

**Algerian Children's Literature: From the Labyrinth of Colonialism to the Cornucopia of Postcolonialism**

**Amina AISSA ASSIA**

Department of English

Faculty of Letters and Languages

University of Relizane, Algeria

Corresponding Author: [amina.aissaassia@univ-relizane.dz](mailto:amina.aissaassia@univ-relizane.dz)

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**Abstract**

Non-Western children's literature has received significant attention in the past few decades. African and Arab children's literature is not the exception to this surge in interest. However, the countries and communities denominated as African or Arab encompass heterogeneous communities and ethnicities. African children's literature often refers to literature in Central and Southern African countries, and Arab children's literature is often Middle-eastern, leaving the genre underexplored in many countries part of both. This article is a precursory sketch of children's and young adult literature in Algeria, tackling the question of the idiosyncrasies of the genre from a cultural-historical perspective. It exposes the substantial historical and linguistic factors that denied the genre of an organic metamorphosis. With 130 years of French colonization, intensive acculturation policies, and the astounding illiteracy rate among Algerians, the post-colonial Algerian government devoted efforts to tending to the wounds and the trauma deeply inflicted by the French. The endeavor to restore the Algerian identity made children's literature its first and most indispensable outlet of the process, similar to how it served as a resistance front during the colonial period. The article concludes by addressing the place of Algerian children's literature on the international scale, the meager yet increasing scholarship interested in this research area, and recommendations for an open, ideology-free conversation between all parties involved in children's literature production, circulation, and consumption to yield an auspicious trajectory for the future of the genre. Thus, the paper conduces to scholarship on African and Arab children's literature.

**Keywords:** Algerian Children's Literature, colonialism, educational policy, language planning, postcolonialism

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## Introduction

The growing field of children's literature criticism has given voice to many marginalized cultures in an attempt to preserve the minute particularities and nuances confined within the literary texts and which, until recently, were at risk of conforming to the standardization imposed by globalization (Bradford, 2008). The genre's complexity in every community mirrors the complexity of the underlying factors that shaped the culture, history, and life of its individuals. Similarly, forming a comprehensible perception of children's and young adult literature in Algeria demands the dissection of the country's convoluted history and cultural makeup. Although Algeria is part of both Africa and the Arab world, the scholarship devised on texts from such continuums does not accurately reflect the state of affairs of Algerian children's literature. A distinctive feature of Algerian history from that in the Arab world is the colonial history carved by the French occupation for 130 years. In contrast, ethnic and religious compositions set Algerians apart from Africans. Thus, examining African and Arab children's literature criticism may offer a generic and approximate understanding of the genre as a whole but is insufficient nevertheless.

This article adopts a cultural-historical approach to account for the developmental milestones of Algerian children's literature in order to advance the body of knowledge on Arab children's literature to include more than just Middle-Eastern countries and on African and post-colonial scholarship that does not solely emphasize the notion of "Blackness." The choice of this approach results from the interplay of historical, political, and ideological factors of pre and post-war in orienting the direction of Algerian children's literature.

## Literature review

The introduction of the notion of colonialism to children's literature is often accredited to the work of Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan*, in which she referred to the totality of the genre as a manifestation of colonization where adults have colonized children by writing for them and on their behalf (Bradford, 2011). Though the work was and is still highly influential among scholars, Bradford (2011) considers the use of such analogy to be problematic since "by conflating children with colonized peoples, scholars who use this language seem to condone a strategic forgetting of the materiality of colonization, its deleterious effects on the lives and cultures of colonized people, its repercussions in the present" (p 274). Moreover, she (2011) signals out the gravity of such stipulations by contending that "to refer to children's literature as a site of colonization is, then, to mute, to downplay, even to trivialize the effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples" (p 274).

Post-colonial readings/studies in children's literature encapsulate two major research areas. On the one hand, there are studies focusing on settler societies where "Indigenous peoples continue to seek recognition, compensation, and self-determination" (Bradford, 2008, p. 4), such as Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. On the other hand, the remaining studies concern texts from countries that obtained their independence from the colonizers. These texts are often a rebellious act against the ex-colonizer who continued to speak on behalf of the colonized, which is the case in most African countries.

