

**SOCIO-HISTORICAL REALITIES AND THE  
DE/CONSTRUCTION OF THE ALGERIAN IDENTITY IN  
SELECTED NOVELS OF LEILA SEBBAR**

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work was carried out by Akudo Ogechi Ugwumba with matric. no. 130064 in the Department of European Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, under my supervision.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, Lady Fidelia Ifeoma Ugwumba, who saw me begin this project but couldn't stay to see the end. May you continue to rest in the bosom of the Lord.

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## ABSTRACT

Socio-historical realities such as wars, colonisation and migration are significant events in North African literature. Leïla Sebbar's creative writings are suffused with the socio-historical realities of Algeria. Previous studies on Sebbar's novels have dwelt largely on the thematic analysis of these socio-historical realities, with less attention paid to how they have (de)constructed the Algerian identity. This study was, therefore, designed to examine the socio-historical realities in the selected novels, with a view to establishing the manner in which these realities shaped the Algerian identity.

Edward Saïd's Postcolonial Theory and Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity were adopted as framework. The interpretive design was used. Four of Leïla Sebbar's novels, *La Seine était rouge* (Seine), *La Jeune fille au balcon* (Jeune), *Mon Cher fils* (Fils) and *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (Fatima), were purposively selected for their representations of the Algerian social history. Texts were subjected to critical textual analysis.

Socio-historical realities represented in the texts are the Algerian war, migration, exile and colonisation. French colonial experience in Algeria engendered anticolonial and nationalistic consciousness in the psyche of Algerians. *Seine* depicts a riot that took place on 17 October, 1961, during the Algerian war, which foregrounds the subalternity of the Algerians both in Algeria and in France. The stereotyped Algerians, who came for a peaceful demonstration against a curfew imposed only on them were injured and killed. Migration of Algerians to France puts them in dire socio-economic conditions. In *Fatima*, the case of Mina illustrates the marginalisation of Algerians living in France; she lives in the ghetto and does menial jobs in spite of her qualification as a lawyer. The exile of the first generation Algerians resulted in the hyphenated Franco-Algerian identity of the second generation Algerians, born and bred in France, and referred to as *Beurs*. Girls such as Dalila, Dina and Dora, in *Fatima* and *Jeune*, use displacement as subversive practices against patriarchal rules, thereby affirming their feminine Algerianness. *Jeune* and *Fils* depict the intergenerational conflict between the old generation Algerians and the new generation born after colonisation. The texts demonstrate the openness of the new generation Algerians (Amel in *Seine* and Yacine in *Jeune*) to the Algerian past, unlike the old generation (Amel's mother and grand-mother or Yacine's father). The recuperation of these old histories as Algeria's collective memory enables the young Algerians to deconstruct their historical experiences and to construct new postcolonial identity. Colonisation produces an exilic and migratory consciousness in young Algerians, who feel alienated both in Algeria and in France. Amel in *Seine*, Dalila in *Fatima*, Mélissa, Dina, Dora and Yacine in *Jeune*, and Kamila and Alma in *Fils* represent the new generation Algerians whose identity has lost its homogeneity and acquired transcultural and transnational hybridity through the agency of colonisation and migration.

Leïla Sebbar's novels narrated the socio-historical realities of Algeria in ways that enable the (de)construction of the Algerian identity between the colonial and post-colonial period.

**Keywords:** Algerian identity, North African literature, Leïla Sebbar's novels

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Title Page	
Certification	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.1.1 Socio-historical overview of Maghrebian society	1
1.1.2 Historical overview of Maghrebian literature	3
1.1.3 Context of social history	7
1.1.4 Leïla Sebbar and her works	8
1.2 Statement of the problem	13
1.3 Aim and Objectives of the study	14
1.4 Research questions	14
1.5 Significance of the study	15
1.6 Conceptual clarification	16
1.7 Scope of the study	18
1.8 Methodology	18
1.9 Organisation of the study	19
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	
2.1 Literature of commitment	20
2.2 Existing studies on Algerian War and Colonisation	23
2.3 Previous works on the Beur generation	27
2.4 Immigration and Franco-Algerian literature	33
2.5.1 Social basis of identity	40

2.5.2	Identity and space	43
2.6	Previous works on Leïla Sebbar and her novels	44
2.7	Narrative techniques in selected texts	55
2.8.1	Postcolonialism and socio-historical writing	58
2.8.2	Postcolonialism in literature	62
2.8.3	Otherness, subalternity and stereotypes in postcolonial discourse	64
2.9	Social realism and socio-historical writing	65

### **CHAPTER THREE: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ALGERIAN WAR IN SELECTED WORKS OF LEÏLA SEBBAR**

3.0	Introduction	72
3.1	The Algerian War in the texts	72
3.2	Discourse on the consequences of the Algerian War	79
3.3	Rootlessness and otherness: Search for Arabic origin	86
3.4	Conditions of the north African immigrant families in France before, during and after the war	94
3.5	Characterisation of post-independence protagonists	105
3.6	Conclusion	106

### **CHAPTER FOUR: COLONISATION AND GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS IN SELECTED WORKS OF LEÏLA SEBBAR**

4.0	Introduction	108
4.1	The Algerian youth in Sebbar's works	109
4.2	Sebbar and the main characters in her works	114
4.3.1	Mother-son relationship	117
4.3.2	Mother-daughter relationship	119
4.3.3	Father-daughter relationship	124
4.3.4	Father-son relationship	127
4.4	Dalila, Amel, Dina, Dora, Mélissa and Kamila as models of new Maghrebian womanhood	134
4.5	Conclusion	140

## **CHAPTER FIVE: LEÏLA SEBBAR AS A POSTCOLONIAL REALIST WRITER**

5.1	Leïla Sebbar as a postcolonial writer	142
5.2.0	Elements of the Algerian past and present realities in Sebbar's narratives	143
5.2.1	Social realities and their effects on the Algerian identity in Sebbar's narratives	144
5.2.2	Historical realities and their effects on the Algerian identity in Sebbar's narratives	160

### **CONCLUSION**

A.	Summary	164
B	Findings	168
C.	Recommendations	171
	Works cited	172



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a socio-historical overview of the Maghrebian society and background to the study. It establishes the problem and delineates the objectives and significance of the study. It equally examines the organisation of the study, defines the scope of the study, unveils the methodology and clarifies important concepts of the study.

#### **1.1 Background to the study**

In this section, an attempt is made to provide the background to the study by presenting a socio-historical overview of the Maghrebian society. It equally takes a look at the overview of Maghrebian literature, examines the context of social history and then sheds light on Leïla Sebbar whose novels are selected and her creative works as related to socio-historical writing.

##### **1.1.1 Socio-historical overview of Maghrebian society**

The Maghrebian society is made up of the north African countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Egypt and Mauritania. According to Sadiqi (2008), the Maghreb consist of the three north African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. He continues by stating that even though other countries such as Libya, Egypt and Mauritania are rightly considered as part of the Maghreb, these three countries of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco are much more popular. They are referred to as the Maghrebian countries in Africa because of their common historical and socio-cultural background. According to Ennaji (2005), the major similarities found among the countries of the Maghreb reside in their history and geo-political characteristics. Being that these three countries were colonised by France, they share more or less the same experiences with the so-called civilisation.

Colonisation in Africa has been a recurring topic for discussion by literary critics such as Vincent Khapoya, Mahmood Mamdani, Achille Mbembe and Stephanie Terreni Brown. According to Weber (2015), the Europeans came to Africa around 14th century with the help of Christopher Columbus and his men; they initiated the slave trade because they needed people to work in their sugarcane plantation in India. By the end of 18th century, there was an industrial revolution in Europe and slaves were no longer needed because of the emergence of machines. This industrial revolution led to the abolition of slave trade. In the words of Davidson (2002), toward the beginning of 19th century, various governments acted to ban the slave trade. With the industrial revolution arose the need to source for raw materials for the emerging industries. Africa, with the rich natural endowment was the destination of Europeans in search of raw materials. This led to the scramble for Africa by European merchants. The Berlin Conference of 18th November 1884 to 30th January, 1885 was dedicated to the partitioning of Africa by the Europeans in the name of "Regenerating Africa". France, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Spain were among the European countries that colonised Africa.

France colonised about 28 African countries, including countries of the Indian Ocean and also the North African countries popularly known as the Maghreb. Some of the countries colonised by France are Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Cameroun, Chad, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Many Maghrebian writers such as Schöpfel, Begag and Sebbar have written about the France-Maghrebian relationship. According to Schöpfel (2000), The French penetration starting from 1830, where Algeria became a political department of France while Tunisia and Morocco were put into protectorates, introduced some new ideas in the Maghrebian society and aroused some serious questions. France-Maghrebian relationship is seen by most Maghrebian literary critics as filled with injustice, war, oppression and above all killings. Said (1978) buttresses this when he talks about the bossy executive approach of European colonialism. Homi K. Bhabha in the Foreword he wrote for Fanon (2004), confirms that being confronted with a world configured, the colonised subject is always presumed guilty.

### 1.1.2 Historical overview of Maghrebian literature

Déjeux and Mitsch(1992) state that, the francophone Maghrebian literature is neither indigenous nor national and that for this reason, this particular literature poses a serious problem for Arabic language critics as well as foreign observers. They also posit that since the 1950s when francophone literature was first written by Maghrebians (as Maghrebians and not as French), many terms have been coined to define it; "Literature of French expression" and "French language literature" are the most commonly used ones. They claim that many critics find these terms cumbersome but nothing better has been suggested. According to Déjeux, Kacem Basfao talks about "Moroccan literature of French language", Ahmed Lanasri discusses "Algerian literature of Arab expression in French language", while Jean Sénac proposes "Literature of French writing" or "Literature of French letters", but none of these terms has met with much success. Déjeux and Mitsch (1992) further state that if André Miquel's term "Arab literature written in French" perfectly replicates a part of the situation, it misrepresents the works of Berber writers who know Arabic but continue to use French as their language of writing. This is so because these authors have their reasons for writing in French and not in Arabic even though they understand the language.

What is of interest in this study is a totality of books written by the Maghrebians (Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians). Some Scholars might want to incorporate authors who are not of Maghrebian origin but were born and raised there such as Emmanuel Roblès and Sénac. These people are known as "pied noir", most of them fought diligently for the cause of independence of the Maghrebian people. There is the need to include writers like Leïla Sebbar, who has Franco-Algerian parents and currently lives in France, and the "Beur" writers like Nacer Kettane, Farida Belghoul and Driss Chaïbi who live in France and whose works span a mixed Franco-Maghrebian literary space.

Francophone Maghrebian literature dates back to the French invasion of Algeria in 1930, a period of French colonial occupation that gave birth to this literature, which is also a constituent part of African literature. According to Sellin and Abel-Jaouad

(1998), Maghrebian writers are products of extreme colonisation. Atilade (2014) avows that it was French colonial strategy of assimilation that produced a class of Maghrebian elite and that with colonisation in Maghrebian society, there was a development of youths well informed in the language of the colonial masters. These youths, according to him, started writing against the colonisers and their political system, interestingly, using their coloniser's language. Maghrebian literature shares the same history as other African literature, at least, as far as the colonial situation is concerned and also writing with the colonial master's language. Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad (1998) affirm that francophone Maghrebian literature has been in existence in an uneven manner from 1912 till after the Second World War, when there was a great rise of literary production in Algeria. This literary upsurge according to Bonn (2008) ended up the prediction of Albert Memmi who had earlier predicted that Francophone Maghrebian literature would die a natural death with the Maghrebian independence and the promotion of the Arabic language.

Francophone Maghrebian literature has been growing since the 1930's during the French colonial occupation of the Maghreb. According to Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad (1998), Jean Amrouche was seen as the pioneer of francophone writings of the Maghreb with his collection of poetry titled *Cendres* (1934) and *Etoile secrète* (1937). According to *Dictionnaire Universel* (1995:1405), the first literary works in French language were found in Morocco between 1920 and 1930. They were theatrical pieces by Kaddour Ben Ghabrit. Despite the early commencement of francophone writings in Morocco, Algeria remains the cradle of Maghrebian francophone fiction.

