

Dirassat & Abhath
The Arabic Journal of Human
and Social Sciences



مجلة دراسات وأبحاث
المجلة العربية في العلوم الإنسانية
والاجتماعية

EISSN: 2253-0363
ISSN : 1112-9751

Presence and Absence: Representations of Grandmother, Mother, and Daughter in Shaping Family Memory in Saad Najaa's Novel, Insafiyat

بين الحضور والغياب: تمثيلات الجدة والأم والابنة في تشكيل الذاكرة العائلية
في رواية "انصافيات" لسعد نجاع

Dr. Samia Bouallag
Abbas Laghrour University of Khenchela
bouallag.samia@univ-khenchela.dz

د. سامية بوعلاق
أستاذ محاضراً
جامعة عباس لغرور خنشلة

تاريخ القبول : 2025 /09/20

تاريخ الاستلام: 2025/07/18

Abstract:

This article explores the representations of women (grandmother, mother, and daughter) in the formation of family memory as depicted in Saad Najaa's novel, *Insafiyat*. Grounded in a structural-semiotic approach, the study highlights how family memory transforms into a tapestry of experiences and values, continuously re-produced through daily narratives and inherited rituals. The grandmother emerges as a guardian of collective memory, the mother as a bridge between the past and present, and the daughter as the voice of a new generation striving for identity renewal.

The article discusses the impact of social transformations, particularly rural-to-urban migration, on the erosion of certain rituals and the shifting dynamics of family relationships. It also clarifies how absence acts as a catalyst for memory retrieval and identity reconstruction. The study concludes that *Insafiyat* offers a significant model for understanding the role of women in the re-production of family memory during periods of transformation, underscoring the centrality of family narratives in resisting oblivion and preserving collective identity.

Keywords: Family Memory, Presence and Absence, Women in Narrative, *Insafiyat* Novel, Identity.

الملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال تمثيلات المرأة (الجدة، الأم، الابنة) في تشكيل الذاكرة العائلية كما تتجلى في رواية "إنصافيات" لسعد نجاع، مرتكزاً على المنهج البنيوي السيميائي. تبرز الدراسة كيف تتحول الذاكرة العائلية إلى نسيج من الخبرات والقيم يُعاد إنتاجه عبر السرد اليومي والطقوس المتوارثة، حيث تظهر الجدة كحارسة للذاكرة الجمعية، والأم كجسر بين الماضي والحاضر، والابنة كصوت الجيل الجديد الساعي لتجديد الهوية. يناقش المقال أثر التحولات الاجتماعية، خاصة الهجرة من الريف إلى المدينة، على تلاشي بعض الطقوس وتغير العلاقات الأسرية، كما يوضح كيف يصبح الغياب محفزاً لاستعادة الذكرى وإعادة بناء الهوية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن "إنصافيات" تقدم نموذجاً دالاً لدور المرأة في إعادة إنتاج الذاكرة العائلية في زمن التحولات، وتؤكد مركزية السرد العائلي في مقاومة النسيان وصون الهوية الجماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذاكرة العائلية، الحضور والغياب، المرأة في السرد، رواية إنصافيات، الهوية.

Introduction

This study aims to explore the representations of the grandmother, mother, ¹ novel *Insafiyat*. It adopts a critical approach that places presence and absence at the core of its inquiry. The novel powerfully illustrates how physical and symbolic presence intertwine with material and emotional absence to reconstruct family memory across generations, reflecting shifts in values and identities within Algerian society.

Research Problem

The central problem addressed in this article is: How is family memory shaped in Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat* through the dialectic of presence and absence, and what role do the three female characters (grandmother, mother, and daughter) play in creating and transmitting this memory amidst the social and cultural transformations of Algerian society?

This central question branches into three sub-questions:

- ✓ How is the meaning of presence and absence re-produced within the novelistic text, allowing characters to transcend their physical existence or material absence and become dynamic focal points in the construction of memory and family relationships?

- ✓ What symbolic and cultural roles do the grandmother, mother, and daughter each perform in transmitting family values and identity across generations, and how does the presence or absence of each character reflect on family cohesion?

Methodology

This article employs a structural-semiotic approach to analyze Saad Najaa's novel, *Insafiyat*. This methodology is ideally suited for examining the interplay of presence and absence in the representations of the

and daughter in shaping family memory within Saad Najaa's

grandmother, mother, and daughter as they shape family memory within the novelistic text.

Key features of the structural-semiotic approach in this article include:

- ✓ Analysis of Narrative Structure: The study focuses on how the text constructs relationships among the three female characters, deconstructing binary oppositions such as presence/absence and past/present.

- ✓ Understanding Symbolic and Semantic Dimensions: The research emphasizes the symbolic dimensions of each character—the grandmother, mother, and daughter—and their respective roles in building family memory.

- ✓ Tracing Dynamic Relationships: The study tracks how family relationships and roles transform through the interaction of presence and absence, and how memory is re-produced via narrative, rituals, and place.

- ✓ Connecting to Socio-Cultural Context: Family memory is viewed as an interactive space that continually renews itself due to social and political transformations, such as rural-to-urban migration.

The structural-semiotic approach enables a deep analysis of the novel's internal structure, allowing for the deconstruction of symbols and meanings that form character identity and narrative roles. It also helps in understanding how family memory is produced and transmitted across generations within a changing socio-cultural context.

