mendicants as a form of social realism, an illustration of the Algerian identity under colonialism, which then constructs collective trauma. The traumas of colonialism have altered, battered and buried the Algerian identity in irrevocable ways; it has been a form of shock, "a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared" (qtd. in Alexander 4). Similarly, the narration of Omar's story, intermingled with the story of the mendicants, reinforces the collective sharing of suffering as cultural and collective trauma. Initially, Omar and the other city dwellers fail to understand the mendicants, viewing their suffering as individual, not existing outside of the mendicants' realm. For this reason the narration's preoccupation with the vagrant population transforms the mendicants' suffering from individual to collective; "Ce ne sont que les nôtres. Hé! Regardez-les ; comme un miroir, ils vous renverront notre propre reflet. L'image la plus fidèle de ce que nous sommes, ils vous la montrent !" 19. They are a reflection of the general population who suffer under the hands of the colonizer.

The narrator aptly describes these individuals as "des meurt-de-faim" who are no different than Omar and his family. Omar, during the year between working at the épicière and being hired on as a dévideur, acts no differently than the mendicants who "vagabondaient un peu de-ci, de-là ; jamais ils n'allaient bien loin. Inattentifs les uns aux autres, ils ne se réunissaient pas entre eux. Mais quand, quelque part, une distribution de nourriture ou de gros sous avait lieu, ils formaient un cercle qui s'enflait à vue d'oeil" 20 . After being hired by Mahi Bouanane as a dévideur, Omar distances himself from the mendicants, as he can now provide at least minimal amounts of food for himself; he, however, still acts as an observer to objectively portray the growing suffering. As an observer, Omar ventures among the masses of vagrants as the narrator notes that, "Les rues étaient encombrées de mendiants, si bien qu'en maintes endroits, il devait enjamber des corps pour passer" . Due to high unemployment and expropriation, these places which were once littered with goats are now replaced by vagrant humans. The replacement of goats with mendicants

demonstrates the colonial regime's lack of concern for the displaced, equating them with animals.

Aïni notes the increasing amounts of beggars as she declares that, "Des mendiants arrivent de partout, ces jours-ci" (Dib, *Le métier* 41). They are described as having "des visages brûlés, secs. C'étaient des femmes, à la féminité sacrifiée, assises sur les trottoirs ou les marches des magasins ; des hommes, debout, couchés, pliés en deux, cachant les mains sous leurs

guenilles". After having observed these mendicants, Omar decides to interact with them. These hordes of beggars, zombie-like creatures, haunt Omar's conscience, and he decides to share some bread and fish with a little girl among the horde. Once the girl has eaten her share, the father is left standing with the crumbs that remain. All the other beggars stare blankly at the father unsure what to do with the remnants. Omar realizes that he has just stirred the pot; he has momentarily awakened the walking dead, and flees in fear. Omar comes to a realization that with the growing population of these mendicants, it becomes more and more difficult to appease them with such limited means.

With each new description of the city of Tlemcen by the narrator in *Le métier à tisser* comes an update on the status of the mendicants. As the novel progresses, the number of mendicants increases, while at the same time, the general population becomes numb to their presence; the narrator argues that "A bout de patience, les habitants firent comme si ces êtres n'existaient pas, et ne s'occupèrent plus d'eux. [...] Au surplus, des agents de police étaient postés à tous les coins de rue" (Dib 117). Once the horde of mendicants has grown too large, neither the colonizer nor the colonized can help. The colonizer instead attempts to suppress the mendicants through a visible policing force, while the colonized continue on with their daily routine. The mendicants have affected the colonized, causing them to become not only numb to the beggar's suffering, but their own as well.

8. Unemployment and Education

Unemployment among the indigenous Algerian population becomes complicated by its inability to receive a proper education, as discussed in chapter one. Bourdieu argues that :

« On sait que plus l'école est quittée tôt, plus l'éventail de choix est restreint. A chacun des degrés d'instruction correspond un degré déterminé de liberté : dans une société où 87% des individus n'ont aucun diplôme d'enseignement général et 98% aucun diplôme d'enseignement technique, la possession d'un certificat d'aptitude professionnelles ou d'un certificat d'études primaires

procure un avantage énorme dans la compétition économique. »(Le désenchantement 82)

With education only available to a select few, including the children of settlers, the opportunity to gain stable employment rests with those individuals privileged to attend school. Bourdieu's alarming statistics further illuminate the inability of the indigenous population to receive a proper education, resulting in the economic downfall of the colonized. He quotes an Algerian worker who declares, "Non, je n'ai pas cherché autre chose, parce que je n'aurais pas trouvé. Je ne peux rien faire d'autre; pour trouver du travail, il faut être instruit. Où c'est que vous trouvez du travail aujourd'hui? Ce boulot, c'est ça ou rien. Sinon, je crève de faim" (Le désenchantement 89)21.

Omar had the opportunity to receive a colonial education which could have led to a better job in the future, but he left his school at the age of thirteen in order to become a "productive" member of society and to help provide for his family. Omar's first job after leaving school to find a métier involved working at an épicier. Unfortunately, "il commençait à peine à travailler, que le magasin était fermé par les autorités, et le marchand, son patron, jeté en prison" (Dib, Le métier 11). With the owner arrested and accused as a supposed revolutionary, Omar was left without a job, or the ability to easily find one, for over a year; in part due to his lack of education. With the help of Aïni and her pleas, not through Omar's educational background, Omar finds employment as a dévideur for Mahi Bouanane.

