



Subaltern Testimony and Necropolitical Sovereignty in Shadia al-Zoubi's *Aradnā al-Ḥurriyyah*

Ahmad Fauzi¹, Achmad Syafri Maulana²

^{1,2} Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Adab and Culture sainece, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

Email: fauzi05082000@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received 09/06, 2026

Revised 21/07, 2026

Accepted 26/07, 2026

Abstract

This study examines *Aradna al-Hurriyah* by Shadia al-Zoubi from a postcolonial perspective by employing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of Subalternity and Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics. It aims to investigate the mechanisms of oppressive sovereignty in Syria and the forms of resistance articulated by subaltern subjects within testimonial literature. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing close reading and qualitative content analysis. The primary data consist of narratives, phrases, and linguistic expressions that represent violence, dehumanization, and freedom in the text. The findings reveal that the Syrian regime exercises internal colonialism through indiscriminate shootings, the bombing of civilian infrastructure, arbitrary detention, and the use of chemical weapons as instruments of necropolitical control. The analysis further demonstrates that testimonial narrative not only represents the lived experiences of subaltern suffering but also constitutes a space of political articulation through which silenced subjects are transformed into agents capable of renegotiating relations of power under conditions of state violence. These findings extend existing scholarship on Syrian testimonial literature by demonstrating the interconnection between subaltern experience, necropolitical governance, and the reconstruction of identity within a unified postcolonial analytical framework. Consequently, this study argues that testimonial literature functions not merely as a representation of wartime suffering but also as a medium for restoring human dignity, collective memory, and the sovereignty of identity while serving as a form of resistance to oppressive power.

Keywords:

Subalternity

Necropolitics

Literary Criticism

Arabic Testimonial Literature

Syrian Literature

تجريد

تناول هذه الدراسة رواية "أردنا الحرية" للكاتبة شادية الزعبي من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار، مستندةً إلى نظرية التابع (Subalternity) عند غاياتري تشاكرافورتى وسيفاك ومفهوم السياسات الموتية (Necropolitics) لدى أشيل مبيمي. وتهدف إلى الكشف عن آليات السيادة القمعية في سوريا، وأشكال المقاومة التي يعبر عنها التابعون في أدب الشهادة. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي النوعي من خلال القراءة الدقيقة (*Close Reading*) وتحليل المحتوى الكيفي. وتمثلت البيانات الرئيسة في السرديات والعبارات والتعبيرات اللغوية التي تمثل العنف ونزع الإنسانية والحرية داخل النص. وأظهرت النتائج أن النظام السوري يمارس شكلاً من أشكال الاستعمار الداخلي عبر إطلاق النار العشوائي، وقصف البنية التحتية المدنية، والاعتقال التعسفي، واستخدام الأسلحة الكيميائية بوصفها أدوات للسيطرة السياسات الموتية. كما بين التحليل أن السرد الشهادي لا يقتصر على تمثيل معاناة التابعين، بل يشكل فضاءاً للتعبير

السياسي تتحول فيه الذوات المهمشة والمقموعة إلى فواعل قادرة على إعادة التفاوض بشأن علاقات السلطة في ظل عنف الدولة. وتسهم هذه النتائج في توسيع آفاق دراسة الأدب الشهادي السوري من خلال إبراز الترابط بين تجربة التابع، وآليات السياسات الموتية، وإعادة تشكيل الهوية ضمن إطار تحليلي موحد يستند إلى دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن أدب الشهادة لا يؤدي وظيفة تمثيل معاناة ضحايا الحرب فحسب، بل يشكل أيضاً وسيلة لاستعادة الكرامة الإنسانية، والذاكرة الجمعية، وسيادة الهوية، فضلاً عن كونه ممارسة مقاومة في مواجهة السلطة القمعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

التابع
سياسات الموت
النقد الأدبي ما بعد
الاستعماري
العربي الأدب أدب
الشهادة السوري