Study Hypothesis

This study operates from a central hypothesis: Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat* utilizes the grandmother, mother, and daughter as pivotal axes in constructing family memory, where their presence and absence intersect to shape familial

relationships and forge collective identity. The study posits that presence and absence are vital mechanisms that reconfigure roles within the family and drive the narrative to explore the depths and fragilities of family bonds. It further suggests that the absence of a female character not only evokes memory but also reveals the extent to which family relationships are susceptible to disintegration or renewal.

The hypothesis asserts that family memory in the novel is not a static entity but is continuously formed under the influence of socio-political transformations, such as migration and displacement. Finally, it highlights the female characters as symbols connecting the past to the present, reproducing memory in the face of crises, thereby reflecting shifts in values and identities within Algerian society.

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

- ✓ Highlight the role of women, represented by the grandmother, mother, and daughter, in shaping and preserving family memory within Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat*, with an emphasis on how memory is inherited across generations.
- ✓ Analyze the dialectic of presence and absence in constructing the family narrative, and examine how the presence or absence of each female character impacts family relationships and the continuity of collective and individual identity.
- ✓ Explore the shifts in values and identities reflected in the novel across generations, particularly in light of the social and political changes witnessed in Algerian society, such as rural-to-urban migration.
- ✓ Offer a critical model that enriches narrative studies on memory and identity in contemporary Algerian literature through a deep reading of the text and an analysis of its symbolic and semantic dimensions.
- ✓ Understand the mechanisms of memory reproduction and how family narrative is employed as a tool to resist

collective amnesia and reinforce belonging, through the evocation of stories, rituals, and spatial settings.

These objectives reflect the study's interest in how social and historical contexts intersect with narrative structure to form a living and evolving family memory.

1. Family Memory: Concept and Its Presence in Contemporary Narrative

1.1. Concept of Family Memory

Family memory is a complex socio-cultural system that transcends a mere collection of individual recollections within a family. It is a dynamic framework where experiences, narratives, values, symbols, and customs intertwine, continuously reproduced through daily storytelling, rituals, and family occasions. Family memory is only actualized within a social context that frames remembering and imbues it with collective meaning. As,² states, "Individual memory exists only within a social context; the group gives meaning to memories and reproduces them, and family memory, in its essence, becomes a model of collective memory, founded on daily stories and symbols inherited across time."

Family memory is characterized by its selectivity and dynamism. It doesn't retain all past details verbatim; instead, these details are reordered and selected to meet the group's needs and support its cohesion and members' identity. Paul Ricoeur notes that memory in this context "is selectively constructed, and its events are reshaped according to the group's meaning and its connections across time," emphasizing the interaction of remembrance and forgetting in forming family identity³.

As a symbolic educational mechanism, family memory plays a crucial role in transmitting values, norms, and behaviors across generations through repeated rituals and practices. It "preserves and reaffirms family identity by repeating family stories and myths that are symbolically entrenched in the collective consciousness of the family"⁴. Beyond this symbolic dimension, family memory performs a highly significant emotional

function; family memories activate a sense of emotional belonging and revive intimate moments during times of transition or crisis, representing "a locus of emotional warmth that extends across generations"⁵.

Furthermore, family memory is not static; rather, it remains an open space for negotiating old values and questioning them in the face of societal changes and transformations. This allows the family to preserve the core of its identity while adapting to cultural and social developments⁶. The importance of domestic spaces and private corners in triggering and invoking memory is also evident, as these spaces transform into "incubators of collective memory," deepening the sense of belonging and identity⁷.

1.2. Family Memory in Contemporary Narrative

Family memory plays a pivotal role in constructing narrative and shaping identity within contemporary Arabic novels. It is no longer merely a backdrop for events but has become a foundational element that defines character relationships and imbues the narrative with human and semantic depth. Evoking the family past through stories, daily rituals, and family details is an effective means of connecting the present to its roots and fostering a sense of collective belonging across generations. This evocation often manifests through recalling past events and constructing shared narratives that reflect experiences of loss, confrontation, or nostalgia. Everyday details, such as recalling images of mothers and grandmothers or family celebrations, become narrative anchors that contribute to the development of novel characters and deepen their relationships within the novel's societal structure⁸.

Contemporary literary criticism studies indicate that family memory in feminist novels is often utilized as a space for challenging patriarchal authority and re-examining the relationship with the past. Family stories are not merely nostalgic soliloquies but are employed to interrogate power structures and reshape characters'

consciousness and identity⁹. In novels addressing issues of diaspora and migration, such as Inaam Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter*, family memory becomes the last bastion for preserving the markers of belonging and identity in the face of root severance and separation from the homeland. Family narratives transform into mechanisms of resistance against oblivion and fading¹⁰.

Conversely, family memory within Kurdish narrative—for example, in the works of Jan Dost—is described as a re-creation of collective memory in the face of crises of expulsion, violence, and diaspora. Here, the familial dimension intersects with collective history, and the act of storytelling and remembering becomes a means of preserving collective memory from loss¹¹. From a critical-analytical perspective, Raja Ben Salama clarifies that the presence of family memory in the novelistic sphere lies in the intertwining of the personal with the collective and the natural with the symbolic, reconstructing family relationships within a synthetic narrative that makes the novel itself a document of memory and identity¹².

Based on these implications, it is clear that family memory holds a central position in modern Arabic novels as a narrative dynamic that enriches character development and ensures a continuous negotiation between an inherited past and an ever-transforming present.