Schöpfel(2000:8) poses this question: "La littérature maghrébine de langue française existe-t-elle alors vraiment? L'Algerie, le Maroc et la Tunisie peuvent-elles regrouper sous un thème commun, les littératures si différentes de leurs pays, au nom de la langue française?" (Does French maghrebian literature really exist? Can Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia come together under a mutual theme, in the name of french language, being that their literatures are different?). Schöpfel (2000) questions the influence of French language in Maghrebian literature and readiness of

the three Maghrebian countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to bring together their literatures, which of course are different, in the name of the French language. She further states that ignoring this particular question or refusing to answer it would be absurd. Answering these questions herself, Schöpfel (2008:8) opines:

Même si, pendant longtemps on a été pessimiste sur son devenir, si elle a été longtemps méconnue du public, on assiste à une édition de plus en plus importante de ses œuvres. Elles connaissent un retentissement international et sont étudiées dans les universités du monde entier dans le cadre de la francophonie littéraire. Des récompenses littéraires majeures sont venues consacrer des écrivains du Maghreb et leur apporter la reconnaissance définitive du monde francophone: en 1987, le grand prix national des Lettres était attribué à Kateb Yacine et le prix Goncourt à Tahar Ben Jelloun pour *La Nuit sacrée*.

Even if for a long time people have been pessimistic concerning what it will become, even if it had not been recognised for a long time by the public, an edition more and more important of its works is present. It has been recognised internationally and is being studied in all the universities in the world as francophone literature. Some major literary rewards came to ordain the Maghrebian writers and bring to them the definitive recognition of the francophone world in 1987, the national *grand prix des lettres* was awarded to Katab Yacine and *le prix Goncourt* to Tahar Ben Jelloun for *La Nuit sacrée*.

Schöpfel explains that even if for a long time people have been pessimistic about francophone Maghrebian literature, it has gained an international recognition and it is being studied in universities around the world as francophone literature. Some of the Maghrebian writers such as Kateb Yacine and Ben Jelloun have also been given international recognition in the francophone world.

According to Schöpfel (2000), Maghrebian francophone literature influenced by the patrimony of Arab and Berber has enriched the French language and culture. From 1954 to 1968, many events took place in the Maghreb, the first insurrection/uprising took place in Algeria in 1954. Morocco and Tunisia gained their independence on 2nd March and 20th May, 1956, respectively. This struggle for independence gave birth to many war novels such as *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* of Assia Djébar

(1962), and Mouloud Manmeri's *L'Opium ou le Bâton*(1965). From 1968 to 1980, Maghrebian writers started concentrating on the huge essential questions: the quest for identity, alienation, self liberation and individual revolt. These themes are seen in the works of Boudjedra such as *La Répudiation* (1969), *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi's *première véritable autobiographie de la littérature maghrébine* (1971), and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Harrouda*(1973). After 1980, works that criticise the social and political aspects of the Maghreb such as *Le Fleuve détourné* of Rachid Mimouni, *L'Invention du désert* of Tahar Djaout and Abdelhak Serbane's *Messaouda* (1983) emerged.

Notwithstanding the presence of francophone literature in the Maghreb, Arabic still became the national language. The fear is that the French may lose their reason to be after decolonisation. Notwithstanding all the conflicts faced by the Maghrebians and the French, the link between the Maghreb and the French language and culture remains unbroken. This reality brings about questions by Schöpfel (2000:9-10):

Pourquoi le français? Pour quel usage? Pour combien de temps? A quel public cette littérature s'adresse-t-elle? Quel Maghreb représente-t-elle? Celui des origines, d'une identité perdue, celui des guerres de colonisation, d'une guerre d'indépendance, celui de l'exile ou celui d'un présent tourmenté, lié aux troubles sociaux, politiques et religieux dans lesquels l'écrivain se sent l'obligation de témoigner dans la limite de la censure et de jouer le rôle de porte-parole? Ne faudrait-il pas plutôt parler de littératures Marocaine, Algérienne et Tunisienne? (2000:9-10)

Why French? For what use? For how long? Which group is this literature addressing? Which Maghreb is it representing? The one whose origin is based on lost identity, the one of colonial wars, of wars of independence, exile, or the one that is presently tormented, linked to social, political and religious troubles in which the writers feel the obligation to testify to the limits of its censorship and to play the role of spokesperson? Wouldn't they have spoken about the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian literatures?

From the foregoing, Schöpfel (2000) demands to know why the Maghrebians are writing with the French language and how long they will continue using the colonial masters' language. She wonders the people the literature is addressing and

the Maghreb it is representing, if it is the Maghreb before colonisation or the one that has lost its identity due to colonisation, the one that fought the war of independence; the one whose people have been exiled or the one whose people are presently being tormented, linked to social, political and religious problems, which the writers see the necessity to write about and act as the mouthpiece. She also imagines if it would not be necessary to talk about the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian literatures instead. According to her, writers from these three countries of the Maghreb have survived bloody wars, they have been traumatised and thereby feeling unofficially obliged to make a narrative of their experiences. Azouz Begag's *Le Passeport* (2000) is a detective novel that narrates the catastrophic effects of the war and also the operational reality of the Algerian police force.

Schöpfel (2000) argues that one should not confuse this literature (the francophone Maghrebian literature) with the colonial literature or "La littérature Pied-Noir". The approach of these literatures differs from that of the francophone Maghrebian literature. The francophone Maghrebian literature represents sufferings, wars, dreams and a specific culture of the Maghrebians. It also includes the quest for identity, problem of emigration and exile, the "Beur" literature or that of the second generation whose standpoint is not the same with that of the first generation. Many Maghrebian authors are "Ecrivains observateurs et très attachés au réel" (writers who observe and who are very much attached to reality) (Schöpfel, 2000:40). This means that these writers write about the history of the Maghreb. The foregoing, therefore, serves as motivation to engage in representations of socio-historical realities in selected works of Leïla Sebbar who is one of Maghrebian writers.

### **1.1.3 Context of social history**

Cross and Kealey (1983) define social history as an ample part of history that examines the practice and the lives of human beings in the past. From Cross and Kealey's view, social history is a very important and sufficient portion of history that deals with human beings and how they lived their lives in the past. Trevelyan (1973:

i), an English historian, sees it as the linking place of economic and political history. To Trevelyan, economic and political histories make no sense without social history.

According to Fulbrook (2002), two types of social history are distinguished: the older social history, that is the one before 1960 and the new social history that is the one that came into the scene in the 1960s. She notes that the older social history is comprised of many topics that are not part of the conventional historiography of political, military, diplomatic and constitutional history. She maintains that it is rather a history without central theme, and that it often includes political movements such as Populism, that was "social" in the sense of being outside the elite system.

This study critically examines how the social and historical realities of the Algerians during and after colonisation have influenced and are still influencing the Algerian identity, considering the works of one of the most prominent female writer in Algeria, Leïla Sebbar, who uses the reality of the Franco-Algerian population as the raw material to construct the fictional world.

#### **1.1.4 Leïla Sebbar and her works**

Leila Sebbar, usually seen as a Francophone writer, is an author of Maghrebian origin. She was born in 1941 in Aflou, Oran district, Algeria. Her father and mother are French and Algerian respectively and were both school teachers. Sebbar has no choice but to adopt the French language as a primary language because of the fact that she grew up under a French mother and she also studied in a school where the French language was the only language allowed. In 1957, during the period of the Algerian war, Sebbar's father, Mohamed, was jailed for a few months by the French military. He also struggled hard to protect his family, balancing the relationship between the Algerian revolution and French colonial authority.

Upon finishing her higher school studies in Algiers, Sebbar moved to France for her university education where she spent two years at the University of Aix-en-Provence studying Literature. During this period, she created the first film library alongside her university mates. She later moved to Paris in 1963 where she began to teach



French Literature. In 1976, she founded the feminist journal, *Histoire d'elles* with Nancy Huston and others. At some stage, she made contributions to another well known feminist magazine, *Witches*, founded by Xaviere Gauthier. Sebbar also worked for the newspaper, *Immigration and the Third World*, from 1979 to 1981, where she was writing a column titled "Memoirs of immigration"

Leila Sebbar has written eight novels and several collections of short stories. She is known to be the first female French writer, who uses creative writing to assert and depict the difficulty of a bicultural identity uniting two societies, Algeria and France, historically in conflict. She explains that her main drive for writing is her having to go on exile. According to Sebbar, if she had stayed back in Algeria, probably her narrative would not have been fashioned in a way to lift the voice of Maghrebians in France because she may not know what was happening over there in France.

She devotes most of her writings to Algeria, her home country, and to the Maghrebians in France. Though she was neither born and bred in France nor lived in the urban ghettos of France (Beur), she mostly tries to look at and decipher the world of the Beurs, those who live in the urban ghettos of France through her narratives. Her narratives also foreground the fact that the present-day Beur culture is ensnared in between its origin, the North African culture and the new overbearing European culture. This means that there is a need to redefine the Beur culture in terms of both the culture of origin in North Africa and the dominant culture in Europe. Even though Sebbar does not speak her language of origin and still lives in France, she usually connects with her cultural root through her writings.

Sebbar explores diverse subjects, and either she takes up an entirely imaginary approach or she uses psychological approach to make her position known. Many of Sebbar's narratives depict the dissatisfactions of the Beur. These are the succeeding age groups of the Maghrebians who were born and brought up in France and who, even though born and brought up in France, have not yet assimilated into the French social order. One of her narratives, *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (1984), translated

as (*Talk my son, talk to your mother*), demonstrates the absence of communication between two age groups that speak different languages. In the novel, Sebbar tells the story of the last day of a dying man, who migrated to France from Algeria as a young man seeking work. The novel portrays the man's youth and shows his position in the Muslim society and the "3 witches". The reader realises at the end that the man in the story is not afraid of those "witches" but of dying alone, without having another Muslim read to him the prayer of the dead. It can be seen that Sebbar never actually names her characters. This is with a view to maintaining a sense of anonymity. It could be said that not naming her characters helps in not restricting the tale to one individual report, but could transmit to anyone.

Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* is a political novel; it was first published in 1999 in France. It is a noteworthy and self-conscious effort that she makes to challenge the official silence that envelops the October 17, 1961 event in Paris. The event has to do with Algerian's manifestation in Paris that results in mayhem. The novel is set in the present-day Paris amidst a number of Algerian-French families whose members survive through the incidents of that ill-fated day. It is a day that aggression breaks out and peaceful protesters are beaten, imprisoned or deported in some cases, while others are killed and thrown into the Seine by the police.

The novel presents the story of Amel, a 16 year old student, the daughter and granddaughter of two women who are Algerian settlers in France. They spend some time in La Santé prison for rebellious acts, but never say anything about it to her. Amel, being an inquisitive teenager, ultimately finds out the truth about her parents and grandparents from a documentary film made by Louis, her childhood friend. The documentary centres on the role played by the prison, the Algerians and the French during the Algerian war. Motivated, Amel and Omar, an Algerian newspaper correspondent, decide to visit the various sites in Paris that are significant in the struggle for independence. While Sebbar's method may seem unclear and keen, the total effect of Amel's search to uncover the truth proves moving and beneficial.

Sebbar's *La jeune fille au balcon*, published in 1996 by Seuil is a collection of six short stories where she tells the story of the interwoven association involving France and Algeria. The work shows conflict of identity, colonial wars, conflicts between tradition and modernity. The short stories are: "La Jeune fille au balcon", "La Photo d'identité", "La Robe interdite", "Couchés dans les maïs", "Vierge folle, vierge sage" and "L'Enfer". "La jeune fille au balcon" is about Mélissa, a fifteen year old girl who lives with her parents in a dangerous town in Algeria. Her father works in a mechanic workshop and earns a little, while her mother takes care of the home.