The majority of post-colonial studies of African children's literature focus on the issues of "Blackness" as an inextricable component of "Africanism" (Yenika-Agbaw, 2011, p. xvii). The

main aim of such criticism is to promote the production of authentic texts with an accurate representation of the African child, a representation free from the long-standing influence of distorted Western depictions. Most relevant to this category of criticism are the works of Osa (1995), Khorana (1998), and MacCann (2001). The reoccurring pattern in these studies is the purview of the texts that only cover Western and Southern African countries, leaving Northern African communities underrepresented and often excluded due to the ethnic diversification of its peoples heavily shaped by the omnipresence of the Arab heritage.

Thus, considering Arab children's literature, there is a consensus among children's literature scholars in the Arab world that the vicissitudes the genre has witnessed so far are a corollary to the question of language in the region (Abu-Nasr, 1996, Mdallel, 2003, Dinges, 2011, Bizri, 2015, Taha Thomure, Kreidieh, & Baroudi, 2020). Bizri (2015) states, "twenty-two countries, as many dialects, some minority languages, and one common, standardized language: the Arab world is far from linguistic uniform" (p.74). This diversification at the linguistic level omnipresent in every single country of the Arab League has been one of the determining factors and impediments in the evolution of children's literature, namely with the ineluctable and dogmatic questions about the suitability of Standard Arabic as a language of production instead of dialectic languages proper to every community (Abu-Nasr, 1996). This complex reality has also made the genre highly challenging to scholars looking at its development and underlying particularities. Many children's stories and folktales were produced in dialects that are often spoken but do not have a documented and a scripted form/grammar rendering the stories challenging to discern.

Nevertheless, within the Arab world, the history of children's literature is relatively less challenging to trace in the countries known as the Mashreq than it is to do so in the countries known as the Maghreb (North African countries like Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). This difficulty sprouts from the toll of French colonization on the region and the subsequent loss of valuable documentation. As such, upon the examination of *the International Companion to Children's Literature* edited by Hunt (1996), l'état de lieu of the genre in North African countries is strikingly nonexistent, neither in the article addressing state of the art in French-speaking ex-colonies nor the article about the Arab world, an absence resulting from the "dangers of universalizing readings that forget the local and the particular in their desire for order and consistency" (Bradford, 2008, p. 5). Hence, this article is a tentative to fill this research gap with the aim to (1) supplement an overall understanding of the fundamental factors influencing Algerian children's literature at its embryonic stage, (2) amalgamate the developments of the genre in Algeria with its larger African and Arab counterpart.

## Background

### *Linguistic and ideological makeup in Algeria*

The linguistic landscape in post-colonial Algeria seems to have been shaped by one catalyst event, the French colonization, and its ramifications. Croisy (2008) contends that the Algerians are trapped in what she refers to as "negative melancholia," which is the leading cause of the "linguistic trauma" and "identity crisis" Algeria has been struggling with ever since its independence in 1962. She asserts that the Algerians have developed "unhealthy attachments to the past" (by never forgetting the brutal crimes committed by the French), a past more often than not "remembered for the wrong reasons" (to mourn the losses and despise all that is French as a result). In contrast,

she offers the possibility of “positive melancholia” as the only path to “healing” (p. 84). The “unhealthy attachments” have been the prime motive behind crucial governmental decisions in the construction of postwar Algeria, decisions pervasive at the level of educational policy and language planning and resulting in the seemingly endless alienation of Arabic against French ever since to reestablish monolingualism in a multilingual country. Dourari (2012) reflects on the actual linguistic situation in the country stating that “en Algérie il existe un véritable malaise linguistique et identitaire” [in Algeria, there exists a real linguistic and identity uneasiness](p.78). This “malaise” is one of Algeria’s most intricate struggling fronts. It has been the central driving force to everything that is Algerian, including the crystallization of children's literature.