2. Narrative Presence and Absence in the Novelistic Text

The duality of presence and absence constitutes a major conceptual axis in contemporary narrative analysis, imbuing narration with renewed semantic and human depth. Presence is not merely an instantaneous appearance in the world of events, nor is absence simply a loss or void. Rather, they form an intertwined dialectic that renders the novelistic text vibrant and open to possibilities of interpretation, the movement of memory, and character development.

2.1. Concept of Narrative Presence in the Novelistic Text

Narrative presence is measured by the sustained impact of characters or events on the narrative flow, even after their direct departure from the scene. Presence is not confined to physical existence or a specific temporal moment; instead, it transcends these limits to become a symbolic and semantic energy left by a character through memory, values, dialogues, or continuous influence on other characters.

Mohamed Bouazza clarifies that:

"Presence is not confined to the direct scene; the character remains active through symbolic impact, the evocation of memory and behavior, or the stirring of the narrator's own motives... and the presence of elements in the novelistic text is only realized if they possess the ability to stimulate the mind and re-produce their meaning even in their physical absence"¹³.

Beyond physical presence, "female memory"—as analyzed by Salwa Bakr—contributes to evoking absent characters, such as the mother or grandmother, in the actions and behaviors of others and in daily language. She states:

"Female memory in narration works to retrieve the image of the absent so that it becomes present in language and in daily details, and the imagined past becomes capable of questioning the present"¹⁴.

This implies that the power of presence is not generated solely through direct narration but is acquired from the renewal of memory, the effects of nostalgia, and recurring situations.

2.2. Concept of Narrative Absence in the Novelistic Text

Narrative absence is not a nihilistic loss or a rupture of meaning; rather, it acts as a catalyst for narrative and a new formation of memory and relationships. When a central character or event is absent, this absence often transforms into a source of inquiry, nostalgia, and a drive toward exploring the past and questioning the present.

A contemporary applied study indicates that:

"Absence in the novelistic text is not a simple loss; rather, it is an energy that calls

for a return to memory, the evocation of ambiguous details, and building upon them anew..."¹⁵.

Absence compels other characters to re-evaluate themselves and their relationships with the world, becoming an occasion to test resistance to forgetting and to create new opportunities for storytelling.

In feminist discourse, absence transforms into an interpretive center, "a source of collective memory" through the presence of absent figures in the consciousness and imagination of present characters. It manifests as nostalgia for the marginalized image of the mother or grandmother and the associated reconstruction of identities and social relations¹⁶.

Marianne Hirsch deepens the dimension of absence in memory and biographical literature, stating:

"In biography, the absent becomes a true shaper of the characters' inner lives, while the present takes on the confrontation with the surroundings and the re-assimilation of this absence in every narrative scene"¹⁷.

This means that absence becomes a central axis for self-reconstruction and the nourishment of cognitive and psychological tension within the novelistic text.

The philosophy of presence and absence imbues the novelistic text with continuous dynamism, making it an open text for the pleasure of reception and interpretation. Presence enriches the narrative with action and renewed meaning, while absence lends the text emotional depth, nostalgia, and inexhaustible contemplation. The dialectic of presence and absence remains what makes the novel a subject of perpetual discovery and a mirror of human existence in its most complex and rich manifestations.

2.3. The Dialectic of Presence and Absence in the Novelistic Text

The dialectic of presence and absence in the novelistic text is crucial for creating the interpretative depth of the text. It opens the novel to new layers of questions and insights, bestowing a dynamic quality upon the

narrative that does not settle at a single point. Narrative elements engage in a constant dialogue between what is stated and what is implied, between the remnants held by memory and the lingering effects and interpretations left by absence. Thus, the novel's trajectory resembles a living tapestry that continuously transforms in the consciousness of the narrator, characters, and reader.

From Fontanille's perspective, narrative meaning is founded on the tension between presence and absence. He argues that "meanings in storytelling are not solely born of the present; rather, their energy is stored in the silence and distance created by the absent within the discourse structure. The more existence fragments into presence and absence, the stronger the power of evoking the absent becomes in reconstructing the narrative world itself"¹⁸. This implies that absence is not a static loss but a fundamental impetus to propel the narrative towards the past and uncover hidden realms of regret and hope.

From a cultural analysis standpoint, Anne Régnier-Lazare suggests that presence and absence in modern Arabic novels are not parallel lines; instead, they form a cohesive structure, as if they are "the heart of a single text, each pushing the other towards transformation; every presence carries within it the desire for absence, and every absence is an open door to the evocation of symbols, memories, and alternative experiences"¹⁹. Thus, absence becomes an opportunity to consolidate identity through nostalgia for the forgotten or marginalized, and to search for renewed meaning in every layer of the narrative.

In the context of temporal or self-narration, Ben Jelloun Benaïssa clarifies that "presence and absence together determine the rhythm of the novelistic time; the present gains its intensity from the recurrence of moments of absence, while absence opens up to possibilities of retrieval, resurrection, and self-interpretation"²⁰. Consequently, the novel is no longer merely a linear tracing of events but becomes entangled between loss

and retrieval, between a present consumed by time and an absent invented in the narrator's nostalgia.