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji *Aradna al-Hurriyah* karya Shadia al-Zoubi melalui perspektif poskolonial dengan menggunakan teori Subalternitas Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak dan konsep Nekropolitik Achille Mbembe. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap mekanisme kedaulatan represif di Suriah serta bentuk-bentuk perlawanan yang diekspresikan oleh subjek subaltern dalam sastra kesaksian. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik *close reading* dan analisis isi kualitatif. Data primer berupa narasi, frasa, dan ungkapan linguistik yang merepresentasikan kekerasan, dehumanisasi, dan kebebasan dalam teks. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rezim Suriah menjalankan praktik kolonialisme internal melalui penembakan membabi buta, pengeboman infrastruktur sipil, penahanan sewenang-wenang, serta penggunaan senjata kimia sebagai instrumen kontrol nekropolitik. Analisis juga memperlihatkan bahwa narasi kesaksian tidak hanya merepresentasikan pengalaman penderitaan subaltern, tetapi sekaligus membentuk ruang artikulasi politik yang mentransformasikan posisi subjek yang dibungkam menjadi agensi yang mampu menegosiasikan kembali relasi kuasa dalam konteks kekerasan negara. Temuan tersebut memperluas pembacaan terhadap sastra kesaksian Suriah dengan memperlihatkan keterkaitan antara pengalaman subaltern, mekanisme nekropolitik, dan proses rekonstruksi identitas dalam satu kerangka analisis poskolonial. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa sastra kesaksian berfungsi sebagai medium restorasi martabat kemanusiaan, memori kolektif, dan kedaulatan identitas di tengah kekerasan serta represi sistemik.

Kata kunci:

Subalternitas
Nekropolitik
Kritik Sastra
Pascakolonial
Sastra Kesaksian
Arab Sastra Suriah

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A. Introduction

Contemporary Syrian literature has undergone a significant transformation since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Literary works no longer merely function as aesthetic expressions but increasingly serve as testimonial narratives that document violence, displacement, imprisonment, and the struggle for survival under authoritarian rule. Testimonial literature occupies a distinctive position because it records individual

experience while simultaneously constructing collective memory against official narratives. Rather than presenting war solely as a political event, these narratives portray the everyday experiences of civilians who endure systematic violence and social disintegration. In this regard, literature becomes a site where marginalized voices negotiate history and reclaim agency through storytelling. Recent scholarship on Syrian archives, documentary practices, and prison life writing shows that testimony can function simultaneously as memory work, historical evidence, and a mode of identity reconstruction (Baker, 2025; Crone & Mollerup, 2024; Saber & Rahman al-Jaloud, 2024). Consequently, Syrian testimonial literature should be understood not merely as a representation of suffering but as a critical discourse that interrogates the relationship between violence, power, memory, and historical narration.

Within this literary landscape, this article introduces the concept of oppressive sovereignty as the principal analytical framework for understanding the relationship between state power and literary representation. In this study, oppressive sovereignty refers to the exercise of sovereign authority through systematic violence directed against the state's own citizens, whereby sovereignty is no longer legitimized by the protection of life but by the capacity to regulate death, fear, and exclusion. This definition synthesizes Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, which conceptualizes sovereignty as the power to determine who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2003), with postcolonial critiques that expose how modern states reproduce colonial forms of domination within their own territories (Loomba, 2015). From this perspective, military bombardments, arbitrary detention, forced displacement, and chemical attacks constitute manifestations of oppressive sovereignty because they transform civilian populations into objects of political control. Within literary narratives, these mechanisms are represented through recurring images of dehumanization, silencing, and the destruction of everyday life. Recent discourse-oriented studies further demonstrate that rhetorical framing and lexical choices actively construct ideology, legitimacy, victimhood, and agency in public and conflict discourse (Fajri, 2025; Mulyadi et al., 2025). Accordingly, literary texts become an important epistemological space for examining how sovereign violence is experienced, interpreted, narrated, and contested from below.

The relevance of this conceptual framework becomes evident in the Syrian conflict, which generated one of the most devastating humanitarian crises of the twenty-first century. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the war

displaced millions of Syrians and produced one of the world's largest refugee populations (UNHCR, 2021). Beyond forced migration, international reports documented arbitrary detention, indiscriminate bombardment, siege warfare, torture, and attacks against civilians (International, 2017). Such conditions reveal a transformation in the nature of sovereignty, where state authority can operate through mechanisms of death rather than protection. Recent research on former Syrian detainees and prison survivors also underscores the long-term psychological and social consequences of imprisonment, torture, and systemic dehumanization (Al-leimon et al., 2025; Tapan et al., 2026). From the perspective of literary studies, these political realities acquire significance not merely as historical facts but as narrative experiences that shape literary imagination. Works such as *Aradna al-Hurriyyah* emerge from this historical context by transforming collective trauma into testimony, enabling literature to function as both historical witness and ethical intervention.