Though the family does not really go out because of the dangerous nature of the community (where they stay), they always watch documentaries about Algeria on the television. What they see most of the time on the television is not what Algeria looks like but an exaggeration of the actual situation; this makes Mélissa to question the authenticity of those documentaries.

In "La photo d'identité", Sebbar reveals a young boy Yacine, just like Melissa, who has the need to find the true image of Algeria. He goes to the bookshop every day; he watches cartoons and films at the cinema. Though a Muslim, he could neither speak nor understand the Arabic language. His mother always condemns his left-handedness but he does not see anything wrong with it. At last, he meets a man at the bookshop who looks like his long gone father and he decides to allow the man tell him things about his fatherland.

"La robe interdite" depicts a woman who is promised heaven on earth by a man. The woman is made to work for the man who latter abandons her to her fate after stripping her naked. "Vierge folle, vierge sage" centres on a woman who gives birth to twin baby girls after having given birth to five boys before. She is afraid at first because she wants just one girl after five boys and not two but she latter accepts them because she is told that children are blessing from God. After giving birth to them, she discovers that they have opposite characters; one becomes a devoted Muslim while the other is a secular girl. At the end, the two girls leave home in search of happiness because they are tired of parental restrictions and prescriptions.

"L'Enfer", which is the last story in the book, is about a father who betrays his country. The grandmother narrates the story to his grandson about how his father betrays their country. She advises him not to follow the footsteps of his father. However, at the end, the boy decides to follow his father's footsteps. Together, the six stories in *La jeune fille au balcon*, thematise the relationship between France and Algeria. The local setting of two of the stories is in Algeria, while the rest are set in France, having the immigrants and especially their children as characters.

Published first in 1981, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* is one of the first full length novels written by Leïla Sebbar. According to Maya (2001), this is the first time that the characters of illiterate Maghrebian female immigrants become heroines of French literature as depicted in the book. The narrative centres on Algerian immigrant women in France who find themselves gathering at the square always to talk about the happenings around them. These women include Fatima, Dalila's mother, whose duty is to stay at home and take care of the children, and at the same time she has no choice just like the other women than to bring up the children in a way that they will be integrated into the French culture. Dalila, on the other hand, is just a seven year old child at the beginning of the novel, who would rather stay by her mother's side than play with her mates. She follows the mother to the square and listens to the women discuss their history laden with violence, war, exile, oppression and other bad things. When Dalila receives some beating from her father, she decides to free herself from the bondage her mother and the other Algerian women are into but refuse to do anything about it, for her, she must fight for her freedom. She runs away from home at the end of the day.

Sebbar also depicts exile, immigration and communication gap between the young and old generations in *Mon cher fils*. It is the history of an old man, who spends thirty years working in France. He has seven daughters and a son. A son whom he does not tell the story of his life when he is with him in France, but chooses to do it through writing now that he has returned to his home country Algeria. There is also Alma, a public writer whose mother lives in Britain and who has always promised to come back but has delayed in doing that. With the help of Alma, the old man tries to write

to his son whom he leaves in France and whom he has not heard from for a long time.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Many literary critics such as Jean Déjeux (1984), Christiane Achour (1990), Jagne and Parekh (1998) have examined Leïla Sebbar's works. These critics explore different aspects of Leïla Sebbar's works, especially the French and Algerian connection and how she puts side by side the background of the two countries to show the disparity in their cultures. She is also frequently mentioned in articles on "Beur" literature and appears briefly in several other studies on the literature of the Maghreb. Sebbar is usually referred to as a writer of novels and essays on immigration (Parekh and Jagne, 1998). However, it is observed that not much has been done concerning the representations of socio-historical realities in Sebbar's works, especially within the context of the Algerian society and how these socio-historical realities have shaped and are still shaping the Algerian identity. In other words, how these socio-historical realities have (de)constructed the Algerian identity have not been sufficiently investigated. It differs from previous works in that it employs Edward Saïd's Postcolonial Theory (Orientalism), Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and Social Realism Theory in order to show how Sebbar uses her literary creativity to mirror the social and historical realities of the Algerians both during and after colonisation and also showcase the manner in which these realities have changed the Algerian identity.

This study, therefore, explores Sebbar's representations of social and historical realities in the northern part of Africa and the impact of these realities on their identity. The focal point of this study is on the Algerian society as presented in Sebbar's novels and the narration of her socio-historical evaluation, which is basically characterised by political wars, religious extremism, colonisation, migration and exile. It examines the lifestyle of the Algerians in France and those in Algeria.

### **1.3 Aim and objectives of the study**

The main aim of the study is to critically interrogate the representations of the Algerian socio-historical realities and the impact they have on their identity in selected novels of Leïla Sebbar, while the following are the specific objectives of the study. To:

- a. analyse the representations of the Algerian war of independence and its effect on the Algerian identity in selected novels of Leïla Sebbar;
- b. examine how colonisation has been the major cause of generational conflicts among the old and the young generations of Algerians and how it has also been a major force in shaping their identity in selected novels of Leïla Sebbar;
- c. explore the experiences of the Algerian immigrants in France, especially the second generation of Algerians "The Beur" and how these experiences have shaped their identity in selected novels of Leïla Sebbar;
- d. investigate the interconnectedness of fact and fiction in Leïla Sebbar's novels and
- e. demonstrate the importance of Leïla Sebbar's works in the post-colonial Maghrebian society.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This work finds answers to the following questions through a careful and critical analysis of selected novels of Leïla Sebbar:

- a. How does Leïla Sebbar represent the Algeria war and what is her viewpoint on how this war of independence has influenced the Algerian identity in her writings?
- b. In what way do Leïla Sebbar's novels represent the Algerian colonisation and how it has caused a rift between the older generation and the younger generation born during the post-colonial era?

- c. How does Leïla Sebbar portray the experiences of the Algerian immigrants in France especially the Beur and what is her outlook on how these experiences have shaped their identity?
- d. Are all Sebbar's writings fictional or factual stories? In other words, can Leïla Sebbar be classified as a realist writer of the post colonial era?
- e. How important are Leïla Sebbar's works in the post-colonial Maghrebian society?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The significance of this study is based on the need to pay more attention to how the Franco-Algerian writers have used autobiographical narratives and historical inquiry to represent the Franco-Algerian past and present. These are used to transform a sense of 'de-territorialisation' or exclusion from the two communities, into 're-territorialisation,' new community connections that allow each of them to find her specific place in the world. Also, it explores how Sebbar uses her creativity to re-write an Algerian history that is partially erased by the French colonialism. In addition, realist critics have always focused mainly on French multiple wars of decolonisation in Algeria that led to the killing of many Algerians. Uneven recollection, including the ruptured identities spawned by that dispute keeps on exerting a dominant impact on the day by day reality of personalities and communities on the two sides of the Mediterranean, especially the youths.

The focus of the study is to expand the frontiers of critical studies of the Franco-Algerian socio-historical reality, originating from post-colonial Africa as a means of 'writing back'. This study motivates more literary, historical and sociological research works on immigration, war and generational conflicts in particular and North-African literature in general.

The study further stimulates and enhances other research works on the topical issues of the Franco-Algerian socio-historical reality and its effect on their identity. Moreover, the study becomes significant as it assists writers, critics, historians, sociologists, teachers and students in providing additional material for reference and

adding to existing corpus on areas of immigration/exile and other related literature. Most of the Maghrebian writers of French expression are slightly known in Anglophone Africa as a result of linguistic barriers. This study, therefore, attempts to bridge the gap as the author in focus remains a North African writer of French expression. The study opens a new vista for Anglophone African literary critics and scholars who might venture into Maghrebian or comparative literature. This study puts forward some vital questions and proffers some potential but modern theoretical and practical possibilities to consider or examine the dialectics of the "Other". For instance, it examines how the colonised could come to understand and completely characterise his or her own personal identity through the twisted prism of the communal and inevitable agonising colonial encounter. In all, it tries to make Leïla Sebbar more popular than she already is to the Nigerian literary critics and readers alike.

## **1.6 Conceptual clarifications**

The condition of the immigrant North African families remains a predominant motif in the writing of Leïla Sebbar. This study interrogates Sebbar's works from a socio-historic reality point of view, knowing that most of her works are based on true life experiences. It treats the theme of migration, identitarian search, generational conflicts, colonisation, war and exile. The concepts used in this study are clarified thus:

- i. **Migration:** Migration as represented in Leïla Sebbar's writing entails leaving one's country to another country willingly or unwillingly in search of greener pasture. During the past decade, she has written seven novels that explore the world of the Beurs, the succeeding age group of Maghrebian settlers that lives in the ghettos found in the metropolitan area of France.
- ii. **Exile:** Exile could be seen as a compulsory rift between an individual and his or her place of origin. People who go on exile do so not because they want to but because they are forced to. Edward Saïd examines exile as a universal phenomenon. Sebbar shares Saïd's cultural space, the intersection of occidental and oriental cultures, as well as his perspective on Orientalism, an idea that both observed as a forecast of



the Westerner's imagination. Sebbar, who is also an immigrant in France, rebuilds the world of marginalised immigrants so as to reduce her own individual sense of exile.

- iii. **Socio-historical criticism:** Socio-historical criticism here stands for fictional analysis or criticism in the light of historical proof, past and present or based on the perspective in which the work was written, including facts about the author's life and the historical and social situations of the time. This study is a combination of social and historical factors. Its concern is to identify the social, cultural, political, religious and historical dynamics that are personified within the selected works of the author.
- iv. **Reality:** Reality in this context is the condition of things as they actually are, rather than as they may seem to be or might be imagined. It includes everything that is and has been, whether or not it is observable or comprehensible. It is also everything that has existed, exists or will exist. The view that there is a reality independent of any beliefs, perceptions, etc, is called realism.
- v. **Context:** The term "context" requires clarification because it is often used differently and with a meaning that remains vague. Context here refers to the framework or the perspective of the writer. It also means the outline or the background the writer wishes to follow.
- vi. **Identity:** Identity here stands for the way an individual perceives himself as a member of a social group. This study is concerned with social identity which is the part of a person's self-concept that comes from perceived membership in a relevant social group.

### 1.7 Scope of the study

The study is based on Maghrebian literature, and essentially on the literary works of the Algerian scholar, literary critic and novelist, Leïla Sebbar who writes in French, her mother's language, with focus on France and Algeria's relationship. She often mixes the imagery of both countries to show cultural differences between the two. Sebbar deals with different topics, and either takes up a purely fictional approach or uses psychology to drive home her point.

Although Leïla Sebbar has authored many literary and critical works, this study is limited to four of her works which are historical and social narratives that are

purposively selected. They are analysed with passive references to her other numerous works as well as literary works of other African writers. The four novels purposively selected for this work are *La Jeune fille au balcon* (1996), *La Seine était rouge* (1999), *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (2010) and *Mon cher fils* (2012). The in-depth representations of the Algerian migrants in France in these novels inform their selection, especially the aspect of the 'Beur' generation.

## **1.8 Methodology**

The study adopts the French "explication de texte" (textual analysis) in examining the socio-historical realities and their effects on the Algerian identity in selected works of Leïla Sebbar. The use of this methodology permits an in-depth textual analysis of literary works, especially as it concerns the identification of the social, cultural, political, religious and historical dynamics that are embodied within the selected novels. Combined with the framework of Social Realism Theory, Edward Saïd's Postcolonial Theory and Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity, the French explication de texte unveils the dynamics of home and exile, immigration, racism, culture, acculturation, conflict of identity, identitarian search and assimilation in Leïla Sebbar's historical writings. The selected texts are analysed with special emphasis on the 'Beur' generation and their relationship with the older generation. All translations in the work are mine.

## **1.9 Organisation of the study**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction. It presents background to the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives of the study, significance of the study, conceptual clarification, scope of the study and methodology.

Chapter Two reviews critical literatures that are germane to the study. It also examines reviewed literatures centre on the Algerian war, exile, Algerian youths born and raised in France, immigration, colonisation, identity and Franco-Algerian literature. The chapter also focuses on the theoretical approach, which is Edward Saïd's Postcolonial Theory, Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and Social Realism

Theory. The chapter also clarifies the relationship among social realism theory, postcolonial theory and immigration writing. Similarly, characteristics of literature of commitment and socio-historic literature are examined.