Abdelmalek Mortad, in his works, asserts that the effects of absence make the text "connected to its most intense and profound moments; the narrative never settles on its reality but remains suspended on the hope of encounter or the retrieval of the absent as an alternative memory or a lost identity"²¹.

Based on these considerations, it can be concluded that the dialectic of presence and absence enriches the novelistic experience and keeps the text open to infinite possibilities of questioning and interpretation, because every presence carries behind it the shadow of absence, and every absent is evoked in the pulse of nostalgia, revision, and the existential examination of self and world.

3. Between Presence and Absence: Representations of Grandmother, Mother, and Daughter in Shaping Family Memory in the Novel *Insafiyat*

3.1. The Dialectic of Presence and Absence for the Grandmother Character in *Insafiyat*

In *Insafiyat*, the grandmother emerges as a pivotal figure in the family's construction. She is not merely a memory for the grandson but represents the beating heart of the family and its living memory. Her presence is embodied in the details of daily life, from bathing rituals to the sessions of ghoul stories, where she appears as a guardian of tenderness and warmth. The narrator describes this presence:

"In this place, your grandmother, Bint Bal'areeb, would plead with me to bathe in a small basin called 'Qas'at al-Hadid,' but I would refuse her request... not out of fear of the basin, but out of dread of the 'stone soap' foam that would get into my eyes and burn them."²²

This excerpt illustrates how the grandmother's care and tenderness leave a profound impact on the children, later recounted to the grandchildren, transforming simple life moments into cherished, inherited memories.

The grandmother also acts as an intergenerational mediator in *Insafiyat*, gathering family members and instilling in them the meaning of love. The narrator recounts how the grandmother lied about the grandfather, claiming the grandson had kissed him while he slept:

"And she lied to your grandfather one night that I had kissed him upon returning from school while he was asleep during siesta, though I had not, and this was her way of spreading love between us."²³

The grandmother in *Insafiyat* can be seen as a cultural agent who contributes to shaping the family's collective memory. She re-produces and adapts memories to changing times as she transmits values and behaviors. We see this in her adherence to modesty, as the narrator states:

"What I also remember is that your grandmother would stand proudly despite her illness, placing her hand on her mouth shyly when speaking to him, despite the distance between them, despite the land and sea that separated them, she still preserved within her that respect and awe he justly deserved, and she, in turn, was worthy of it."²⁴

The grandmother does not raise her voice during phone calls with her husband at his friend's place, as raising a woman's voice was considered immodest at the time. She also respects her husband's dignity, holding him in high esteem despite his distance. This simple behavior transforms into an inherited pedagogical principle for generations,

reflecting how individual memory becomes a continuously renewed collective memory.

Amidst social transformations, the grandmother becomes a symbol of resistance against forgetting and disconnection from roots. She preserves the continuity of rural values in a changing urban environment and re-produces identity. Despite her move to the city, the grandmother's house remained open to everyone:

"For the family home, my little one, decades ago, was spacious enough for everyone, for family, relatives, friends, and even those coming from villages and hamlets for study and seeking knowledge."²⁵

The narrator recalls this generosity as an act of resistance against the present-day narrow-mindedness towards guests.

The grandmother's presence is not presented as naive nostalgia for the past but as a conscious act that integrates authenticity with renewal, empowering the family to face present challenges without losing its identity. This analysis reveals that the grandmother in *Insafiyat* is not merely a traditional character; she is a vital axis in shaping memory and identity, a living bridge between past and present, and a cultural agent who re-produces values and memories in a contemporary context.

The grandmother character in Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat* stands out as an essential element in shaping the family's identity and collective memory. Her presence is not limited to her physical existence but extends to her profound influence on daily life details and in building authentic values and customs among children and grandchildren. This aligns with what Mona Abdullah affirms: "The grandmother is not only a guardian of memory, but she is a

symbol of continuity and identity that connects generations"²⁶.

When the grandmother is absent, a clear emotional and mnemonic void appears within the family. Family members feel a loss of tenderness and support, and the effects of this absence manifest in a decline in intimacy and a change in relationships among them. However, her absence does not stop her influence; instead, it becomes a catalyst for evoking memories associated with her, making children and grandchildren more aware of her values and behaviors that have become part of their daily lives. Khaled Al-Saadi emphasizes this dimension in his book on memory and identity in contemporary Arabic novels, stating: "The grandmother's absence creates an emotional void but reinforces the evocation of memories, making them more present in the collective consciousness"²⁷.

The grandmother's presence does not end with her physical absence; she remains present in the memory and daily behavior of the grandchildren, and her values and stories continue to shape the family's identity. This dialectic is reflected in the novelistic narrative, where the grandmother appears sometimes as a physical presence and sometimes as a memory, giving the text human depth and highlighting the importance of roots in the face of life's changes. In this context, Layla Mansour indicates that: "The dialectic of the grandmother's presence and absence reflects the tension between living memory and symbolic absence, which gives the narrative human depth and highlights the importance of roots"²⁸.

The portrayal of the grandmother in *Insafiyat* aligns with contemporary critical studies on the centrality of the grandmother in shaping family memory. Raja Ben Salama,

in her book *Mirrors of Memory: Narrative and Identity in the Arabic Novel*, notes that "grandmothers in Arabic narrative are the bearers of stories, and mediators for transmitting values and collective memory, as their absence becomes a catalyst for re-activating and re-producing the story"²⁹. As for Abdullah Al-Ghadami, in his book *Woman and Language*, he considers the grandmother to represent "the symbolic reservoir in which the meanings of belonging and transformation across generations are concentrated"³⁰.