The present study examines *Aradna al-Hurriyyah* by Shadia al-Zoubi because it offers a distinctive literary perspective within contemporary Syrian testimonial writing. Unlike many war narratives that focus primarily on military confrontation or geopolitical conflict, Al-Zoubi reconstructs the Syrian revolution through the perspective of a child narrator whose personal memories gradually evolve into collective testimony. This narrative strategy positions childhood not merely as a symbol of innocence but as a critical site where violence, memory, identity, and political consciousness intersect. As Spivak argues, subaltern subjects are systematically excluded from dominant structures of representation and therefore struggle to articulate their own voices within hegemonic discourse (Spivak, 1988). At the same time, the testimonial form enables the narrator to challenge that silencing through the act of bearing witness, thereby transforming individual trauma into political agency. Studies of Syrian refugee narratives similarly show that figurative language and counter-narrative practices can function as identity work and as resources for agency under displacement (Ab Rashid et al., 2025; Rommes & Chaer, 2024). Consequently, *Aradna al-Hurriyyah* provides an important literary corpus for examining how testimonial narratives reconstruct subaltern agency under conditions of oppressive sovereignty.

Recent scholarship demonstrates a growing interest in Syrian cultural production, yet much of this work concentrates on digital activism, archives, refugee identity, memory, and documentary practice rather than integrating literary testimony with sovereign

violence. Alhayek (2025), for example, examines Syrian women's counter-discourse in digital media as a strategy of empowerment and resistance (Alhayek, 2025). Research on the Syrian Archive shows how eyewitness footage and oral testimony operate simultaneously as historical testimony, evidence, and creative practice (Saber & Rahman al-Jaloud, 2024), while studies of Syrian documentary production emphasize archival mediation and temporal reordering in the reconstruction of the past (Bandak et al., 2024; Crone & Mollerup, 2024). Recent work on prison life writing and enforced disappearance further shows how testimony contributes to collective identity, memory work, and demands for truth (Baker, 2025; Herremans & Ghoutouk, 2025). Studies of refugee narratives likewise demonstrate that figurative and counter-narrative practices are central to identity negotiation under displacement (Ab Rashid et al., 2025; Rommes & Chaer, 2024). Although these studies substantially enrich the understanding of Syrian cultural production, the relationship between testimonial narration and necropolitical sovereignty remains insufficiently integrated within literary analysis.

From a postcolonial perspective, Subaltern Studies provide a productive framework for understanding how marginalized communities are excluded from dominant systems of representation. Spivak argues that the subaltern occupies a structural position in which speech is systematically mediated, appropriated, or erased by hegemonic discourse (Spivak, 1988). Likewise, Bhabha (1994, pp. 112–118) conceptualizes resistance as a negotiation that emerges within the ambivalent space between domination and subjectivity, while Fanon (1963, pp. 35–40) explains that colonial violence simultaneously destroys and reconstructs political consciousness (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon R., 1963). Recent Arabic literary studies demonstrate the continuing usefulness of these perspectives for examining symbolic resistance, marginalization, and orientalist domination in literary discourse (A'la, 2025; Nazar et al., 2026; Wardah & Surur, 2025). Nevertheless, most classical applications remain situated within encounters between imperial powers and colonized territories. Comparatively fewer studies investigate how postcolonial concepts illuminate situations in which sovereign states reproduce colonial mechanisms of domination against their own citizens. Consequently, the intersection between subalternity, testimonial literature, and internal state violence remains theoretically underdeveloped within contemporary Syrian literary criticism.

A similar tendency can be observed in studies employing Achille Mbembe's theory of Necropolitics. Mbembe (2003, pp. 11–40) argues that modern sovereignty is ultimately expressed through the authority to determine who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2003). Subsequent scholarship has employed this concept to examine war, militarization, border regimes, and humanitarian crises. Recent work on necropolitical ordering in Arab conflict contexts further emphasizes the relationship between sovereignty, dehumanization, and organized exposure to death (Al-Kassimi, 2025). However, within literary studies, necropolitics has more frequently been used to interpret representations of death than to explain how literary testimony reconstructs political agency among subjects exposed to sovereign violence. Existing studies on Syrian narratives generally emphasize trauma, displacement, or humanitarian suffering without systematically examining how testimonial narration transforms victims into political subjects capable of contesting hegemonic authority. This theoretical separation between Subalternity and Necropolitics has limited a more comprehensive understanding of how literary texts simultaneously represent the production of death and the reconstruction of agency under authoritarian rule.