The third chapter analyses the context of the Algerian war and its consequences on the Algerian identity in selected novels of the writer. Rootlessness and Otherness: the search for Arabic origin is also examined. The chapter equally looks at representations of home, immigration, racism, culture, exile, transculturation, hybridisation, acculturation, conflict of identity, identitarian search and assimilation as related to setting and the characterisation of the works. The condition of the North African immigrant families, the source and by products of immigration and the writer's attempt to use young male and female protagonists born after the Algerian independence who have almost the same characteristics as her in order to achieve her aim are considered.

Chapter Four continues the analysis of the selected novels of the author. It examines the Algerian colonisation and its effect on the Algerian identity. It goes ahead to explore the Franco-Algerian experience, especially that of the 'Beur' generation. These are youths born and raised in France who are yet to adapt to the French culture or know the Algerian culture. It deals with the problems of physical and psychological differentiation and biculturalism which contribute to the void between the central characters and the French community as well as within their own families. The chapter also examines the author's representations of the absence of dialogue between the young and the old generations, two generations that do not speak the same language.

Chapter Five analyses the writing of Leïla Sebbar as postcolonial, autobiographical and realistic works, each used to describe the exilic experience of the Franco-Algerian immigrant population in France and Algeria. It also analyses Sebbar's deep commitment to fictional rewritings of history and assesses her originality as a writer captivated by the ethnic range of modern-day French society.

The conclusion marks the end of the thesis. Findings are discussed and suggestions are offered for further study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter reviews some existing literatures on the Algerian war and the Algerian youths born and raised in France (The Beur). It goes ahead to review works on Leïla Sebbar, immigration, exile, colonisation, identity and Franco-Algerian literature as well as looking into Sebbar's narrative techniques. The chapter also focuses on the theoretical approaches, which are Edward Saïd's Postcolonial Theory, Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and Social Realism Theory. It helps to clarify the relationship among social realism theory, postcolonial theory and socio-historical writing.

#### **2.1 Literature of Commitment**

Literature by its nature is a social art committed to human values. Its role as a positive medium of communication requires more responsibility than privilege to the writer. Commitment denotes the fundamental cast of mind, the genuine devotion of a person to a cause and his or her convictions. It represents a pledge, an involvement of the nature of a binding promise, entailing a clear stand in a specific problem arising out of a deep consciousness of various dimensions of the issue concerned. According to Horosz (1975), commitment is being aware, having an attitude as well as a clear and meaningful recognition of being fully present in the moment. This leads to making the choice of the moment and making sure to stand by any consequence these choices may bring. Cuddon (1997) describes a committed or an engaged writer as one who through his or her work, is dedicated to the advocacy of certain beliefs and programmes especially those which are political or ideological

and in aid of social reforms. Cuddon's view about a committed writer shows that the writer must devote his or her time to a specific cause, be it social, political or both.

Literature of commitment was made popular after the world war 11 when the French existentialists, in particular, Jean-Paul Sartre, made a review in connection with the idea of the artist's responsibility to society. The idea is a submission to art of a key existentialist principle which states that a person defines himself or herself by deliberately engaging in wilful action. This statement by J.P. Sartre is made in reaction against the belief of "art for art's sake" and against the bourgeois writer, whose commitment is to the beauty of his or her trade rather than the satisfaction of the audience. In his preliminary speech to *Les Temps Modernes* (1945), a review dedicated to literature of commitment, Sartre disapproves of Marcel Proust for his self-involvement. He refers to Gustave Flaubert, whose personal means permits to dedicate himself to a perfectionist art as a "talented coupon clipper".

Literature of commitment narrows down to an author trying to defend an ethnic, political, social or religious cause in his or her writings (Balogun, 2005). This means that a committed writer does not just write for the beauty of the art, but for a reason. He or she writes to depict the socio-political, cultural and economic realities in the society. He or she is also the voice of the people, which means that through his or her writing, the whole world could know what is happening in his or her cultural milieu. Writers do not live in a vacuum. They are sensitive to the world around them more intensely than others. So their works endure the impact of their times. Yet, reflecting the deepest disposition of their times, the writers shall also organise their times. The types of commitment and political alternativeness chosen by writers living in an era of controversy vary. The artistic consequences of the choices they make form a distinct part of the study of literature. Thus, as stated by Rabkin (1964), the term commitment includes both the conscious involvement of the artist in the social and political issues of his age and the specific political obligations which the artist assumes in consequence of his involvement.

The study of the vices in society leads to violent disapproval and dispute. Recording this dispute has become the main purpose of literature. The writer by his or her

nature cannot help being conscious of important political subjects. Thus, it is clear that commitment is considered as a social and political activity. Consequently, commitment is used as an equivalent to a responsibility or an obligation. It comprises any belief, which incurs obligation whether individual or social. The writer commits himself or herself to work for a person, an ideology or an organisation. Social commitment is used in preference to political commitment, since the former is more comprehensive than the latter. In fact, social commitment includes political commitment as well. The maladies disturbing any society are more than just questions of political issues. If it is committed to social objectives of the society, it deals not only with political issues but with so many other subjects that lie beyond. Social commitment involves all aspects of life and is therefore wider in connotation. It has three major parts; the first being a deep and probing enquiry into the drawbacks of the society leading to the sincere understanding of the problem. The second is to consider and suggest possible measures to remedy the problem and thirdly, indicate ways by which the solutions could be implemented.

The committed writer is not out to make a general statement, he or she is out to change a particular situation or to initiate, reverse or modify a mode of thinking. Novels such as *Animal farm* and *Nineteen eighty-four* by George Orwell, *Things fall apart* by Chinua Achebe, *The Concubine* and *The Great ponds* by Elechi Amadi, and *The Beautiful ones are not yet born* by Kwei Armah have stood the test of time due to the fact that the social and political situations dealt within them still exist today. Some of the themes treated by committed African writers are colonisation, slave trade, injustice, oppression, negritude, racism, exile, immigration and war.

## **2.2 Existing Studies on Algerian war and colonisation**

The francophone Maghrebian literature is usually interested in questions surrounding the social history of the Maghreb (Schöpfel, 2000). Maghrebian writers testify critically to the events of their time: colonisation, Second World War, exile and Algerian war. According to Déjeux (1994), war is a reoccurring theme in the Algerian writers' narratives since 1963:

Ce thème de la guerre tient une part relativement importante dans les romans algériens depuis 1963: près de 23% du total des romans sont consacrés entièrement à cet événement et près de 12% contiennent une

partie, un chapitre par exemple, qui l'évoque plus ou moins longuement (Déjeux, 1994:158).

This theme of war has a relatively important part in the Algerian novels since 1963: close to 23% of the total number of novels are completely dedicated to this event and almost 12% contain, for example, a part or a chapter that talks more or less about it.

Many great works have been written on colonisation, even before the independence of Tunisia and Morocco in 1956 and that of Algeria in 1962. These works were written during the Second World War or during the Algerian war. Memmi (1957) writes about the coloniser and the colonised. For the coloniser, he argues that it is impossible that he (the coloniser) does not know about the illegitimacy of his situation. For the colonised who has been classified as lazy and as a thief, Memmi foresees the danger of the colonised being placed out of history. Memmi's thoughts about the coloniser and the colonised is a reality because the coloniser knows very well that he is not in his home and at the end he has to let go by accepting to give independence to the colonised.

Mohammed Dib's *La Grande Maison* (1952), *L'Incendie* (1954) and *Le Métier à tisser* (1957) also represent power relations between the coloniser and the colonised, especially during the Second World War. The Second World War is also a recurring theme in the works of Maghrebian writers. Mohammed Dib in *Le Métier à tisser* (1957) and Mouloud Mammeri in *La Colline oubliée* (1952) reveal mothers' traumatic pain when their sons are taken to war during the Second World War. These young adults are taken by force to a war that means nothing to them, a war that does not concern them.

According to "Literature and War Readalong" (2013) which posits that Assia Djebar's novel, *Les enfants du nouveau monde* (1962), translated as *Children of the New World*, is the first novel written about the Algerian war. According to the reviewer, Assia Djebar is one of the most significant, if not the most significant North African female writer. She became the first Maghrebian writer to be elected to the Académie Française in 2005. The reviewer also shows Djebar as anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial, which means that she neither supports colonisation nor

phallogocentrism. Her novels which usually focus on women's experiences were written in French and not in Arabic. *Children of the New World* is about the Algerian war from the women's perspective. Here are the first sentences from *Children of the new world* as seen in "Literature and War Readalong" (2013):

In the old Arab quarters at the foot of the mountain the whitewashed houses all look alike. Before the city grew larger, this was the only place where affluent families would come to find a bit of cool air, near the brooks and orchards at the end of spring. Each home is at the end of a cul de sac, where, after wandering through a maze of silent little alleyways, one must stop. All that can be heard is some vague whispering suddenly interrupted by the shrill cries of children, whom the mothers are trying to keep at home, but to no avail. The military guard can show up any moment. Then there is barely enough time to gather the children and muffle their voices behind closed doors.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Djébar paints Algeria before and during the war; a very peaceful town that turns into a town filled with fear and uncertainty. Those that fight back are at the risk of exile, prison, torture or even death. The women try their best to keep their children safe since their husbands have already gone to war.

Djébar is not the only woman who writes about the Algerian war, there are others. One could definitely relate the story to the Algerian war where Algerians suffered all kinds of oppression but at the end they succeeded in gaining their freedom. There is also Lemsine and others who write directly or indirectly about war in the Algerian society (Déjeux 1994). In 1976, Aïcha Lemsine wrote about war in the home of Mokrane in her book *La Chrysalide* (1996). However in her *Ciel de porphyre* (1978), she really represents the Algerian war. She presents Ali who goes in search of freedom which does not come easily for him as he is imprisoned, but at the end he regains his freedom and that is when the war ends. When one considers Lemsine's storyline in *Ciel de porphyre*, it is not just a work about war but the portrait of a man who lives the war with his people (Déjeux, 1994). Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée* (1979) is another work that thematises war. Yamina may not have witnessed the war as an adult since she was just ten years old when



Algeria got her independence in 1962 (Déjeux, 1994). *La Grotte éclatée* is about an orphan who

joins the "maquis". There, she takes care of wounded soldiers. While exercising her duty, she meets and marries a soldier who later dies leaving her with their only child. She suffers a lot with her child after the death of her husband but she subsequently regains her freedom.

In 1982, Myriam Ben published a collection of stories for the twentieth anniversary of the Algerian independence titled *Ainsi naquit un homme* which represents the Algerian war and all the experiences of her people. Hafsa Zinaï-Koudil in *La Fin d'un rêve* (1984) reveals her childhood in an Algeria where war is the order of the day. Her father is arrested by the French soldiers in the presence of the entire family, so the young girl sees everything that happens. After seeing her father arrested, she lives in the anguish of the adults in that period of pain, death, fear and frustrations when a child is supposed to be filled with joy and happiness.

Three sisters who signed up as Safa Wakas in 1986 published a book titled *La Grenade dégoupillée* which is a fictional account about Nouredine, who, during the fight in Algiers, beats up a French officer and kills him with a grenade. The sisters, in the novelty to show that the Algerian fighters are not assassins but freedom fighters fighting a just cause.

Malewriters have also lent their literary voice to the representations of Algerian war. Mammeri's *L'Opium et le Bâton* reflects the attitude of the French towards Algerians and towards the main character Bachir Lazrak who is a medical doctor that graduates from a university in Paris and wants to be neutral in politics. This provokes one of his friends, Ramdane, a member of F.L.N (Front de libération nationale). At last, Bachir comes out of his neutrality and joins the army as a medical personnel. He suffers oppression and violence and later goes on exile in Morocco. He sneaks back into the country later to fight for freedom and truth. Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer?*, equally represents the Algerian war as an allegory. Kateb Yacine

also composed some poems while preparing his novel *Le Polygone étoile* (1966) and presents the fight for freedom in some epic texts that he incorporated in his work *Nedjma* (1956).