Thus, the dialectic of the grandmother's presence and absence in *Insafiyat* transforms into a driving force for the narrative. The grandmother, whether present or absent, remains a source of memory and values, and a bridge that connects the family to its past and strengthens its cohesion in its present. It is clear that the grandmother's character in *Insafiyat* transcends the traditional role of an elderly woman, becoming a foundational axis in shaping family memory. Both her presence and absence imbue the text with human and cultural depth, making family memory a continuously renewed symbolic resource across generations, in full accordance with contemporary critical perspectives on the centrality of the grandmother in modern Arabic narrative.

3.2. The Dialectic of Presence and Absence for the Mother Character in *Insafiyat*

The mother character in Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat* plays a central role in family life. She is not merely an individual within the family but represents the vital link between generations. Her presence transcends physical existence, appearing in the details of daily life, where she embraces family members with tenderness and support,

creating an atmosphere of intimacy and love within the home. She also carries the family heritage and strives to adapt to the changes of the city and the challenges of the modern era.

The mother's significance in the novel is evident through her profound impact on the balance of family relationships. When the mother falls ill, the effects of this change and illness are clearly visible on family members. For instance, the youngest daughter, Zahra, becomes isolated after her mother falls ill. The narrator clarifies this by stating:

"Sadness became her station, and her inclination towards isolation grew more than before, after she grew tired of searching in the features of your grandmother for the comfort she was accustomed to, and for the smile your grandmother would distribute to us every morning."³¹

This excerpt highlights how the mother's absence leaves a deep psychological impact, as sadness and isolation become prevalent among the children, revealing the fragility of family bonds upon the loss of this pivotal presence. The mother is not just the one who gathers the family; she is also a source of security and tenderness that is difficult to replace, and her absence leads to a restructuring of relationships within the home.

The narrator also expresses his estrangement after his mother's death: "Waiting for those who departed without return, those who used to secure places for us where we could run as we pleased in their presence without hearing a voice admonishing us for it... And with their absence, attention to us disappears, and we become strangers."³² This confession emphasizes the extent of alienation and loss the narrator experienced after his mother's

death, especially since she was the one who would check on him periodically as he sat at the doorstep, saying: "Your grandmother would open our house door every now and then, reassuring herself of my presence in my spot, asking me: 'My child, are you here... open your eyes, in case someone calls you to go to them.'"³³

Furthermore, the mother's illness shifts the responsibilities of the children. The son admits that his mother's illness made him shoulder responsibility despite his young age. This role is highlighted in the narrator's statement:

"I was working on furnishing a small clinic in a corner of my heart, hoping to take care of her in your grandfather's absence... I was very courageous as I complied with her requests, striving between her and her needs..."³⁴

This excerpt reflects the son's strong bond with his mother and his eagerness to compensate for the father's absence by caring for her. The same applies to the daughter, Farida, who took on household chores after her mother fell ill: "Your aunt Farida is the girl who did not enjoy her childhood like her peers. As soon as she grew strong, she found your grandmother bedridden, leaving her face to face with responsibility."³⁵ Both excerpts indicate the transfer of care and responsibility between generations. They also reveal the depth of the emotional relationship that binds family members, as the mother falls ill.

Modern critical studies concur with the representation of the mother in *Insafiyat* as a central figure for transmitting memories and shaping family identity. Raja Ben Salama, in her book *Mirrors of Memory: Narrative and Identity in the Arabic Novel*,

states that "the mother in modern Arabic narrative is not merely a biological entity; she is a social and cultural axis, and her absence reshapes individual and collective identity"³⁶.

Abdullah Al-Ghadami, in his book *Woman and Language*, asserts that "the mother is the symbolic reservoir in which the meanings of belonging and transformation across generations are concentrated, and her absence opens the door to self-discovery and the reconstruction of memory"³⁷.

Salwa Bakr, in her study *Memory and Feminist Narrative*, explains that "absence in feminist narrative is often a catalyst for the re-production of memory, as the absent transforms into an axis around which questions revolve, and relationships and identities are re-formulated"³⁸.

It is evident that the mother character in *Insafiyat* transcends the traditional role, becoming a focal point for transmitting memories and re-producing family identity. Both her presence and absence constitute a dynamic catalyst for the narrative, imbuing the text with human and cultural depth, in alignment with contemporary critical perspectives on the centrality of the mother in family memory and modern Arabic narrative.

3.3. The Dialectic of Presence and Absence for the Daughter Character, "Insaf," in *Insafiyat*

The character of Insaf in Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat* emerges as the voice of the new generation, approaching family memory from a position of inquiry and self-discovery. Insaf's questions are the constant engine of memory. She is not merely a passive recipient of recollections but transforms into an active agent in their re-production, evoking images of her mother and grandmother and re-

examining them through her own questions, seeking her place in the chain of generations.