In pre-French-colonization Algeria, language in the territory stood witness to the succession of occupations, each leaving its undeniable trace varying with degrees and intensities of the contact between the colonized and the colonizers. With many historians subscribing to the theory that Berbers (Amazigh) are the natives of North Africa, mainly the Maghreb (Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria), the first language contact Tamazigh had was with Punic upon Phoenicians' occupation of Carthage in 860 BCE lasting for seven centuries and marking the earliest forms of bilingualism in the area (Benrabah, 2005). At the turn of the second century BCE, Carthage’s destruction by the Romans marked the imposition of multilingualism in the area “Romani spoke Latin, used exclusively in towns. Punic remained at the periphery, and the Mauri (Moors) were monolingual Berber speakers living in mountainous areas” (Benabou 1975 as cited in Benrabah 2005, p.392). Furthermore, Benrabah continues that after almost six centuries of Roman occupation in North Africa, and with Vandal and Byzantine invasions in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, respectively, leaving no tangible linguistic impact in the region, the introduction of Islam by Arabs in 647/648 CE signaled the first Arabization process in the history of Algeria. The subsequent invaders were the Spaniards at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, occupying mainly the coastal area of Algeria until the Ottomans took over in 1529 (Croisy, 2008). In this light, the series of the abovementioned invasions succumbed to three significant repercussions. First, Algerian Arabic is an amalgam of most of the colonizers' languages. Second, Classical/Standard Arabic is inseparable from Islam, which grew to become one of Algerian culture and identity foundations. Any depreciation of their (Arabic and Islam) status as cornerstones of the Algerian identity has led to significant questioning of one's "Algerianess ." Third, by 1962 (after 130 years of French occupation), French represented the language of a vicious enemy, and any advocates promoting its usage are often indications of “treachery ." The second and the third outcomes set an array of subsequent resolutions that predetermined the trajectory of children’s literature as a genre in Algeria.

## Analysis

### *Children’s literature outset under language planning and educational policy*

#### *Colonial-era*

Emenyonu (2002) reckons that “folktales are rich and authentic sources of raw African values in traditional African societies.” (p.584). Similarly, the oral tradition of folktales has always been part of the Algerian heritage, which remotes to pre-French colonization. Written children's literature, however, is a relatively modern invention. The main determining factor in the late introduction of children's literature to Algeria was the astounding illiteracy rate of the overall population. Children who used to acquire essential reading and writing skills and some Islamic education in traditional Quran schools lost that opportunity as those schools were closed down by

the French occupation in 1830 (Sharkey, 2012). Fawzi (1982) expands on this point by explaining the process of educating a Muslim child in Algeria before 1830. Typically, he argues, "children were sent to Kuttab where they would learn Islamic law (Fih), Muhammadan tradition (hadith) and commentary on the Koran (tafsir) in addition to grammar and some instruction in the sciences" (1982, p. 23). Soon after the French set foot in Algeria, they started their "civilizing" mission by closing most of these kuttabs and by criminalizing "the unauthorized exercise of the profession of elementary teaching" (Fawzi, 1982, p.24). In the same line of thought, Benrabah (2014) sheds light on the drastic decrease in literacy levels amongst the Algerian population during the French occupation between 1830 and 1962 as follows:

On the eve of the French occupation in 1830, about 50% of Algerians were still monolingual in Berber. At the time, the tribal system prevailed: out of 516 tribes; there were 206 under Turkish rule, 200 independent, and 86 semi-independent tribal chiefs. The population, estimated at three million, was mainly rural, with only 5% to 6% living in urban centers. Regarding literacy, between 40% and 50% could read and write Arabic. [...]Between 1830 and 1962, the French implemented a methodical policy of deracination and deculturation. To realize their "civilizing mission," they imposed an assimilationist policy of total Frenchification on millions of recalcitrant Algerians. (p 44)

The horrifying outcomes of these policies left Algeria with an illiteracy rate of 90% by 1962 (Benrabah, 2014). The French policy of deracination and "deculturation" called for counter-policies to preserve the Algerian identity and culture on the part of the Algerian resistance. The earliest forms of attention drawn to children's writings are traced back to the 1930s under the activities of the Association of Algerian Muslims' Ulama (AAMU), founded by Abdelhamid Ben Badis (Abdelhadi, 2006). Since the AAMU represented a form of resistance to the French colonization and the policies of assimilation, which "led later on to the hegemonic imposition of French at all levels of Algerian society" (Croisy, 2008, p.85), its activities fell within the framework of restoring and protecting the "pure" Algerian identity and culture. The essence of the AAMU's activities is reflected in the Association's motto 'Islam is my religion, Arabic my language, Algeria my fatherland' (Roberts, 2003). From this moment on, the genre's premise was born: children's literature should be mainly a medium to learn Arabic and (re)inculcate Islamic beliefs and Algerian nationalism, i.e., it was a subversion of the acculturation policies.