Ironically, after Omar gains employment as a dévideur with the possibility of becoming a textile worker, Aïni contradicts her desire for Omar to quit school to obtain employment. She argues with Omar stating, "Si tu étais resté à l'école, tu aurais pu, plus tard, avoir une place dans un bureau... Ne serait-ce que comme balayeur. Qu'est-ce que tu vas être ? Un tisserand ? Tu travailleras jour et nuit, et tu n'atteindras pas le bout de pain. Entends-tu ? Tu n'atteindras pas le bout de pain". She once believed that there would be no beneficial gain in studying books under the colonial system, but this may as well be her prise de conscience as she recognizes, even if momentarily, that poverty in the colonial system can be avoided, permanently or temporarily, by colonial education. Rather than investing in the future by allowing Omar to remain in school and eventually land a job in an office, Aïni focuses on the immediate future and the acquisition of daily bread. She has difficulty looking toward the future, as she is blinded by the constant trauma of suffering; she calls death "la couverture d'or" and continues by stating, "Mais si cette mort n'arrive pas, ne veut pas de nous, et si, ne pouvant plus abattre de la besogne, nous continuons tout de même à vivre, voilà la calamité" (Dib, La grande maison 137). She has lived a life full of despair in which

the injustices of colonialism have bound her and put her on the brink of madness; she has lost sight of what the future may hold²².

Even with an education or a skilled trade, the colonized are placed in an inferior status; they cannot and will not be equals with the colonizer in the colonial system. Mostefa Rezak, a tisserand who works with Omar, declares, "j'ai travaillé toute mon existence, et malgré ça, je suis resté au même point. J'ai donc décidé de travailler juste assez pour gagner de quoi boire !" (Dib, *Le métier à tisser* 103). Mostefa had worked his whole life, never advancing, only remaining stagnant with insufficient wages. He represents the lot of the colonized worker who is fortunate enough to find a stable job, regardless of his education.

9. Child Labor

Child labor in the colonial system became exploited, since lower wages could be paid to these children. As discussed in the previous section, if a family could not afford for the children to attend school, the children would often join the workforce at a young age. Bourdieu declares that the colonized are "contraints de commencer à gagner leur vie très tôt, entre 10 et 15 ans, sont jetés dans la compétition pour l'emploi sans aucune préparation, à peine sortis de l'école, lorsqu'ils ont eu la chance d'y aller" (Bourdieu, *Le désenchantement* 82). As a result of insufficient educational opportunities, the colonized youth were forced to provide manual labor to supplement the family's income.

While Omar attended school, his sisters Aouïcha and Mériem were kept at the house until adolescence when they, like Omar, became part of the workforce at a very young age. Omar's sisters began working for a rug factory where they each received their own salary. However, their wages differed because of age; the narrator demonstrates the differing wages as he declares, "Aouïcha apportait son gain de la semaine, la cadette aussi, le sien, mais moins important parce qu'elle était plus jeune" (Dib, *La grande maison* 143). Mouloud Mammeri similarly addresses this issue in *Le sommeil du juste*: "Parmi les vendangeurs il y avait beaucoup d'enfants. Lounas dit que le patron les préférait parce qu'il les payait moins". The use of child labor in colonial Algeria was preferred to that of colonized adults because of its economic benefits. The requirement for the youth to work at such a young age affects the character development and plot of the novel as Omar, in the final novel of the trilogy, no longer plays and constantly worries about hunger, but spends his time in the dank atelier.

10. Conclusion

The spiralling descent into poverty, from which an escape seems impossible and perilous, constantly affects and denigrates the colonized. Without employment, the colonized experience a whole life of hunger and suffering. Likewise, an inability to eat daily resulted in inferior manual labour, escalating the problem.

Poverty and ensuing results of that poverty were a direct outcome of colonial in/action. Foucault's theory concerning biopower and biopolitics explains the colonizer's inaction or insufficient action to help a population whom they, through the mission civilisatrice, are supposedly required to help. The colonizer acknowledges that through regulating the devices required to live, he holds a power even greater than physical, violent acts of domination. The colonizer possesses a new form of control over the body, one that allows for the subjugation of an entire population. Before biopower, the sovereign's power was viewed as to kill or let live; but with its introduction, this dynamic changes to make live or let die. With this choice, the colonial regime, as evidenced in this literature, has chosen to make the colonized live while restricting the ability to thrive.

The plague of poverty in the colonial system historically runs rampant and, therefore, in accordance with the author's social realism, it is essential that it be demonstrated in the Francophone Algerian novel. The theme of poverty, however, plays a vital role in the narration and character development of these novels, rather than realist, descriptive background information; it acts as a driving force for both the narration and the characters, whether through hunger, starvation and famine or through labor and workforce.

The following part of my study continues the investigation of suffering and its role in the Francophone Algerian novel by looking at the plagues of colonialism in the postcolonial works by Dib. It will look at the residual effects that violence and poverty continue to play in the postcolonial period, as well as at the insistence on the colonial past. This chapter will use, as a baseline, the first two chapters' thematic elements in order to analyse the implications of colonial suffering of Algerian children portrayed by Omar in Dare Sbitar in the postcolonial novels.

FOOTNOTES

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