Insaf consciously engages with her father, recalling details of memory, as she says:

"Have you forgotten, Father...? Most of your adventures you used to tell us were about the moon? ... Does your memory always betray you, Father? Have you forgotten the Milky Way, and the woman suspended there on the surface of the moonlight, didn't you say she settled in that place as punishment for torturing a cat?? And the Guest Star, the star you said, when its glimmer fades in the sky, it warns us that the time for a guest's arrival has passed, so you resort to getting rid of your food... And many things you had detailed for me but I forgot. Ooooooh... Do you remember all this and speak of forgetting? Yes... I remember, Father... and I remember it very well."³⁹

Insaf's recollection of these simple stories (moon adventures, the Milky Way, the suspended woman, the Guest Star) highlights her role as a guardian of memory and grants her the authority to conjure the past before her father, who has begun to forget. Insaf's questions reflect her desire to interrogate family narratives and not be content with a one-sided account from her father. By reminding her father of what he has forgotten, the daughter positions herself as an agent in the re-production of memory, reordering it according to her own perspective. This dialogue reveals Insaf's search for her identity within the family; she evokes memories to confirm her belonging and the continuity of her presence in the chain of generations. It is an inquiry into self-construction, as the daughter demonstrates her ability to recall the past and employ it in shaping her identity.

In another instance, Insaf asks about a sensory image that still lingers with her, saying: "The scent of my grandfather, which you described to me two years ago, still lingers in my nose... You said it was the scent of estrangement... Does estrangement have a scent, Father?"⁴⁰

Furthermore, Insaf consciously grasps the purpose of the narrative her father engages in when she asks: "But I have heard you more than once mention the qualities of those who have departed and elaborate on them in front of my mother, as if you want to convey some message?"⁴¹

Insaf also insists on hearing her father's stories and memories at another point, saying: "Here I am, Father. Ready to listen to you until the call to dawn prayer. Tell me... how was your childhood?"⁴²

Insaf's inquiries are not merely a means of retrieving memory; they activate the daughter's presence in the text as the voice of a new generation that rejects forgetting and insists on recalling details. This presence imbues the text with dynamism, making the daughter a central figure in the reconstruction of family relationships and collective memory. It also lends human depth to the narrative, as Insaf transforms into a mirror reflecting the anxiety of new generations about the loss of memory, highlighting the importance of small details in forming identity and belonging.

Insaf is the voice of the new generation through whom the past traverses into the present, but at the same time, she refuses to be a mere echo. Instead, she reconstructs her family memory by questioning narratives and recalling childhood, seeking her own identity in the lineage of women who preceded her in the

family. All of this is manifested in her dialogues with her father, her constant evocation of the grandmother and mother, and her deconstruction of the symbolism of home, nostalgia, and absence.

The character of Insaf in *Insafiyat* plays the role of a living mediator between past and present. She is not merely a recipient of family narratives but an active agent in questioning and reshaping them according to her own perspective. Insaf does not simply evoke memories; she subjects them to scrutiny, re-reading the roles of women in the family (grandmother, mother) beyond stereotypes, in search of her self and her place in the chain of generations.

Insaf's presence in the novel is linked to the absence of the mother and grandmother; their absence transforms into a driving force that propels the daughter to seek her roots and rebuild her family relationships, and for the father to conjure their images in her narrative consciousness. This tension between presence and absence imbues the daughter's character with human depth, placing her in a continuous dialogue with the past in search of her position in the present.

The portrayal of the daughter in *Insafiyat* aligns with contemporary critical studies on the role of the new generation in questioning and re-producing memory. Salwa Bakr indicates that: "The daughter in the Arab feminist novel is often a mirror for self-discovery, re-producing memory through questioning the past and evoking images of the mother and grandmother"⁴³. Raja Ben Salama asserts that: "The presence of the new generation in narrative is a presence of inquiry and nostalgia, and an attempt to reconstruct meaning through evoking the images of mothers and grandmothers"⁴⁴.

Insaf in *Insafiyat* is not merely a representative of the new generation but a central actor in shaping family memory. She does not simply receive memory; she reproduces and questions it, in complete harmony with contemporary critical perspectives on the dynamics of family narrative and the role of women in the continuity of identity and memory across generations.

Conclusion

The findings of this research affirm that Saad Najaa's novel *Insafiyat* places family memory at the heart of a complex dialectic between the personal and the collective. Individual experiences intertwine with social and historical transformations to produce a family narrative rich with renewed meanings and identities. The analysis demonstrated that the presence or absence of the grandmother, mother, and daughter is not merely an existential state or a material loss; rather, it constitutes a dynamic mechanism for reconstructing relationships and roles and generating meaning within the family. It is clear that each female character transforms into a symbolic axis connecting the past to the present, re-producing memory in the face of crises and transformations.

The study also revealed that family memory in *Insafiyat* is not a closed construct but an interactive space that continually renews itself through interaction with the socio-political context, such as rural-to-urban migration or the repercussions of the "Black

Decade" (Algerian Civil War). This memory, with its nostalgia and conflict, becomes a tool for resisting collective oblivion, a bridge for transmitting values and identity between generations, and a mirror reflecting the dialectic of self and society in contemporary Algerian literature.

Furthermore, the study showed that place in *Insafiyat* plays a pivotal role in shaping family memory. The old house, its rooms, and the courtyard transform into vessels for collective nostalgia and memories. The role of place is not limited to simply accommodating characters; it becomes a catalyst for memory retrieval and a domain for reconstructing relationships across generations. In this way, the spatial dimension intertwines with the temporal and emotional dimensions, giving the text additional depth and making the novelistic space a mirror for the transformations of identity and belonging in Algerian society.