Poetry was the first and predominant form in which the genre was initiated. Under the recommendations of the AAMU, many non-governmental schools were established to provide Algerian children with a bare minimum of education; along with schools, the AAMU's activities were reinforced by another organization, the Algerian Muslim Scouts (Khouani, 2008). The active poets who took it upon themselves to write for children can be categorized into two groups; writers who initially specialized in adult literature but occasionally wrote some texts for children and dedicated children's literature writers (Bouchemal, 2009). Most poems and poem collections were written for educational purposes serving as textbooks, mainly for teaching the Arabic language and cultivating a sense of nationalism against the oppressive colonizer (Abdelhadi, 2006). Concomitantly, poems were also penned for celebrating religious and national occasions. As for their dissemination, those collections were printed (often in booklets) either in Tunisia or in private and rare local publishing houses (Khouani, 2008). In addition to that, El-basa'ir (a newspaper) and

El-chihab (a magazine) were two outlets, though mainly used to spread nationalistic awareness among Algerians in general, contributing to the circulation of children's poems on a larger scale (Abdelhadi, 2006).

Among adult literature authors composing poems for children, Mohamed Laïd Al-Khalifa (1904-1979), one of the prominent active poets of the AAMU, who though his main writings are considered adult literature, had written several poems and rhymes dedicated to children. His writings' common themes were Islam, Arabic, Algerian nationalism, aspirations for a better future, freedom, and education (Khouani, 2008). In 1948, he collaborated with Muhamed El-hadi El-Cherif to draft the iconic poem/song *Min Jibalina* [From our mountains], a patriotic song par excellence (Khouani, 2008). In addition to him, another prominent figure was Moufdi Zakaria (1908-1977). He is well-known as the writer of the Algerian national anthem, but many of his poems were used by Scouts and schoolchildren for different occasions (Abdelhadi, 2006).

As for authors whose writings were deliberately addressed to children, many were active teachers in the non-governmental schools who wrote due to the lack of appropriate instructional material for school children. Khouani (2008) listed many of them in her dissertation on children's literature in Algeria. According to her, Labeled Djilali published 1939 a collection of poems entitled "School Rhymes," published in Tunisia. Moreover, two years earlier, another iconic poem was composed by Ibrahim Toqan known as *Mawtini* [my homeland].

Plays were another popular form of children's literature during the French colonization. They were often played in schools that have become a rite associated with school and are still practiced. Their prevalence was because they were easy to improvise depending on the occasion's needs (Khouani, 2008). Unfortunately, most of the plays drafted during that time were lost since they were not documented in any written form. The absence of scripted formats can be explained by the language used, a mixture of Standard Arabic and Algerian Arabic. However, out of the plays which survived the test of time, there are; Mohamed Laïd Al-Khalifa's play entitled "Bilal Ibn Rabah" written in 1938 (Bouchemal, 2009), "Tariq Ibn Ziad" by Mouhamed Salah Ben Atiq written in 1947 and "The Stepmother" (1951) by Ahmed Bendiyab (Khouani, 2008). Ostensibly, the era was heavily shaped by the historical and political events that led to the independence of Algeria from the French rule in 1962. As for short stories and novels, many scholars attribute their absence to Algerians' mediocre social and economic conditions.

### ***Post-colonial era***

Upon independence in 1962, the Arabisation process was inducted into primary schools as one of the earliest decisions by Ahmed Ben Bella, the first president of Algeria (Benrabah, 2007). Though initiated for linguistic purposes, this step's substantial finality was political. In this regard, Roberts (2003) advances that "the Arabization policy was based on the premise that neither French nor the colloquial Arabic and Berber spoken in Algeria could serve as the language of education and administration." The finality of these measures was "to make the modern literary Arabic which had been developed as the lingua franca of the Mashriq, the national language of Algeria." (p.39). The implications of these decisions led to the gradual Arabization of administrations, ministries and university majors.