Writing about the Algerian war is not limited to prose writers. Poets also write about the Algerian war of independence, for instance, "*Ecoute et je t'appelle*" (1961) by Malek Haddad. There is also Jean Sennac a "pied noir" who wrote *Soleil sous les armes*(1957) and *Matinale de mon peuple* (1967). Mohammed Dib who is known for his novels also wrote some poems on Algerian war such as *Ombre gardienne* (1961).

In the Algerian literature, war and independence are essential themes and a sequence of novels have been published on these subjects. The particularity of the novels consists in an attempt to remember pieces of memory of that period. According to these war novelists stated above, before the war of independence, the colonialists imposed the use of the French language notwithstanding the fact that many Algerians saw the French school system as the devil system. Surprisingly, after the Algerian independence in 1962, the use of the French language spread all over the country. To them, it means that afterwards, the use of French language became free in Algeria as well as in other countries of the Maghreb. In dealing with the francophone literature of the Maghreb, there is need to point out the fact that the French language is neither homogenous nor the cultural property of the French state.

"Francophonie" as a word was initially used in 1880 by Onésime Reclus. He used it to qualify the zone of influence of the French language in Africa after the share of the colonies made during the Berlin Conference (Tétu, 1992). Subsequently, the word turned out to be popular in the sixties following decolonisation and this led to the unregimented use of French as a literary language. Many of Franco-Maghrebian writers have also written works on the Maghrebian youths born and raised in France, those youths who are eager to know their root and their past. These youths are often referred to as "BEUR".

It is important to note that much research into the Algerian war and colonisation have been done over the years and in recent times. This is to buttress the fact that the Algerian war and colonisation are major tools in Algerian literature. However,

how the Algerian war and colonisation have affected the Algerian identity left much to be achieved. Hence the present study.

### **2.3 Previous works on the Beur generation**

The term "Beur" seems to mean different things to different people. Beur is an informal word used to label French-born people whose parents or grandparents are settlers from the Maghreb. It is also commonly applied to other Europeans with Maghrebian origin such as those in Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

According to Bonn and Rothe(1991), Beur is typically used to relate to the young Maghrebians born and bred in France; it is a word coined by transforming the "RB" in the word "ARABE" to "BR" which gives "BEUR". One of the first beur works is *Les Boucs* written by Driss Chraïbi and published in 1955. Other beur writers are Ahmed Kalouaz, Nacer Kettane, Farida Belghoul (Bonn and Rothe, 1991). For Bonn and Rothe (1991), it is not enough that one lives in France and writes about emigration for one to be called a beur writer, one has to be writing particularly about the new generation of Franco-Maghrebians. Some beur works are *La maison d'Alexina*, written by Mehdi Charef. The work is a semi-autobiographical narrative that queries the soundness of the standard education system when it comes to marginalised children. It also offers an educational utopia, not forgetting the significance of France's colonial past. Subsequently, *Les Raisins de la Galère*, a novel written by a Moroccan writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun, who is not a beur himself, is a story full of literary allusions. In this novel, the main character puts French democratic principles to the test and fights against racism and bias. Lastly, *Garçon manqué*, even though it is an autobiography written by Nina Bouraoui, moves away from social realism to delve into the hassles and joys of a bi-cultural writer born

during the Algerian War. The three texts mentioned above deal with racial, national and gender identity issues.

Bonn and Rothe (1991) also name Leïla Sebbar as a beur writer, while Sebbar thinks she is not a "Beur," even though she writes about them. This she says probably because she does not like being defined, or possibly she has the same opinion with Tahar Ben Jalloun. Both were not born in France, rather they went to live in France after being born and spending some time in their home countries. The latter in a converse with Thomas Spear was questioned to know if he would want his girl to be addressed as Beur or Moroccan. His response is that his daughter would not be Beur as he claimed that "'Beur" is something very specific. Looking at his answer, one may say that he believes that Beurs are children of poor immigrants, he says:

Beurs are children of the sub proletariat of immigrant workers and manual workers who have lived here. But if, for example, you look at the Paris phone book, you'll find that there are hundreds upon hundreds of Maghrebian professionals with their families and their children, they live here like bourgeois French people. Can you call their children "Beurs"? (Lionnet and Ronnie, 1993:33).

Going by the above, Ben Jalloun believes that Beurs are children of poor illiterate Maghrebian immigrants in France. He argues that the rich and educated immigrant children should not be referred to as Beur. He desires a geo-political group for his daughter. To him, his daughter would be Franco-Moroccan. Beur literature is deeply subjective to the question of identity related to being Maghrebian descent and of French nationality. This is so because most Beurs are French citizens with ties to Maghreb through their parents. Azouz Begag, Farida Belghoul, Mehdi Charef and Leïla Sebbar are perhaps the most popular contemporary Beur authors (Bonn and Rothe, 1991:157).

Nada (1992) posits that many scholars of contemporary literature take pleasure in the theoretical debates surrounding the problematic of diversity and identity in a

multicultural world. Nada (1992) argues that for the minorities who make up this "diverse element," the expression of personal identity is more of a daily struggle than it is an intellectual indulgence. With Nada's (1992) assertions, the Beurs, the French-born children of North African immigrants to the former imperial power, are one such minority. As the offspring of a relationship characterised by more hate than

love, growing in a nation, indeed a continent, where overt racism is on the rise, the Beur generation should affirm and value itself in order to come to grip with its incongruities.

According to Hargreaves (1997), after examining the mechanics of the linguistic catch-22 of the Beurs, he is of the opinion that in the creation of a sense of self, no borrowings are more far reaching than the signifying systems through which the subject thinks and speaks. However, the Beur writers, who trained in French, must borrow from the very tool of their estrangement. They have to articulate and construct their identity with the language of their tormenter. This usually results to a literature of conflict, of problematic commitment, of sore duality and disintegration, exposing the discontinuities of the postcolonial reality. This turmoil makes up the richness of Beur writing, which Hargreaves (1997) declares is intrinsically dialogic, revealing the multi-voice of each protagonist. Hargreaves analyses the writings of seventeen Beur writers, with examples of the heteroglossia characteristic of their novels. The novels which orchestrate different speech types and centres of consciousness, creating a totalising narrative which dispenses with the quotation marks that would attribute sections of the discourse to different speakers. Hargreaves (1997) explains that Dialogism is at its most intense in seamless robes of this kind. He then examines the identity that emerges from the confluence of discourses, the unique yet polyglot self created by two cultures at odds with each other. His review blends thorough analysis of the official structures of Beur writing, autobiography and fiction, time and space, intertextuality and audience, and a variety of insight derived from interviews he conducted with the writers, along with numerous unpublished manuscripts put at his disposal.

Dialogism is an indicator of change, transformation and growth. Beur literature is still in the nascent stage, and most Beur writers have only published a single novel. The real creative talent of these authors remains to be proven. Their contributions to cultural awareness cannot be overlooked as they have succeeded in unmasking the shortcomings of the French system, a system that cherishes a national anthem that is

a militant call to arms, urging the citizens to rid their soil of foreign blood (Nada, 1992:980). The Beur writings herald liberty, fraternity and equality for all.

Basfao and Henry (1991) opine that publications such as *La Beur Génération* (Aïchoune 1984) describe Beur writers who are also activists and who in turn commemorated the coming of a new crossbreed (*métis*) populace in France. According to him, these new people were bestowed with politicians, academics, and artists of theirs. Nevertheless, some writers such as Nacer (1986), who was also once in charge of Radio Beur, saw the Beurs as the discard of a globalising world. Others like Ammi (1985) picture them like they are the forerunners of a precise space that came after colonisation. This feel that this space linksthe Maghreb and their colonial mastersthrough American authors and their movies.(Ammi, 1985: 90) as well agrees that these Beurs portrayed themselves like the future generation even if they are seen as people rejected globaly or as the futuristic.

However, many of the parents of these Beur radicalshad to encourage their offsprings to learn the Arabic language so as to find out their Maghrebian being throughexercisessupported by some beur organisationswith the hopes of a probablecome back to Algeria.Although they start to understand more of the Maghrebian culture while taking part in theseexercises, many of these Beur radicals later rejected these activitiesbecause they felt it is not relevant to their daily lives in France. They actually believe that they do not need any of those to pull through in France. (Jazouli, 1992 and Bouamama, Hadjila and Mokhtar, 1994).

Beur avant-gardespresent themselves like the fundamentalsocial, as well as political mediatorsconnecting France and Algeria,the same as a recent new photo of the pan-

Mediterranean *homme frontière* of colonial speech (Silverstein, 2002a). Their organisers tried to chart a “third route” (*troisième voie*) linking the colonial masters state’s scheme of assimilation as well as the efforts made by political parties in Algeria and some public pressure groups to restore the colonist's political life (Bouamama, Hadjila and Mokhtar, 1994). In this sense of independence, the young generation needs to make an effort in order to be disconnected from the colonisers

and Algerian political and cultural groups and set up its own means of participation. Saleiha Amara, who happens to be the president of the ANGI (Association of the New Immigrant Generation) explains that groups such as hers see their main objective as thwarting the independence of the petitions of these colonist youths from being appointed by political parties already in existence or Algerian legislative organisations (Bouamama, Hadjila and Mokhtar, 1994). Nevertheless, such a division is difficult to uphold. Firstly, the Beur associations' sovereignty was challenged as long as the French and Algerian political groups found in the cities carried on with their public acts.

Hargreaves, 1991 states that to a large degree, the Beur books are prearranged as conventional migrant works, and as stories of racial invention. In each of the Beur novels, the theme of physical mobility plays a significant role. For example, Bouzid’s *La Marche*, in recounting the political movement of Beur youths from Marseille to Paris, in various methods, it precisely goes back over the footsteps of the first-generation labourers. Those who most often drop at Marseille en route their work place in the city centres of Paris or Lyon. Akli Tadjer’s novel *Les ANI du Tassili* (1984) is situated exclusively on the Tassili, a well travelled commuter boat leaving Algiers to arrive Marseille, having the main character Omar bargain his association with a selection of Algerian and French personalities just as the boat navigates its movement over the Mediterranean. The Tassili therefore, is now an important metaphor for Franco-Algerian migration and identity entirely.

The Beurs' re-enactment of their parents' migrant chronicle, therefore, makes up a fundamental process in their consolidation of their age group distinctiveness and sociopolitical preconceived notion. Renan (1990) avows that the Beur novels rewrite the immigrants' past so as to fully comprehend the intercultural present and make available opportunity for future Beur agency in France. He further states that Beur literature partakes in the same philosophical window just like the pro-independence stories that recount the nation's ancient times so as to characterise the present condition of affairs as a programmed as well as a teleological result. This goes to

show that the past of a Nation determines to a large extent its future. Silverstein (2004) states that as stories of immigration and identity, the Beur narratives make use of and contend with a range of pro-independence and anti pro-independence stories making rounds inside France throughout the eighties. He maintains that their historical narratives present the previous as money-making migration, the forthcoming as repatriation, and the contemporary as an essential evil to be tolerated with a slight connection amid the Colonisers and the colonist populace as probable. According to him, anti-racist narrative, alternatively, rejects the fantasy coming back en masse, however, maintains an all-purpose lecture that denies colonist organisation. Their narratives consist of the previous as financial migration, the imminent as assimilation, and the current as racial discrimination to be conquered.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Beur writings outrightly reject phallogentric and historical narratives that does not empower people. Instead, they proffer two major substitute accounts that imply dissimilar foresight of a Novel France, together with the colonist story as an essential constituent of the dream country. Generally, the Beurs see the previous as the migration or colonisation of their parents, the present as the moment to struggle and fight for the future and they view the future as a time to be empowered. However, Silverstein (2004) states that the specific way in which they narrate this system varies significantly with every situation reacting to the same chauvinistic as well as anti-racist conversations of patriotism found as at that



moment. He asserts that from 1983 to 1988, Beur storylines layed emphasis on inter-age group conflicts so as to underscore a particularist Beur political identity. Works done soon after, by distinction, have tried an additional nonstop assimilation of the first generation's story into larger political narratives, citing the Beurs' struggle in a transpolitical context that unites France with North Africa (Silverstein, 2004).