Against this scholarly background, the present study positions *Aradna al-Hurriyyah* within the broader tradition of Syrian testimonial literature while proposing an integrated postcolonial reading that connects Subalternity and Necropolitics through the analytical concept of oppressive sovereignty. Rather than treating violence merely as the historical background of the narrative, this study examines how sovereign violence is textually constructed and how testimonial narration transforms personal memory into political intervention. In doing so, the article argues that the child narrator functions not only as a witness to violence but also as a subaltern subject whose testimony destabilizes official state discourse and reconstructs collective memory from below. This approach also builds on recent literary research that treats identity, collective suffering, and social criticism as discursively and aesthetically constructed rather than transparently mirrored by texts (Hasri et al., 2025; Hikmah & Purnamawati, 2026; Syarifuddin et al., 2026). Accordingly, this study asks: (1) How is oppressive sovereignty represented through the narrative structure of *Aradna al-Hurriyyah* from the perspective of Subalternity and Necropolitics? (2) How does the testimonial narrative reconstruct subaltern agency in confronting

authoritarian state violence and negotiating collective memory within contemporary Syrian literature?

B. Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design within the framework of postcolonial literary criticism to examine the representation of oppressive sovereignty and the reconstruction of subaltern agency in Shadia Al-Zoubi's *Aradnā al-Ḥurriyyah* (أردنا الحرية) (الزعيبي, ٢٠٢٤). The study integrates Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of Subalternity (Spivak, 1988) and Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) as complementary analytical perspectives. The primary source of the research is *Aradnā al-Ḥurriyyah*, published by *Mu'assasat al-Farah* (مؤسسة الفرح), which documents the author's testimony regarding the Syrian Revolution between 2011 and 2024. The text was selected because it represents contemporary Syrian testimonial literature that combines personal memory, political violence, and collective resistance, making it highly relevant for investigating the relationship between literary testimony, subalternity, and sovereign violence.

The units of analysis consist of textual elements that explicitly or implicitly represent oppressive sovereignty and subaltern agency, including words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and narrative episodes. Primary data comprise quotations describing military violence, chemical attacks, arbitrary detention, Saydnaya Prison, forced displacement, resistance, and the reconstruction of identity. Secondary data include books on postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, testimonial literature, and necropolitics, as well as peer-reviewed studies published primarily between 2024 and 2026 and institutional reports used to strengthen the historical and theoretical context. Data were collected through documentation techniques, employing close reading and the read-and-note method, in which every relevant quotation was identified, recorded, classified, and organized according to predetermined analytical categories.

To facilitate systematic interpretation, the data were coded based on three principal analytical dimensions. The first category, Silencing–Speaking Back, derived from Spivak's theory, identifies representations of structural marginalization and forms of subaltern resistance. The second category, Right to Kill–State of Exception, based on Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, examines representations of sovereign violence through military

attacks, imprisonment, torture, and emergency rule. The third category, Memory–Trauma–Testimony, analyzes how individual experiences are transformed into collective memory and political testimony through literary narration; recent scholarship on Syrian archives and prison life writing demonstrates the analytical importance of this relationship between testimony, memory, and identity (Baker, 2025; Saber & Rahman al-Jaloud, 2024). These categories function as operational indicators for interpreting the relationship between narrative structure and postcolonial power relations.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis through six sequential procedures: (1) identifying textual quotations relevant to the research questions; (2) classifying the quotations according to the analytical categories; (3) applying theoretical coding using the concepts of silencing, speaking back, right to kill, state of exception, memory, trauma, and testimony; (4) interpreting the coded data through the integrated perspectives of Spivak and Mbembe; (5) comparing the findings with previous studies on Syrian testimonial literature, subaltern agency, and necropolitics to determine the scholarly position of the study; and (6) drawing conclusions through the synthesis of textual evidence and theoretical interpretation. This analytical procedure emphasizes systematic coding, iterative interpretation, and contextual comparison to generate trustworthy qualitative findings. The credibility of the findings was enhanced through theoretical triangulation, whereby each textual quotation was interpreted using both Subalternity and Necropolitics and subsequently examined in dialogue with contemporary scholarship on Syrian literature and postcolonial criticism, thereby ensuring the consistency, transparency, and analytical rigor of the research.