It was an attempt to recuperate more than just a language. It was a reminder that “Algeria had a history in common and a relationship to be rebuilt with the rest of the Arab world” (Croisy, 2008, p.92). However, applying this policy on such a large scale had proven to be strenuous. With illiteracy rates as high as 90% of the population, the Algerian government could not recruit the needed staff to execute its policy. As a result, teachers were brought from the Middle East, mainly Syrians and Egyptians (Benrabah, 2007). The implications of such decisions reflected a belief that the Mashriq populations were more Arab than the people of the Maghreb, a belief that was expanded to include the texts in school textbooks. Hunt (2000, p.112) advances the existence of an interdependent relationship between children's literature and school since "how books are treated in education is directly linked to the books produced and marketed ." However, this relationship is reversible. The educational system's treatment of books encourages what to market outside school and what parents should purchase for their children. Similar to how the Algerian government sought the Middle East to cover the shortage at the level of educating staff, textbook designers adopted the same strategy when creating adequate textbooks for the targeted finalities. Upon examining the fifth-grade primary school textbook (published in 1969), out of the 86 texts included in the reading textbook, 45 were written by Middle-Eastern authors, mainly Egyptians, Syrians, and Lebanese. It had also included 29 texts by Algerian authors, while there were four texts by Tunisian and Moroccan writers. Some scholars may attribute the recurrence of such measures to the lack of literary production in post-colonial Algeria; however, that was not the case. It is worth mentioning that the earliest stages of the crystallization of children's literature often consisted of borrowings and adaptations from adults' literature, and by the late 1960s, many Algerian authors had made considerable leaps in terms of production. The only issue with such texts was that they were produced in French.

Between 1945 and 1989, 740 francophone literary works were produced in Algeria, comprising 305 novels and short story collections, 383 poetry volumes, and 52 plays (Déjeux, 1992). Nevertheless, such works have always struggled to be recognized as representative of Algerian society for the simple reason that they were perceived as "inauthentic" since “it (French) will always only ever be associated with more than a hundred years of acculturation, exploitation, an irremediable loss of identity for many Arabs” (Croisy, 2008, p.86). The government had complete power over the publishing sector to ensure further control over what Algerians could read. According to Bentaifour (2003), right after the independence in the mid-sixteens, la Société Nationale d'Édition et de Diffusion (SNED) [National Dissemination and Edition Company] had the exclusivity of publishing rights. In 1972, la SNED published a translated version of the collection of short stories written by Jean-Paul Fauchier entitled “Père Castor” (Khouani, 2008). The first Algerian collection of short stories was published in 1976 and written by Moussa El Ahmadi Nouiouat entitled “Salim and Saleem” (Khouani, 2008).

As for outside textbooks and school, Abdelhadi (2006) maintains that the sole arena consecrating some corners to children's literature was the press during the mid-sixteens. *Le Peuple* and *El-Moujahid* were two papers published in French, dedicating *Pages des Jeunes* and *Pour Les Jeunes*, respectively, as sections with children's and young Adult literature content (Khouani, 2008). As for press produced in Arabic, *Ech-chaab* (people) and *Alwan* (colors) were newspapers dedicating at least one of their sections to publish not only short stories and poems for children but also serious discussions of scholars expressing their interests in the genre and their aspiration to

the future (Abdelhadi, 2006). In 1969, the first specialized magazine was published under "Mkaidech ." It published comics depicting fictitious adventures but with a relatable Algerian character Mkaidech (figure 1 shows two cover pages of two different magazine issues). According to Khouani (2008), the magazine, produced in Arabic and French, was active in two different periods, from 1969 to 1974 and 1978 to 1983.



Figure 1. Cover pages of two issues of the magazine Mkaidech

Many scholars consider that the official inauguration of the genre in Algeria was in 1982 with the opening of the children's publications division as part of l'Entreprise Nationale du Livre (ENAL) [Book's National Enterprise] (Abdelhadi, 2006). Another name of one of the children's literature pioneers in Algeria is Mohamed Lakhdar Essaihi, who published two series of poems (Elrabi, 2009). The first series, published in 1983, was destined for young adults (Elrabi, 2009). Upon examination of the set of poems included, the common theme is promoting nationalism and undivided devotion to the governing party and its policies, such as the agrarian revolution, among other themes. With the government's total control over publishing houses and what books to import from the Middle East and the rest of the Arab world, the texts allowed to the public mainly were used as ideological outlets at the service of the governing party's agenda which was a common practice amongst communist countries.