Through this discussion, it is confirmed that *Insafiyat* does not merely document memory; it opens a critical horizon for understanding the mechanisms by which memory and identity are formed amidst transformations. It highlights how family narrative is capable of absorbing collective traumas and transforming them into a symbolic resource that enriches human experience and grants it new dimensions of depth and meaning.

Publishing and Distribution in 2020, and "*Insafiyat*" by Dar Nasma in 2024. Some studies on these two novels include: Sawsan Ibrardasha, "The Poetics of Popular Narration: A Reading in the Diaries of Al-

¹ Saad Naja: An Algerian writer from the city of Barika, an accredited lawyer at the Batna Judicial Council, and a former journalist. Among his works are "*Souchi wa Rahwaja*" published by Dar Khayal for

Souchi wa Rahwaja by the writer Saad Naja," Journal of Literary Issues, Laboratory of Maghreb Literature Issues, Akli Mohand Oulhadj University of Bouira, Algeria, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2011). Al-Sahmadi Barakati, "Saad Naja's Insafiyat: A Biography of Place and a Narrative of Self-Sorrows," Al-Uhda Journal in Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, M'sila University, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June 2025).

² Maurice Halbwachs, The Social Frameworks of Memory, trans. Farid Al-Zahi (Casablanca, Morocco: Dar Toubkal Publishing, 1994), 38.

³ Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p120.

⁴ Jean-Pierre Warnier, "Territorialization and the Politics of Autochthony," in Heritage, Memory & Identity (Sage Knowledge, 2016), p 45.

⁵ Jonathan K. Foster, Memory: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p 69.

⁶ Abdullah Al-Ghadami, Woman and Language (Beirut, Lebanon: Arab Cultural Center, 2004), p 132.

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p 176.

⁸ Meriem Selatnia, "Orientalists and Contemporary Arabic Novel" (Diss., University of Souk Ahras, 2018), p 15.

⁹ Ginevra Leoni, "The Bildungsroman in Contemporary Arab Women's Literature" (Doctoral Thesis, Stockholm University, 2024), p 20, 37.

¹⁰ Inaam Kachachi, The American Granddaughter, trans. ed. (Bloomsbury, 2008), p 24.

¹¹ Mohammad Junaid, "The Narration of Contemporary Kurdish Politics in Jan Dost's Novels" (Uppsala University, 2024), p 9, 12.

¹² Raja Ben Salama, Mirrors of Memory: Narrative and Identity in the Arabic Novel (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Tali'a, 2012), p 55.

¹³ Mohamed Bouazza, Analysis of the Narrative Text: Techniques and Concepts (Noor Library), p 38.

¹⁴ Salwa Bakr, Memory and Feminist Narrative (Cairo, Egypt: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 2016), p 67.

¹⁵ Karima Gaish, "Narrative Mechanisms in the Contemporary Arabic Novel (Qad Shaghafaha Hubban as a Model)" (Master's Thesis, supervised by Ibrahim Ben Tayeb, Contemporary Criticism and Methodologies, Biskra University, academic year 2021-2022), Jilali Bounaama Ain Defla University, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, p 27.

¹⁶ Salwa Bakr, Memory and Feminist Narrative (Cairo, Egypt: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 2016), p 67.

¹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust (Columbia University Press, 2012), p 245.

¹⁸ Jacques Fontanille, Les espaces subjectifs: Introduction à la sémiotique de l'expérience (Presses Universitaires de France), p 144.

¹⁹ Anne Régner-Lazare, Écritures de l'absence: Imaginaire du manque et de l'exil dans les littératures du Maghreb (Editions Acoria, 2004), p 66.

²⁰ Ben Jelloun Ben Aissa, The Time of Narrative: A Study of the Temporal Rhythm of the Contemporary Arabic Novel (Damascus: Publications of the Union of Arab Writers, 2002), p 131.

²¹ Abd Al-Malik Murtad, On the Theory of the Novel: A Study in Narrative Techniques (Algiers: Dar Houma for Publishing, 2000), p 91.

²² Saad Naja, Insafiyat (Constantine, Algeria: Dar Nasma for Publishing and Distribution, 2024), p 9, 10.

²³ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 27.

²⁴ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 20.

²⁵ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 11,12.

²⁶ Mona Abdullah, The Role of the grandmother in Shaping Family Memory (Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 2020), p 45.

²⁷ Khalid Al-Saadi, Memory and Identity in the Contemporary Arabic Novel (Doha, Qatar: Arab Center for Research, 2019), p 78.

²⁸ Laila Mansour, The Dialectic Between Presence and Absence in Arabic Narrative (Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, 2021), p 102.

²⁹ Raja Ben Salama, Mirrors of Memory: Narrative and Identity in the Arabic Novel (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Tali'a, 2012), p 45.

³⁰ Abdullah Al-Ghadami, Woman and Language (Casablanca, Morocco: Arab Cultural Center, 2004), p 112.

³¹ Saad Naja, Insafiyat (Dar Nasma for Publishing and Distribution, 2024), p 20, 21.

³² Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 11.

³³ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 17.

³⁴ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 20.

³⁵ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 34.

³⁶ Raja Ben Salama, Mirrors of Memory: Narrative and Identity in the Arabic Novel (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Tali'a, 2012), p 112.

³⁷ Abdullah Al-Ghadami, Woman and Language (Casablanca, Morocco: Arab Cultural Center, 2004), p 112.

³⁸ Salwa Bakr, Memory and Feminist Narrative (Cairo, Egypt: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 2016), p 67.