C. Result and Discussion.

1. Results

a. Mechanisms of Sovereign Oppression (State Oppression)

1) Brutal Shootings of Civilians

"بدأ الجيش السوري يضرب الرصاص بشكل عشوائي على... المواطنين الأبرياء"

"The Syrian army began firing bullets randomly at... innocent civilians." (p.5)

Military actions involving indiscriminate shooting represent a pure expression of necropolitics, in which state sovereignty is no longer exercised to protect life, but rather to assert power through the right to kill. In this context, citizens are reduced to disposable objects for the survival of the

regime, marking the collapse of the state's protective function within the traditional social contract.

2) Bombing of Civilian Infrastructure

"بدؤوا يقذفونا بقذائف الهاون... على المدارس والجامعات، والمستشفيات"

"They began bombarding us with mortars... targeting schools, universities, and hospitals." (p.5)

The targeting of strategic civilian infrastructure constitutes the state's attempt to create "social death" by destroying the facilities that sustain the daily life of society. Academically, this is a strategy of degrading the subaltern's living space, in which spaces that should be safe (such as schools and hospitals) are transformed into zones of danger in order to enforce total obedience through spatial terror.

3) Arrests and Hostage-Taking

"يعتقل شبانهم، وأطفالهم، ونسائهم، لكي يجعلوهم رهينة لهم"

"They arrest their youth, children, and women in order to make them hostages." (p.5)

The use of mass detention as an instrument of hostage-taking reflects the implementation of a state of exception, in which the law is suspended to grant security forces the freedom to carry out extra-judicial actions. Under these conditions, the bodies of subjects including vulnerable groups such as women and children are transformed into political commodities used to control populations considered rebellious.

4) Use of Chemical Weapons

"أباد بعض المناطق بالغاز السام، الذي يسمى بالكيمياوي"

"Some areas were annihilated with poisonous gas, known as chemical weapons." (p.7)

Chemical weapons represent the peak of biopolitical power transformed into necropower, in which the state uses scientific technology to regulate mortality collectively and instantaneously. This act conveys a message of absolute sovereignty: that the state possesses full control over the biological breath of its citizens, while simultaneously demonstrating the total failure of international legal norms to protect subaltern groups from extermination.

b. Phenomenology of Subaltern Suffering (Subaltern Suffering)

1) The Loss of Childhood

"كانت تختفي طفولتي بين قصف، وخوف، وحزن"

"My childhood disappeared amidst bombings, fear, and sorrow." (p. 8)

The disappearance of childhood in testimonial narratives is understood as a profound fragmentation of identity caused by chronic trauma. Academically, children function as an "indicator species" of a nation's political health; when the narrator feels that her childhood has "disappeared," it signifies the erasure of future agency by tyrannical power structures.

2) Spatial Exclusion in Refugee Camps

"سكن تحت خيمة ليست واقية عن المطر"

"Living under a tent that could not protect from the rain." (p. 6)

Conditions in refugee camps are a physical representation of bare life, in which humans are stripped of their legal and political protections, leaving only their most basic biological needs. The inadequate tent symbolizes the total precarity of the subaltern subject, forced to live in conditions of systemic humiliation under the control of various authorities without sovereignty over their own space.

3) Systemic Poverty and the Looting of Resources

"كانوا ينامون وهم جائعون... وأفقرت الشعب للحد الأدنى للمعيشة"

"They slept while hungry... and the (regime) impoverished the people to the minimum standard of living." (p.7-8)

Explanation: Poverty in Syria is not merely a consequence of war, but rather the result of economic necropolitics in which the regime loots international aid and state resources to strengthen its elite. This condition of hunger is used as a weapon to weaken the physical and mental resistance of subaltern groups, ensuring that all the people's energy is consumed merely by surviving day to day.

4) Psychological and Mental Warfare

"دخلت مع هذه الحرب الدموية حرب نفسية كبيرة واقتصادية"

"Alongside this bloody war came a massive psychological and economic war." (p.7)

Psychological warfare aims to destroy social cohesion and collective mental health through the spread of terror, false information, and mysterious criminal acts. Theoretically, this is a hegemonic attempt to silence subaltern voices through psychological pressure that causes individuals to feel isolated and powerless against a system perceived as omnipresent.

c. The Dialectic of Hope and Freedom (Freedom)

1) Vocalization of the Demand for Freedom

"كنت أسمع صوت يردد نريد الحرية لا للأسد"

"I heard a voice repeatedly saying: We want freedom, no to Assad." (p. 4)

This cry for freedom marks the moment when the subaltern begins to "speak" and reclaim the right to narrate (permission to narrate) amidst imposed silence. It is a radical political act that dismantles the hegemony of the regime's discourse, transforming personal grievances into a collective political identity demanding popular sovereignty.