By the late eighties, the Beur Association was in crisis in its hybridity speech. The greater part of unions that were created in the wake of Mitterrand's election had broken up. Going by what Bouamama, Hadjila and Mokhtar (1994) stated that Activists, looking back have put the blame of these organisations not working out

on their institutionalisation inside the governance structures. This they did because it was alleged that these associations had been purchased and compromised by metropolis, state political parties and Marxist principles. To be precise, anti-chauvinistic organisations such as SOS-Racisme that had won the socialist government's favour in propagating civic integration have since been blamed by youths of being the "*harkis* of immigration", which means that they sold out the ghetto youth in order to advance politically (Jazouli, 1992). In the meantime, nonconformists inside the Beur generation decided to accuse thriving Beur advocates of making up a cultural and financial bourgeoisie, of utilising the nostalgia of their contribution in the Beur Organisation to rationalize their current stance as the one and only lawful community speakers linking France and North African colonists (Wihl de Wenden, 1990, Boubeker and Abdallah, 1993, Bouamama, Hadjila and Mokhtar, 1994). These rebels practically called out the others as being selfish and having been bought by the French.

In all, these youths seek to know who they really are, they seek their own identity in a land that may actually not be theirs; a land where even though they may be citizens, they are also immigrants or their parents/grandparents are. It is imperative to be aware of the fact that much study have been done concerning the Beurs over the years and in recent times. This is to buttress the reality that the Beurs are important in Algerian literature. However, how these Beurs' identity have been

affected due to the socio-historical realities of the Algerians is yet to be properly investigated. This present study, therefore, tries to investigate, how the Algerians' socio-historical realities have shaped the identity of these Beurs.

## **2.4 Immigration and Franco-Algerian literature**

French policies on immigration have been subjected to nationwide discussion at various historical moments, predominantly through moments of economic emergency in the thirties and seventies. During the time France was faced with the problem of unemployment as high as thirteen percent in the eighties and nineties, the debate focused more on state security and less on border policies. It also focused on

colonists' right of entry into the French citizenship, on assimilation as well as elimination in the inhabited cities where most immigrants lived with their children. The debate yet again was centred on the legitimacy of signs of Muslim identity particularly praying in groups, building mosques, and ladies wearing headscarves in the French public area. These numerous concerns seem to be the topic of never ending polemics for the lawmakers of French origin and ordinary occupants similarly, with migration staying as a major policy problem in election movements all through the nineties and near the beginning of twenty-first century (Silverstein, 2004).

In sequence to fully comprehend the modern-day transpolitics of Algerians in France, it is very important to track down larger revolutions of migration and state identity all over Europe from the time when the Second World War ended. Postcolonial politics surrounding the status of Algerians as French nationals is parallel to the dilemma of "Blacks" in Britain, "Turks" in Germany, and "Asians" in the Netherlands. Problems of racism and anti-racism, assimilation and multiculturalism, states intervening and activism by the minority are themselves transnational experiences, happening at the same time over a huge area that brings together European metropolis to their previous colonies. Algerians in France are not working in isolation as immigrants, ethnic minorities, and Muslims. They have

sustained an approachable discussion with the previous organisations across this international space in forming and enacting their political and monetary efforts. As the domestic borders of Europe are cleaned off, transpolitical camaraderie as such turns out to be especially firmly drained. Enquiries are being made concerning migration and residency, concerning particularist (“ethnic”) as well as widespread (“republican”) impressions of the nation-state inside a Novel Europe (Silverstein, 2004).

Furthermore, scholarly studies on the immigration phenomenon have been ensnared in a parallel selection of dichotomies. As Silverman (1992) suggests, works that create problems in terms of binary oppositions between individual and collective

integration, between general and specific official responses, risk strengthening an intention which showcases the migrants as either perpetrators or victims of the problem. Undeniably, works on immigration has been mainly well thought-out by widespread groups and the conflicts of safekeeping and lack of security, also of natural and artificial that have operated as often as not to position immigrants as challenges outside of the nation-state under consideration (Silverstein, 2004).

Hammar (1985) on the other hand believes that as long as bossynational configurations normally make a dissimilarity involving migration and migrant guiding principles, this dichotomy becomes unsuccessful in accounting for migration as a complete social experience. It is also predisposed to resulting in a historical narrative opposed to modern-day tussle by colonists along with marginal organisations in Europe today. What rises above things that separate immigrants from natives are questions asked about nationalism and racism, issues of great importance given the number of violent conflicts in the name of culture and nation all through the present day Europe along with its postcolonial periphery. Even if nothing else, the way in which immigration is being linked to terrorism, disease, and economic disaster within the popular political imagination indicates that there is a perceived crisis. Huntington (1996) believes that immigration is a primary site on which the supposed "clash of civilizations" takes place.

According to Silverstein (2004), Immigration has encountered a lot of problems. He posits that since the mid seventies, global movement to Europe has been an observable fact of significant partisan and financial thing to law makers as well as their electorates. He further maintains that more often than not, these transfers of humans , goods and ideas from the postcolonial border to the metropolis have been embodied in scholarly literatures and the likes, as novels. Moreover, he states that government policies seemed to view migration as a financial factor that can be restricted, influenced, or even held on to and as a monetary problem to be resolved. According to this scheme, development in colonised countries that have been marginalised, created a situation of over urbanisation characterised by too many people living in an area and lack of jobs, thus making the country poor.

Simultaneously, post-war Europe encountered a condition of both extraordinary increase and underemployment.

However, by the eighties, the root of the migration discuss in France moved anew. It however centres this period on the second-generation colonist youths, these ones for equally good or bad, turned out to be a powerful image of the predicament coming from migration. A sequence of official governmental accounts are focussed at enquiries of criminal behaviour, schooling as well as identity catastrophes in the midst of colonist youths. These problems are at the same time dealt with by a number of scholarly studies such as CCI (1984), Gaspard and Servan-Schreiber (1984), Abou-Sada and Millet (1986), Aïssou (1987) and Jazouli (1986). The dominant representation inside this particular discourse is the North African colonist youths or Beurs, who are trapped amid their parents' way of life and that of the host society, their place of birth and abode. They are not able to attain the present if they did not go through the previous. Such a supposed procedure of incorporation constantly seems to include psychological, if not physical brutality.

Silverstein (2004) avows that one of the main ambivalences linked with the enquiries of colonisation, identity, and nationality in present day Europe involves the how to manage ethnicity inside the current State. He explains that nations such as France,

have consistently hesitated between accepting and erasing of social (which includes ethnic, racial, class, and religious) differences within their populations throughout their histories. According to him, while the European nations have normally fought contrary to the observed disruptiveness of national cultural range in a bid to incorporate (if not take on board) their inhabitants, they have at the same time found a way to make use of such ethnic disparities as policy of occupation along with jurisdiction. While doing thus, they tend to counter sign the verified versions of them. In other words, at the same time as colonists coming from North Africa have been staying in France ever since the close of the nineteenth century. It is no more than in modern years, in the midst of the problematisation of Islam, that the Maghrebian or Arab has become apparent as a specific group of ethnic identity that shines over in-house family, State, as well as spiritual differences (Silverstein, 2004). CCI (1984),

Abou-Sada and Millet (1986), Aissou (1987) and Jazouli (1986) state that the immigrant Algerians in France having to imagine and actually practice that they belong to the French community is unimpeded by types of generational identity and political commitment. They note that the difficult and most tense relationships amid various ages of Maghrebian migrants, or among parents and children inside one migrant family, mark everyday living in the cities. With the coming of political age of the second generation or Beurs in the early 1980s, the French state and immigrant actors alike emphasised cultural conflict and struggle as the preeminent characteristic of relations between parents and children. The Beurs, having presented themselves as occupying an in-between position between North Africa and France, were hesitantly embraced and feared at the same time by French state officials. These officials feared the Beurs as either models of a current multiracial France or, on the other hand, as the bearers of potentially incommensurable tribal as well as spiritual identities. The second generation of Algerian immigrants, who are also the focus of state anxieties about the future cultural cohesiveness of the French nation, have likewise become the privileged targets of integration policies. Beur subjectivity in France has risen above state discourse and exploitation, and it also forms the basis for immigrant collective action

that has as well gone beyond the generational divide. Cultural and religious transmission between genealogically related or fictive parents and children has continued apace in the context of the cities rather than being simply replaced by state socialising institutions of the school, the factory, and the sports programme. As such, transformation models that assume an interruption or rupture between generations of immigrants do not account for either the daily lived reality or the transpolitical recruitment of multiple generational Maghrebian colonists in France. (CCI, 1984; Abou-Sada and Millet, 1986; Aïssou, 1987 and Jazouli, 1986)

However, regardless of such stability, social breeding in the cities remains a thing of tussle for Franco-Maghrebians, alongside the offspring of migrants refusing to accept, plus they sometimes even invalidate procedures of intergenerational transmission. Intergenerational transmission here indicates the transmission from

older generation to younger generation, especially the transmission of some Muslim traditions such as women having to stay at home. In situations like the foregoing, the younger generation functions not just as the ethnic intermediaries amid France and the Maghreb, however, they as well act as instruments of social memory, of the homesick objectification along with representation of different Maghrebian, Kabyle or Muslim tribal forms.

The age group of contemporaries is an essential anthropological hitch not just for the study of the Maghrebians in France, but as well very important for the comprehension of ethnic spread along with renovation in general. Generational relationships help to ascertain the way in which cultural forms of value and authority are being created and replicated in societies eventually, in addition to how internal social registers of harmony and difference are engraved and challenged. Theories of socialisation and migration, from German sociology (Mannheim, 1952) to American immigration studies (Kriegel, 1978) to French practice theory (Sayad, 1977, 1994) focus on intergenerational exchanges and ruptures as the motor of social production and reproduction. Even as these theories often presume a teleology of historical

advancement and immigrant assimilation; they, however, emphasise on how generational identities craft their way into daily societal life as entities of political tussle.

Mitterrand, in the first few years of his tenure, developed a sequence of federalisation strategies which gave confidence to and encouraged marginal cultures in France with his socialist administration. According to Giordan (1982), Mitterrand defended what he called "the right to be different" as a global human right. This defence of "the right to be different" by Mitterrand amounts to a redefinition of French national unity according to its multiethnic and multilingual diversity. In his preface to a programmatic report titled *La France au pluriel*, Mitterrand (1981:10) insists that the French citizens deeply consider that if France have to be united, she also have to be wealthy in her disparities. Her unity has enabled our country; respecting her diversity will prevent her undoing. One and diverse, that is France".

Mitterrand by the foregoing is one of the French presidents who truly defended the rights of Immigrants.

In the first place, *Les Minguettes and Vénissieux* is written to commemorate the 1981 hunger strike. Mitterrand cancelled the laws that uphold deportation and officially recognised the Beurs as full-fledged residents. In addition, he made money available for a major rehabilitation programme in the ghettos and created Educational Priority Zones (ZEP) to encourage the achievement of migrant students (Daoud 1993). In the name of being well educated, the administration fashioned a collection of programmes done once classroom schooling is over alongside programmes done during holidays to destabilize youth instability in the cities. These programmes in addition brought city youth to weekend camps in the rural area, operated by older suburbanites who were given employment on contract basis and seen as interlocutors and go between among the [*banlieue*] population and the [prevention] establishments (Jazouli, 1992: 43). Most times the municipal authorities restored these agreements all through the academic year, by doing so, they provide

jobs to the older youths. This they do with the exact goal of integrating young Beurs into the social life of upscale France.