³⁹ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 8.

⁴⁰ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 10.

⁴¹ Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 11.

⁴² Saad Naja, Insafiyat, p 13.

⁴³ Salwa Bakr, Memory and Feminist Narrative (Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 2016), p 67.

⁴⁴ Raja Ben Salama, Mirrors of Memory: Narrative and Identity in the Arabic Novel (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Tali'a, 2012), p 52.

References

1. Benjelloun Ben Aissa. Zaman al-Sard: Dirasah fi al-Iqaa' al-Zamani li al-Riwayah al-Arabiyah al-Mu'asirah [The Time of Narration: A Study in the Temporal Rhythm of the Contemporary Arabic Novel]. Publications of the Arab Writers Union, Damascus, 2002.
2. Murtad, Abdelmalek. Fi Nazariyat al-Riwayah: Bahth fi Taqniyat al-Sard [On the Theory of the Novel: A Study in Narrative Techniques]. Dar Houma Publishing, Algiers, 2000.
3. Naja, Saad. Insafiyat. Nasma Publishing and Distribution, Constantine, Algeria, 2024.
4. Abdullah, Mona. Dawr al-Jaddah fi Tashkil al-Dhakirah al-A'iliyah [The Role of the Grandmother in Shaping Family Memory]. Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, Cairo, Egypt, 2020.
5. Ben Salama, Raja. Maraya al-Dhikra: al-Sard wa al-Hawiyah fi al-Riwayah al-Arabiyah [Mirrors of Memory: Narration and Identity in the Arabic Novel]. Dar Al-Tali'a, Beirut, 2012.
6. Bakr, Salwa. al-Dhakirah wa al-Sard al-Niswi [Memory and Feminist Narration]. The Egyptian General Book Organization, Cairo, 2016.
7. Al-Saadi, Alaa. al-Dhakirah wa al-Hawiyah fi al-Riwayah al-Arabiyah al-Mu'asirah [Memory and Identity in the Contemporary Arabic Novel]. The Arab Center for Research, 2019.
8. Mansour, Laila. al-Jadaliyah Bayna al-Hudhur wa al-Ghiyab fi al-Sard al-Arabi [The Dialectic Between Presence and Absence in Arabic Narration]. Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, 2021.
9. Ben Salama, Raja. Maraya al-Dhikra: al-Sard wa al-Hawiyah fi al-Riwayah al-Arabiyah [Mirrors of Memory: Narration and Identity in the Arabic Novel]. Dar Al-Tali'a, Beirut, Lebanon, 2012.
10. Bakr, Salwa. al-Dhakirah wa al-Sard al-Niswi [Memory and Feminist Narration]. The Egyptian General Book Organization, Cairo, 2016.
11. Ricoeur, Paul. al-Dhakirah, al-Tarikh, al-Nisyan [Memory, History, Forgetting]. Translated by George Kattoura. The Arab Organization for Translation, Beirut, 2009.
12. Aberdadasheh, Sawsan. "Shi'riyat al-Sard al-Sha'bi: Qira'ah fi Yawmiyat al-Soshie wa Rahwajah li al-Katib Saad Naja" [The Poetics of Popular Narration: A Reading of "Soshie and Rahwajah's Diaries" by the Writer Saad Naja]. Majallat Qadaya al-Adab, Literature Issues Laboratory of Maghreb Literature Issues, Akli Mohand Oulhadj University of Bouira, Algeria, Vol. 06, No. 1, 2011.
13. Barakati, Al-Sahmadi. "Insafiyat li Saad Naja: Sirah li al-Makan wa Sard li Awja al-Dhat" [Insafiyat by Saad Naja: A Biography of Place and a Narration of Self's Pains]. Majallat al-Ahd fi al-Lisaniyat wa Tahlil al-Khitab, M'Sila University, Vol. 09, No. 02, June 2025.
14. Halbwachs, Maurice. al-Atar al-Ijtima'iyah li al-Dhakirah [The Social Frameworks of Memory]. Translated by Farid Al-Zahi. Toubkal, Casablanca, 1994.
15. Ricoeur, Paul. Memory, History, Forgetting. University of Chicago Press, 2009.
16. Warnier, Jean-Pierre. "Territorialization and the Politics of Autochthony." In: Heritage, Memory & Identity. Sage Knowledge, 2016.
17. Foster, Jonathan K. Memory: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2009.
18. Ricoeur, Paul. Memory, History, Forgetting. University of Chicago Press, 2009.
19. Selatnia, Meriem. "Orientalists and Contemporary Arabic Novel." University of Souk Ahras, Dissertation, 2018.

-
20. Leoni, Ginevra. "The Bildungsroman in Contemporary Arab Women's Literature." Stockholm University, Doctoral Thesis, 2024.
 21. Junaid, Mohammad. "The Narration of Contemporary Kurdish Politics in Jan Dost's Novels." Uppsala University, 2024.
 22. Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press, 2012.
 23. Fontanille, Jacques. *Les espaces subjectifs: Introduction à la sémiotique de l'expérience* [Subjective Spaces: Introduction to the Semiotics of Experience]. Presses Universitaires de France.
 24. Régnier-Lazare, Anne. *Écritures de l'absence: Imaginaire du manque et de l'exil dans les littératures du Maghreb* [Writings of Absence: Imaginary of Lack and Exile in Maghreb Literatures]. Editions Acoria, 2004.