2) Active Resistance (The Free Army)

"بدأوا المواطنين في تشكيل فرق أطلقوا عليهم أسماء بالجيش الحر"

"Citizens began forming groups that they called the Free Syrian Army (FSA)." (p. 5)

The formation of military agency by civilians demonstrates a transition from passive victimhood toward subjects who possess sovereignty over themselves. This action constitutes a form of active resistance against the state's necropower, in which the subaltern risks death in order to fight for a new and inclusive vision of the national community.

3) The People's Resilience

"ولكن الشعب ظل واقفاً ضد هذا الرئيس والجيش الظالم"

"But the people remained standing firmly against this unjust president and army." (p.8)

The people's resilience is academically understood as a form of conscious agency, in which suffering is no longer perceived as fate, but rather as the consequence of political crimes that must be resisted. Awareness of the

tyrant's nature as something to be wary of strengthens subaltern solidarity that transcends ethnic or religious differences for the sake of a shared goal of liberation.

4) Transcendental Optimism

"حتماً ستكون النهاية مفرحة، وتكون معجزة"

"Surely the ending will be joyful, and it will be a miracle." (p. 3)

The use of the term "miracle" indicates the presence of transcendental hope functioning as a healing process for the subaltern. This hope enables individuals to imagine a future beyond the existing structures of oppression, providing the moral energy necessary to survive fourteen years of conflict until liberation is achieved.

2. Discussion

a. Philosophical Foundation

The philosophical foundation of postcolonialism is rooted in a deconstructive critique of Western epistemological hegemony that has long positioned itself as the center of universal truth (Eurocentrism). Philosophically, postcolonialism challenges the "colonization of the mind" that marginalizes local knowledge and creates a hierarchical dichotomy between the center (Metropole) and the periphery (Periphery). This line of thought seeks to dismantle hegemonic structures of thinking by presenting counter-narratives grounded in the concrete experiences of oppressed subjects, in order to restore the intellectual dignity that had been eroded by the grand narratives of colonialism.

Ontologically, postcolonialism is grounded in the theory of Orientalism developed by Edward Said, which reveals how power produces knowledge in order to dominate "The Other." Said argues that representations of the Eastern world are often constructed in a biased and essentialist manner to legitimize the political and moral domination of the colonizer (Said, 1978). This philosophy provides a critical foundation for dissecting how dominant discourse creates the image of colonized societies as irrational and static entities, thereby positioning them as permanently in need of "assistance" or supervision from external powers.

Furthermore, this philosophical foundation is strengthened by the concept of Subalternity from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which questions the agency of silenced groups within global structures of power. Spivak emphasizes that subalternity is a structural position in which marginalized subjects are not readily recognized within dominant circuits of representation (Spivak, 1988). Recent literary analyses of patriarchal and gendered marginalization likewise show how mechanisms of subordination can be normalized through discourse and cultural representation, extending the relevance of subaltern analysis beyond classical colonial settings (Cahaya, 2026; Wardah & Surur, 2025). Philosophically, postcolonialism in this context functions as an instrument for recovering the agency of subjects erased from official historical narratives while challenging paternalistic practices of representation.

The critique of Necropolitics by Achille Mbembe complements this philosophical foundation by dissecting sovereignty as the control of death over human bodies. Mbembe argues that in postcolonial conditions, power is often manifested through the ability of the state or dominant actors to dictate who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2003). This philosophy serves as an analytical tool to challenge oppressive sovereignty, in which policies of violence and the destruction of living spaces are viewed as extreme forms of power that have lost their ethical legitimacy toward the values of life and human rights.

As a philosophical conclusion, postcolonialism demands an ethics of recognition toward the plurality of human narratives and identities. This foundation asserts that truth is never singular but is constructed through complex dialectics of power, representation, memory, and resistance. Scholarship on archives and visual memory further demonstrates that images and testimony do not merely preserve the past; they actively reorganize how communities remember violence and imagine historical meaning (Bandak et al., 2024; Saber & Rahman al-Jaloud, 2024). By integrating the theories of Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Fanon, and Mbembe, postcolonial discourse is therefore not merely a historical study but also a critical practice concerned with voices that have long been silenced and with the epistemological conditions under which those voices become legible.

b. The Early Emergence in the West

The formal emergence of postcolonial studies in the West is often attributed to the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978. Philosophically, Said employed Michel Foucault's discursive approach to expose how Western academic and cultural institutions constructed the image of the "East" as inferior, irrational, and exotic in order to legitimize colonial domination (Said, 1978). This publication became a crucial turning point that transformed the perspectives of Western academics regarding power relations between colonizers and the colonized, while also marking the birth of postcolonialism as a widely recognized discipline of literary and cultural criticism within universities.