Lastly, quoting the win of organisations such as *Zaâma d'banlieue* in settling the 1981 Lyon riots, the administration toppled the 1938 legislation barring migrant associations. They also got financial aid for these associations through the Deixonne decentralisation programme and the Social Action Funds (FAS) formed during the Algerian war to earmark government funds for the integration of colonist employees. Tropes of immigration/identity generally characterise Maghrebian literature, especially works of Driss Chraïbi, Mohammed Dib, Djébar Assia, Azouz Begag, Tahar Ben Jalloun, Leïla Sebbar and others (Schöpfel, 2000). An example is Azouz Begag who was born of an Algerian immigrant father, bred and lives in the same Lyon. His work *Le Passeport* (2000) centres on Zoubir El Mouss popularly known as Zoubir who comes back from France to his home town, yet remains a stranger to the shady lifestyle in Algerian public service. He decides to flee back to Europe

legally or illegally as if to justify the author's diasporic experience in France. Leïla Sebbar is marked by her uniformity in evoking themes of identity and immigration.

Immigration as a subject is not new to the Algerian literary critics. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that how immigration has affected the Algerian identity is left much to be achieved and that is part of the importance of the present study.

### **2.5.1 Social basis of identity**

Several studies on identity such as Epstein (1987), Phinney (1990), Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990), Frable (1997) and Lopez and Hasso (1998) emphasise on the individual aspects of social identity.

#### **i) Racial identity**

Over and above seventy surveys of racial identity are reviewed by Phinney (1990). According to the assumptions from a greater part of these surveys, the development



of identity is specifically complex, especially for those who belong to ethnic and racial marginal groups. This is due to unconstructive societal typecasts and favouritism. There is a consideration by Phinney (1990) concerning the main theoretical structures of ethnic identity configuration; that is, social identity, acculturation and developmental theories. She also considers some major elements of ethnic identity such as ethnic self-identification, feeling of being in the right place, approaches concerning one's personal ethnic group, social involvement and cultural habits. Experiential discoveries on self-worth, self-notion, psychological modification, ethnic identity in relation to the mainstream culture, modifications that are related to generation of immigration, ethnic identity and gender and contextual issues are also explored by Phinney. She makes a case for the creation of dependable and legitimate means of ethnic identity, for greater work on the effect of ethnic identity on outlooks regarding both one's own and other groups. Phinney (1990) equally notes the deficiency of attention to assorted ethnic backdrops. The decade following her appraisal has seen noticeably added recognition to multi-ethnic and assorted race settings.

Previous assessments such as those of Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) foreground developmental procedures and socialisation into ethnic identity while specific socialisation customs are explained by Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota and Ocampo (1993), this includes mothers' giving lessons about tribal way of life, parental age band of migration, mothers' knowledge of culture, and orientation. It also involves spoken language and demographic attributes such as parents' teaching and the extent of community urbanisation. This replica illustrates present-day multi-level examinations of social identities by collectively putting social communications, cognitive principles and stances, then environmental and structural attributes.

## **ii) Sexual identity**

Epstein (1987) remarks that group identity in common have taken up a good deal of significance and where sexuality turns out to be an essential component of identity creation. Gay and lesbian identities are likely to evolve. Sexual identity is different

from racial identity in that wakefulness of one's person as a sexual being and in particular alertness of one's potential divergence from sexual criteria, which normally happens subsequently in one's life than alertness of one's race or background. Even though repercussions of this distinction have not been exactly explored, nearly all types of sexual identity are similar to those of racial identity.

### **iii) Sex identity**

Sex or gender identity has been more comprehensively looked at than other social identities. Markus, Crane, Bernstein and Siladi (1982) and West and Zimmeman (1987) have pictured sex identity as either gender-self schemas in the cognitive custom, or as composed attainment in the communicationists custom, respectively. In whichever situation, sex identity could be seen as awareness that one is male or female. Also interiorising pre and prohibition of conducts believed to be culturally proper to these self perceptions are considered to be learned during early socialisation and learned through early socialisation and executed and strengthened

all through the lifetime. General to both standpoints is the declaration that gender is a social class and as a result sex identity is all about more than individuality.

The majority of studies find a small number of differences in the existence of sex identity. In stipulations of substance, Kroger (1997) discovers sex differences in identity formation, substance, developmental procedure and framework. Kroger gives an account in an experiential follow-up that sphere of sexuality and family are to an extent more outstanding for the female than the male, but more in general, there are not many distinctions in identity content.

### **iv) Class identities**

Class identity is mostly defined by an individual's financial status in a society. In societies, there exist the upper class, the middle class and the lower class. As

maintained by Frable (1997), with a small number of exemptions, class as a significant identity is purely missing from the psychological literature. According to Lopez and Hasso (1998) and Stewart and Ostrove (1993), class identities have been looked at in the social psychological literature, the stress is inclined to be in communication with other forms of identity and on related outcomes. They also insist that students who come from the middle class and also from the ethnic minority setting bargain their marginal standing at the elite educational institutions. Hurtado, Gurin and Peng (1994) opine that present generation migrants are more likely to have class identities comparable to those dominant in the United States of America than the former generation migrants. Shockey (1998) observes that there is a disconnection between the distorted experience of class and sex workers' professional practices and end results.

**v) Age identities**

To be old is exclusive as a social grouping. In actual fact, everybody goes from not being in this grouping to being part of it. However, identities based on age have got little precise notice from social psychologists. Gatz and Cotton (1994) address the

identity dynamics of growing old. Age identities are ascribed and attained, the borders of the category partisanship are absorbent, but they are also classified progressively (Gatz and Cotton, 1994). An influx of new members, according to them, to the aged class is also sure, with their numbers rising much faster than those of other minority categories with absorbent limits. The word "aged" is itself supple in definition, both culturally and individually. The ever-present style is that the older people get, the less closely their subjective age identity matches their sequential age.

Similarly, Logan, Ward and Spitze (1992) insist that as people grow older, their idea of when old age starts becomes older and older. Rothbaum (1983) avows that the older adults engage in more typecasting of all age categories than do the younger ones. From the position of Logan, Ward and Spitze (1992) it could be assumed that greater self-esteem is linked with feeling younger as statistics propose that life

contentment is lower and stress is more for people who see themselves as aged. After considering all the different types of identities: ethnic, sexual, gender, class and age identities, one would say that they are all natural apart from class identity. Where someone comes from or one's sexuality, gender or age should not be a barrier to one's happiness.

### **2.5.2 Identity and space**

Geographical and practical spaces are another fresh foundation of identities, a course that attests to the interdisciplinary character of recent study on identities. Cuba and Hummon (1993) interrogate place identities as identities based on a sense of being at home. Major questions have to do with the consequences of being mobile on place connection and meeting points between place identities and evolutions in the life course. Their pragmatic study of migrants' place identities aims to explore generational disparities in peoples' dealings with place. A structural component is attached by Lindstrom (1997), bearing in mind intersections of place stratification and place identity. He argues that someone's home address is an indicator of worth and socio-economic place. Enquiries of spatial identity and spatial dislocations to intersections with national, gender and sexual identities is connected by Espin (1995)

who investigates great efforts concerning acculturation pivot on migrant women's sexual attitudes and sexual category performances. According to her, the passage of frontier through migrations may give women the space to pass other border lines, here, the border line of sexuality and sexual category. Espin (1995) deals with those who have some amount of option about where they stay. Even though in all probability, the people who have fewer option, or the people who do not have homes, without doubt, have a place identity, how these dynamics are different when one chooses this identity and when one does not remains to be justified.

### **2.6 Previous works on Leïla Sebbar and her novels**

Leïla Sebbar's publications include essays such as *On tue les petites filles* (1978), *Le pédophile et la maman* (1980), *Lettres parisiennes*, *Autopsie de l'exil*, with Nancy

Huston (1986), and *L'arabe comme un chant secret* (2007); short stories such as *La négresse à l'enfant* (1990), *La jeune fille au balcon* (1996), *Le baiser* (1997), *Soldats* (1999), *Sept filles* (2003), *Isabelle l'Algérien*, *Un portrait d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (2005), *L'habit vert* (2006), *Le peintre et son modèle* (2007), *Métro* (2007), *Le ravin de la femme sauvage* (2007), *Le Vagabond*, *Louisa*, *La Blanche et la Noire*, *Noyant d'Allier* (2007-2008), *Une femme à sa fenêtre*, (2010), *Aflou*, *Djebel amour*, with Jean-Claude Gueneau and Nora Aceval, (2010), *Le jour où elle a parlé* (2012), and *Lodève Aflou Lodève, le bruit des métiers à tisser* (2012); full novels such as *Fatima ou les Algériennes au squar* (1981), *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (1984), *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, (1982), *Le chinois vert d'Afrique* (1984), *Les carnets de Shérazade*(1985), and *J.H. cherche âme-sœur* (1987). Others include *Le fou de Shérazade* (1991), *Le silence des rives* (1993), *La Seine était rouge* (1999), *Marguerite* (2002), *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*(2003), *Les femmes au bain* (2006), and *La confession d'un fou* (2011). She also authored *Mes Algéries en France*, (2004), *Journal de mes Algéries en France* (2005), and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre* (2008).

Sebbar has also co-authored and edited so many works which, including *Paris-Dakar, autres nouvelles* (1987), *Voies de pères, voix de filles* (1988), *Les meilleures*

*nouvelles de l'année 89-90*, Syros (1990), *Un siècle de nouvelles Franco-Maghrébines* (1992), and *Nouvelles de la guerre d'Algérie, trente ans après* (1992). She also published *Une enfance d'ailleurs, 17 écrivains racontent*, with Nancy Huston in 1993, *Une enfance algérienne* in 1997, *Une enfance outremer*, in 2001 and *Journal intime et politique*, in 2003. She edited works like *Les Algériens au café*, by Sébastien Pignon, Al Manar-Alain Gorius in 2003, *Mon père* (2007), *C'était la France, en Algérie avant l'indépendance* (2007), *Ma mère* (2008), *Une enfance corse*, with Jean-Pierre Castellani (2010), *Une enfance tunisienne*, with Sophie Bessis, (2010), and *Une enfance juive en Méditerranée musulmane*, (2012).

Leïla Sebbar is widely read and critiqued positively and probably negatively. Many critics such as Mildred Mortimer, Helen Vassallo, Rafika Merini, Mala Pandurang et

al, and Ann Donadey have written about her and her works. Mildred Mortimer, a professor of French at the University of Colorado in Boulder translated Sebbar's *Le Silence des Rives* as *Silence on the Shores* and she has written several works on North African literature which include *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition* and *Journeys through the French African Novel*. Reviewing Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* Mortimer (1990:32) declares:

Leila Sebbar's novel recounts an event in French history that has been hidden for many years. Toward the end of the Algerian war, the FLN, an Algerian nationalist party, organized a demonstration in Paris to oppose a curfew imposed upon Algerians in France. About 30,000 Algerians gathered peacefully, but the protest was brutally suppressed by the Paris police. Between 50 and 200 Algerians were killed and their bodies were thrown into the Seine. This incident provides the background for a more intimate look into the history of violence between France and Algeria. Following three young protagonists—one French, one Algerian, and one French national of Algerian descent—Sebbar takes readers on a journey of discovery and comprehension.

Mortimer (1990) agrees that *La Seine était rouge*, written by Leïla Sebbar actually narrates the story of an occurrence in the history of France which has been hidden for many years. Mildred Mortimer's extraordinary translation puts across the power of Sebbar's words in English. It as well helps English speaking readers to understand

the complex relationship between past and present, metropolis and colony, immigrant and citizen that lies at the heart of the novel. Vassallo's (2013) *The Body Beseiged: the Embodiment of Historical Memory in Nina Bouraoui and Leila Sebbar* interrogates the works of two modern writers Nina Bouraoui and Leila Sebbar. Even though this study is concerned with Leïla Sebbar, both authors exemplify a noteworthy historical divide. Both have one parent from France and the other parent Algerian, and their works return unswervingly to the legacy of opposition provoked by the colonial past which France and Algeria share. Vassallo (2013) notes that neither Bouraoui nor Sebbar claims to plan to write about the Algerian War of Independence, and yet its impact is felt throughout all of the texts she explores. According to her, this unavoidable omnipresence of the Algerian War is

conceptualised in her work as "embodied memory". She defines this embodied memory as a human impulse to write about a war whose legacy is passed on to these second generation writers rather than a deliberate decision to connect with the historical aspect of their personal heritage. Vassallo (2013) argues that both women suffer a racially forced de-territorialisation in their lives and their early autobiographical narratives. She also posits that both women undergo a voluntary dislodgment, embarking on literal and psychological journeys to make sure they have a sense of self, sense of belonging, and ultimately the sense of re-territorialisation.