Notwithstanding, editorial rights were open to the private sector in the late 1980s, which marked an unprecedented proliferation in publishing houses and children's book production (Bentaifour, 2003). However, the civil war during the 1990s abruptly deterred this proliferation



(Bentaifour, 2003). With the turn of the new millennium, the new political changes resuscitated the sector.

During the 1990s, educational policy and language planning took a significant turn. English was introduced in primary schools as a <sup>first</sup> foreign language choice in fourth grade, a status exclusively reserved for French in the previous decades (Benrabah, 2007). Though the experience was unsuccessful since French remained the language of instruction in most majors in higher education, the call for replacing French with English was revived in 2019. In a poll administered by the ministry of higher education weeks, more than 90% of respondents preferred English as the first foreign language in Algeria. As a result, the ministry promised a gradual transition to English at its level. Another gained momentum at the linguistic level was the recognition of Tamazight as a national language in 2001 (Benrabah, 2007). It became a mandatory subject in schools curricula in areas inhabited by Berbers, and many texts were produced in Tamazight as children's literature (Bentaifour, 2017). As a result of these significant decisions, the Algerian market welcomed new children's stories in English and Tamazight.

### ***Government's efforts***

At the turn of the new millennium, considerable governmental efforts promoted reading among children and facilitated book production in Algeria. In 2009, upon issuing a presidential decree, the ministry of culture benefited from creating its newest division, the National Center of Books. It aims to "promote publishing, books, and reading. It manages the national policy concerning books and conducts studies and provides statistics about books and reading in Algeria" (m-culture, 2020, 3). The decree even specified the creation of three permanent committees. The first one is the Creation and Translations Committee, which provides financial support and aid to literary works' creators, financial support and aid to literary work translators, and the purchase of international copyrights. The second is the Youngsters Book Committee. It is dedicated to providing support and aides for writers, illustrators, and children's and young adult literature publishers. In addition, it ensures the elaboration of programs for hosting and animating the different activities related to Young Adult books. Moreover, it collaborates with the different sectors involved in book publishing for youngsters. The third one is the Publication and Distribution Committee. This one is consecrated to the inauguration of literary magazines, the estimation of aids and support for book publications, distribution and enhancement, printing pamphlets of the center's activities, and encouraging collaborated publishing.

In addition to the different divisions created, the organization of Salon International du Livre Algérien (SILA) [International Fair of the Algerian Book] officially became an annual fair starting in 2006. The book fair represents an annual occasion for foreign publishing houses and local ones to promote their productions. Since its launch, the number of publishing houses participating and visitors has been on the rise. In 2017, to a study conducted by the SILA's organizers, one-third of the visitors were children.

### ***Locating Algerian Children's literature on the international map***

Although writing for children has been harnessed since independence, Algerian authors struggle to produce stories and texts that appeal to an international audience, even at the League of Arab Countries. In 2017, Institut du Monde Arabe, Centre National de la Littérature Pour la

Jeunesse, and the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY Europe) published *100 Books For Children And Young People In Arabic*. The list was dominated by Lebanese and Egyptian writers, followed by other countries from the Middle East and only two Moroccan authors to represent the Maghreb. The selection, however, reflected the length the genre has come along over the past twenty years. The diversity of the works covered picture books, folktales, poetry, rhymes, songs, beginner readers, novels, comic books, and non-fiction books. Along with the works, all illustrators were acknowledged. Additionally, in a study conducted and published by Taha Thomure, Kreidieh, and Baroudi (2020), out of 47 award-winning Arabic children's literature books analyzed, 45% of the works were Lebanese, Morocco with only 2% of the works and not a single Algerian text.

### ***Translation and censorship***

With the scarce domestic production of children's books, children's literature in the Arab world was dominated by translated texts from Western literature. However, these translations are more of adaptations than faithful translations. Sabeur Mdallel (2003) adheres that "the way we write for children, in a given group, governs to a great extent the way we translate for them" (p. 298). In the same line of thought, if literature written for children is a tool to ingrain Islamic and moral values, so should any translated text. Concurrently, if the text did not offer moral values in line with Islamic practices, it should not present foreign cultural practices that may endanger the Arabic and Islamic cultures. Therefore, heavy censorship in the Arab World has often accompanied the translation of Western literature (Abu-Nasr, 1996).