As a conclusion, the early emergence of postcolonialism in the West was the result of a dialectic between anti-colonial political upheavals in the Third World and the development of poststructuralist theory in Europe. This theory emerged not merely as a historical study, but as a critical methodology for challenging the remnants of colonial ways of thinking that continue to persist within modern Western politics, education, and culture (Loomba, 2015). The success of postcolonialism in penetrating Western academic barriers demonstrates international recognition of the necessity for epistemological diversity and ethical acknowledgment of the plurality of human historical narratives.

c. The Early Emergence in the Arab World

The early emergence of postcolonial thought in the Arab world was intellectually rooted in reformist debates that questioned Western cultural and political domination and later intensified after the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967 (the Naksa). The defeat generated broad criticism of imported models of modernity, authoritarian nationalism, and the failure of post-independence states to secure dignity and political agency. In contemporary Arabic literary scholarship, this longer trajectory remains visible in analyses of Palestinian resistance writing, where poetic and narrative forms articulate collective oppression, dispossession, social reality, and symbolic resistance (Hasri et al., 2025; Nurchalis et al., 2024). These studies illustrate how literary discourse can preserve collective memory while also transforming historical marginalization into cultural resistance.

The publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978 became the primary catalyst that provided a methodological framework for Arab intellectuals to deconstruct Western representations of the East. Although Said wrote within the context of Western academia (Columbia University), his influence quickly penetrated Arab intellectual centers such as Beirut, Cairo, and Morocco. For Arab thinkers, Said provided an epistemological “analytical tool” to expose how Orientalist discourse had been used to justify colonialism in Palestine and other Arab regions, and how that discourse continues to persist in Western foreign policy today (Said, 1978).

During the 1980s and 1990s, postcolonial studies in the Arab world developed more specific characteristics through their close connection with the Palestinian question, exile, displacement, and critiques of the nation-state. Literature became a crucial arena for negotiating alienation, dispossession, collective memory, and the right to narrate. Recent studies of Palestinian literary representation similarly show that symbolic resistance, social criticism, and collective identity are constructed through formal, rhetorical, and discursive strategies rather than through thematic content alone (Hasri et al., 2025; Nazar et al., 2026; Nurchalis et al., 2024). Philosophically, postcolonialism in the Arab world thus functions not merely as a literary theory but as an intellectual struggle over history, representation, sovereignty, and the legitimacy of marginalized voices.

In the Maghreb region (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), postcolonialism emerged through a strong dialectic with French poststructuralist theory. Thinkers such as Abdelkebir Khatibi introduced the concept of “Epistemological Decolonization” through his work *Maghreb Pluriel*. Khatibi argued that Arab societies must move beyond the dualism between tradition (*turath*) and Western modernity in order to achieve a hybrid and independent mode of thought (Khatibi, 1983). This approach demonstrates that postcolonialism in the Arab world possesses rich regional variations, in which the issue of language (Arabic versus French) becomes a major battlefield in defining postcolonial identity.

As a conclusion, the emergence of postcolonialism in the Arab world was marked by a gradual shift from direct anti-colonial resistance toward discursive,

cultural, and epistemological forms of critique. This framework also enables scholars to examine forms of internal domination in which local authoritarian power reproduces exclusionary or colonial modes of representation and control (Loomba, 2015). Contemporary Arabic literary studies demonstrate how orientalist discourse, subaltern silencing, and ideological representation continue to structure literary and public discourse (A'la, 2025; Fajri, 2025; Nazar et al., 2026). Its continuing relevance therefore lies in connecting critiques of external colonialism with self-criticism concerning authoritarianism, identity formation, and the politics of representation in contemporary Arab societies.

d. Figures and Concepts of Western and Arab Postcolonialism

Within Western postcolonial discourse, Edward Said is the central figure who laid the foundation through the concept of Orientalism. Through his monumental work published in 1978, Said exposed how Western academic and cultural institutions constructed the image of the "East" as inferior, static, and irrational in order to legitimize imperial domination (Said, 1978). Said's philosophy emphasizes that knowledge about the Eastern world is not produced objectively, but rather functions as an instrument of power to maintain Western hegemony over the Islamic and Asian worlds.

Furthermore, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak expanded the scope of this theory by introducing the concept of Subalternity. Spivak questioned the ability of the most oppressed groups, located outside hegemonic structures of power, to speak and be heard within official history (Spivak, 1988). Philosophically, Spivak's contribution challenges Western intellectuals not to become trapped in paternalistic representational practices, but rather to open spaces for subalterns to "speak back" against multidimensional structures of global oppression.

Another important figure from the Western tradition is Homi K. Bhabha, who formulated the concepts of Hybridity, Mimicry, and Ambivalence. Bhabha argues that the relationship between colonizer and colonized is never stable, but instead creates a "Third Space" in which identity negotiation occurs (Bhabha, 1994). Mimicry, or the colonized subject's imitation of the colonizer's culture, is viewed by Bhabha not as perfect assimilation, but as a hidden strategy of resistance that disrupts colonial authority by mocking the authenticity of colonial culture.

Shifting to the Arab perspective, Frantz Fanon (a diaspora intellectual highly influential in Algeria and the Arab world) offered the concept of Psychological Decolonization. Fanon emphasized that colonialism does not merely occupy physical territory, but also destroys the mental condition of the colonized through alienation and the internalization of inferiority (Fanon R., 1963). For Fanon, true liberation requires the total destruction of colonial structures within the human psyche in order to produce a “new humanity” possessing complete sovereignty over both body and mind.

In the Arab Maghreb world, figures such as Abdelkebir Khatibi introduced the concept of Epistemological Decolonization through his work *Maghreb Pluriel*. Khatibi emphasized the importance of “double critique,” namely criticizing outdated internal traditions while simultaneously rejecting the hegemonic domination of Western modernity (Khatibi, 1983). This concept aims to create an independent intellectual space for Arab societies, in which identity is no longer defined dichotomously between “tradition” and “the West,” but through a transformative critical synthesis.

Finally, Achille Mbembe formulated the concept of Necropolitics, or the politics of death, to explain how sovereignty can be exercised through the power to expose populations to death, injury, abandonment, and conditions of unlivability (Mbembe, 2003). Recent scholarship applying necropolitical analysis to Arab conflict contexts further stresses the ways political orders classify lives unequally and normalize organized exposure to violence (Al-Kassimi, 2025). This concept complements Arab postcolonial discourse by highlighting how postcolonial regimes may inherit and reproduce coercive methods of domination against their own populations, transforming the human body and everyday space into sites of sovereign control.

D. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that *Aradna al-Hurriyyah* by Shadia Al-Zoubi is not merely a historical memoir but a form of testimonial literature that articulates epistemic resistance against oppressive sovereignty. Through the integration of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of Subalternity and Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics, the analysis reveals that the Syrian regime reproduces mechanisms of internal colonialism by employing military violence, arbitrary detention, and chemical attacks as instruments for governing

life and death. Simultaneously, the testimonial narrative transforms the child narrator from a silenced subaltern into a political subject who reconstructs memory, identity, and collective resistance through the act of bearing witness. These findings confirm that testimonial literature functions not only as a representation of trauma but also as a literary space in which marginalized voices negotiate power and challenge authoritarian domination.

Academically, this study contributes to postcolonial literary scholarship by demonstrating that Subalternity and Necropolitics are complementary analytical frameworks for explaining the relationship between sovereign violence, testimonial narration, and the reconstruction of political agency in contemporary Syrian literature. Rather than treating subalternity as merely a condition of silence or necropolitics solely as the administration of death, this study shows how testimonial narratives mediate the transformation of structural oppression into narrative resistance. Accordingly, the concept of oppressive sovereignty proposed in this study provides a productive analytical perspective for examining literary representations of state violence beyond the conventional framework of classical colonialism.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single literary text and focuses primarily on textual interpretation within a postcolonial framework. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader corpus of Syrian testimonial literature or to other forms of Arab cultural production. Future research may expand this discussion through comparative analyses involving multiple Syrian testimonial works, refugee narratives, prison literature, or multimodal media representations. Further studies may also integrate feminist postcolonial theory, memory studies, trauma theory, or discourse analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how literature reconstructs resistance, collective memory, and political agency in societies affected by protracted conflict.

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