Censorship has always been inherent to children's literature. It was a need that was first called for by Jean Jack Rousseau in 1762 in his book *Emile* to protect the innocence of children (West, 2005). In Algeria, as is the case for the rest of the Arab world, the central motive behind censoring children's books is often an attempt to protect religious and cultural precepts. While it is applicable for both books produced domestically and the imported/translated ones, it is more associated with translations of Western literature. In the same line of thought, Mdallel (2003) asserts:

While every nation has the right to choose the literature to be translated for children, censorship could be looked at as a normal reaction if the translated literature contains elements or themes encouraging violence, racism, sexism, or moral values not accepted by the target culture. Censorship is sometimes a means to preserve one's own cultural identity and avoid being just a copy of the other. (p303)

What Mdallel advances on the threat translated literature poses on children's mental representations of their culture and identity is also valid for books imported from the Middle East and the Arabic peninsula. With the failure of many Algerian authors to produce appealing and entertaining stories which reflect the Algerian society and culture at its core, most readers find themselves in front of a choice between books from the other Arab countries or World literature.

### ***Criticism and Scholarship***

Children's and young adult literature as a genre has little recognition in Higher Education institutions in Algeria. It is not introduced at the graduates' level in any of the Arabic, French, English, and Translation Studies departments. Only the Arabic and Translation Studies departments include it in their syllabi at the Master's and postgraduate studies levels. Concurrently,

most available research on children's literature in general and on the genre in Algeria is mainly conducted and produced by scholars of those two departments. To name a few of those researchers, Mouhamed Mortadh published a book entitled "Themes in Algerian Children's Poetry" (1993), and Mouhamed Elakhdar Abdelkader Elsa'ih's book "History of Children's Literature in Algeria" (2000) (Elrabi, 2009). However, it is worth mentioning that recently there has been an increase in terms of doctoral dissertations done under all four departments, while the lead is still to the departments of Arabic and Translation Studies.

Though the number of criticism studies conducted on the available texts in the Algerian market has been on the rise, there is still a massive gap in coverage of all genres and types of books marketed to children and young adults. The main reason is the chaotic production policies and lack of control over the quantity and quality of books published for children. In addition, the spread of ICTs as practical outlets for the circulation of different texts and genres contributed to creating a new dimension alien to most scholars and decision-makers.

### Conclusion

This paper attempts to take a closer look at the circumstances surrounding the birth of a genre. At its embryonic stage, children's literature in Algeria started at a disadvantage due to the continuum of its production. A continuum heavily shaped by the interplay of linguistic, political, and ideological factors of pre and post-war. Since its conception, children's literature has been seen as a mere mediator to promote literacy and nationalism. The stages that the genre has been through can be identified into two major phases. The first stage from 1930's to the mid-1980, with complete governmental control and censorship over local production and foreign texts. The second stage starts from the mid-1980s till today, in which the government relinquished most of its control in favor of the private sector. With the government's attempts to mobilize and provide a fertile infrastructure to nourish the production process, refining the quality of children's books to meet readers' expectations and win over parents' trust is slow-paced. Thus, though flooded with a panoply of texts for children, the Algerian market still reserves its most extensive shelves for productions from the Middle East or the translated texts from Western literature. Surmounting the issues confronting Algerian children's literature, domestically and internationally, necessitates a swift cut through the Gordian knot via an open conversation comprising authors, critics, authorities, and even readers. However, a fruitful conversation importunes the political and ideological contentions' repudiation. Current and future concerns the field is experiencing in the rest of the world are of similar urgency and should be included in the agenda of the roadmap toward a serious revision of the production process.

### About the author

**Amina Aissa Assia** is an assistant teacher in the department of English at the University of Relizane, Algeria. She has a BA in Spanish (2010), an MA in French, Teaching French as a Foreign Language, Contextualization and Pedagogical Innovation (2016), and a Magister in English (2017). She is currently reading for her Ph.D. in Discourse Analysis and Literary Stylistics. Her research interests include cognitive poetics, literary discourse analysis, children's and young adult literature, and stylistics. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7865-2995>

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