Moreover, Vassallo's (2013) study explains how this turn from de-territorialisation to re-territorialisation is associated with a move from internalisation through memory and silence to externalisation via articulation and communality. Vassallo (2013) also notes that Bouraoui's and Sebbar's life writings concede that their know-how starts with a universal, historical or social perspective more willingly than using the individual as representative of the universal. It also stands for a private show of recollection which is key to the reclamation of historical memory, and to the negotiation of a suitable place for this particular memory. At an era of compromise and commemoration, Vassallo's (2013) analysis exposes and investigates open sores in the Franco-Algerian link through a close focal point on the autobiographical texts

of two women authors. Bouraoui and Sebbar represent histories and fictions, and their writings epitomise a site of this personified memory.

Merini's (1999) review titled *Two Major Francophone Women Writers, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar: A Thematic Study of Their Works* is another work that really brings out Sebbar's potentials. Merini's (1999) study uses a socioliterary approach to explore how two women writers of francophone origin, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar, subvert the culture of voyeurism in their works and create characters who "originate new modes of being Maghrebian women" (6).

Merini's (1999) most original contribution resides in her feminist rewriting of the popular Arab concept of the "evil eye". When the Arabs use the word "evil eye", they mean from the wicked power of envy to the gaze of the person looking. Throughout the book, she traces how clear-sighted female characters ward off the evil eye of voyeurism through various clever tactics, "turning the tables on the voyeur and co-opting his voyeurism" (119), thus engaging in "reverse voyeurism" (2). Chapters 1 and 4 are particularly notable, because they highlight works by Sebbar that have received the least critical attention, which are *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (1984), *Le pédophile et la maman* (1980) and *Le fou de Shérazade* (1991).

Sociological approaches to literature tend to have currency in the United States but more in France and in the Maghreb. Even though the concentration on the culture of voyeurism is a brilliant and original point of approach to the texts of Djébar and Sebbar, Merini's (1999) analysis at times evinces a mimetic conception of literature that is at odds with Djébar's and Sebbar's explicit goals of creating alternative visions, new worlds, through literature. In spite of some weaknesses, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers* which happens to be the first English language book-length study of the works of these two female authors is an important study that interests a growing number of scholars, especially those interested in Djébar's and Sebbar's literary works.

Vergano is another writer who wrote a critical work on Sebbar. Her work *Poétique, politique et culture dans les romans de Leïla Sebbar* offers an analysis of three of Sebbar's novels: *Sherazade* (1982), *Les Carnets de Sherazade* (1985) and *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique* (1984). Vergano (1991) submits that the North African immigrants living in France are usually the focal point of Sebbar's works. These people are particularly the children of immigrants, born and brought up in France, making them to belong to both French and Arabic. The narratives that Vergano examines present the expedition of a 17 year old girl of Algerian origin named Sherazade, and a 12 year old boy of dual nationality: Algerian and Vietnamese. The two young stars engage in identitarian search. In the introduction, Vergano discusses Sebbar's upbringing in Algeria and her successive profession as a writer whose interest is above all the fate of women living in Arab communities within France. She also



delves into the sociological perspective of Sebbar's creative writing which is all about the rise of Maghrebian populations in France.

Pandurang and Bartels (2010) suggest that *Le silence des rives*, a novel written by Sebbar in 1993, takes what they call the "in between spaces" of gender and nationality, undermines traditional identities and sees those who are in search of an identity, in the hunt for community as roaming, through a reconciliation of memory. They insist that Sebbar depicts identity, through the exilic space, generating a sense of neighbourhood that exists, not as a specific landscape, but instead abounds as pure space. That is why Sebbar's story stirs up both a sense of loss (exile) and recovery through the self-importance of drifting identity as that which is unstable. They analyse *Le silence des rives* as a narrative which discusses exile and memory as movements and passages. They note that in the narrative, nobody is really named aside from general nominations such as: l'homme, l'enfant, la mère and les trois sœurs. The novel, which has its setting in the south of France, cross-examines the edges of identity as much as questions the linguistic and geographic spaces imprint on the memory, in language and on the body. According to them, "fitna" brings together illustrations underneath the rubric of death and rebirth in order to contradict the duality of naming and silence, birth and death, movement and stasis. Going further, they reveal that the novel takes place close to the bank of a river which flows into the sea in the southern part of France. The point where the river meets the sea and where the characters are tackled is symbolical with the mixture of cultures: France, over there and the Maghreb, at the other bank. They note that it is between "over there" and "the other bank" where the characters of the narrative go in pursuit of meaning in an undefined space of coming and going and of belonging and non-belonging. They avow: "Sur l'autre rive, dans la chambre blanche, l'homme qui marchait le long du fleuve est à l'agonie". (On the other bank, inside the white room, the man that was walking on the shores of the river is in agony) (.52). They affirm that Sebbar explains the complexity of locating identity as she displays a story fraught with characters that gradually begin to occupy space as a substitute of the earth. This interiorised space of consciousness, spirituality and human relations to spirit becomes the loci of nomadic identity.

Pandurang and Bartels (2010) maintain that the identities of the narrators in *Le silence des rives*, are not known. Sebbar upholds a certain secrecy and androgyny of the narrators. However, at the beginning of each part of the novel, the speaker changes temporarily and each of the voices speaks very little, reciting maybe a line or two. Then the page the person is reading from becomes tremendously empty and blank, leaving the words in a void of whiteness. At this juncture, former omniscient narrator continues with the story telling as before. Just like the movement between the presence and absence of writing on the page, the novel displays a similar struggle between presence and absence. An example is when there is a constant tussle between the identities of the characters that remain silent, unevoked, and a textual drive to name the language of the mother as that space of linguistic and cultural identity, they assert "Qui me dira les mots de ma mère? Dans la chambre blanche où je suis seul, qui viendra murmurer la prière des morts? Et qui parlera la langue de ma terre à mon oreille, dans le silence de l'autre rive?" (Who will tell me my mother's words? In the white room where I am alone, who will come and murmur the prayer of death? And who will speak my native language to my ear, inside the silence of the other bank) (53).

Pandurang and Bartels (2010) agree that in Sebbar's narrative, she tends to put the geographical bank of difference next to the figurative limits of language, the body and the community whereby the bank comes to signify that which leads to the sea, the abyss that disturbs nations and likewise that which separates peoples. As these particular characters march along the shores of that which looks out towards the Maghreb, Sebbar's novel is a deliberate negotiation of real and imaginary spaces in which identity is inevitably bargained, frequently hidden, and occasionally found. They submit that Sebbar's *Le silence des rives* reveals the emblematic space of exile that Maghrebians face in a foreign country. They also note that the theatrical standing of the pursuit of identity as a type of "suicide" makes this text quite complicated. This is so because the quest for identity in Sebbar's work is not physical search, but a philosophical and somatic seeking of resolve through language and memory. Here travelling is depicted as the incapability of staying "over there"

and the impracticality of ever turning around to the "other bank" as the subject lives amid these environmental and ethnic distances.

Identity is an impossible combination of tasks as implied by self-motivation, alternatively, the search for one's self is what threatens the body, and then again, the outcome of not trying to find one's identity is spiritual death. The people who try to locate their misplaced tradition die striving to cross the sea, and the ones who stay indifferent concerning locating their lost identity spiritually rot in the lack of meaning. The excess of meaning for the people who are successful and barrenness for those who are not, show travelling as the "fitnic" space of in-between self and geography, where the blank space, and not a specific geography, is the context for identity. Narrating the socio-historical realities of a country that experienced colonisation may not be complete without talking about the context of identity.

Donadey (2002) also examines works of Djébar and Sebbar. Donadey's "Recasting postcolonialism" is a detailed study of the works of these two major female writers of francophone origin, Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar. They view postcolonial literature as being both defiant to and complicit with an array of power structures. They posit that through creative writing, literature repossesses a history written first and foremost from a Eurocentric viewpoint. They also affirm that postcolonial literature connects with a selection of intertexts, which it alternately questions,

recovers and reinvents. Donadey's (2002) study challenges the existing tradition of postcolonial theory by drifting away from concentrating on English language literature. She claims that instead of being nonessential to postcolonial concerns, gender is one of the main reasons for the undecided aspect of much postcolonial literature. "Recasting postcolonialism" delineates historiographical argument over the Algerian war and the role and place of women in the war. Donadey studies the narrative approaches which Djébar and Sebbar deploy to historicise an Algerian past that is to some extent expunged by the French colonialism. She also proffers an obvious breakdown of how these two women's texts illustrate the outstanding role

played by the Algerian women and the previous memories of women in the recasting of Algeria's colonial history.

There are other studies on Sebbar's portrayal of the Arabic language in francophone works in the light of a current variance. Regardless of the suggestion of cultural mixture and métissage in a lot of Sebbar's fictional compositions, she, however, goes on to call to mind rupture amid languages, not able to translate, and the silence of Arabic in a way of writing constituted even now by linguistic fracture. This is actually part of the socio-historical realities, that is the inability of the the second generation of Algerian immigrants in Franceto speak their native language. Sebbar who only speaks and writes French, eventhough she has an Algerian father, makes reference frequently and without a doubt fanatically to her sense of separation from her father's memory and culture as a result of this lack of knowledge of how to speak and write Arabic. Meanwhile, she always talks about her Algerian heritage in all her writings. This enquiry of the rift involving French and Arabic and the fact that Sebbar cannot speak her indigenous language, which is Arabic, serves to expose the rashly, triumphant oratory of contemporary theories of transculturation and hybridisation. These theories, although they commendably strive to violate the law of cultural and linguistic borders in constructive ways, possibly dismiss the doggedness of linguistic conflict and the exile it keeps on provoking. Michel Le Bris, while writing the introductory part of his collection, *Pour une littérature monde* (2007) condemns the monolingualism of francophonie, so as to support a

form of writing that is compound, various, coloured, multipolar and not homogeneous just like the dissatisfied had feared. Moreover, he continues by saying that all novelists writing today in a particular language do so notwithstanding the argument of many world languages around them. Francophone writing from this angle by Bris should delve into dealings with other languages and rise above national and cultural discords. Despite the fact that this multiple division of languages is on one level at the heart of Sebbar's narratives, this speechifying risk is proving false the resentment among languages in tricky contexts, for instance, that of

colonial and postcolonial Algeria. This study is geared towards the absence of Arabic language in Sebbar's work. Sebbar's writings specifically exposes the complexity of pulling off cultural harmony and demonstrates the pressure at work in the creation of any substitute idea on languages.

Those who evaluate Sebbar's narratives, concentrating particularly on the *Shérazade* trilogy, have inclined to defend the invigorating types of cross identity that her characters such as Shérazade, her main character, enacts. For instance, Donadey (1998), analysis Shérazade's commitment with, and revolt of, Orientalist metaphors as a sign of mixture. Woodhull (1993) interrogates the wandering nature of Sebbar's characters. Hiddleston (2003) emphasises how Shérazade's commitment with several cultural evocations, and her having to find herself through travel, may possibly be seen to propose a stimulating vision of transculturation, regardless of the ongoing sense of exile. In the same way, Lionnet (1995) suggests a concept known as the "logic mixture". This is a concept which Lionnet takes from Amselle (1990), to portray a vibrant model of "relationality", as she calls it. She also sees Sebbar's *Les Carnets de Shérazade* (1985) as a model of modern styles of dialogue linking cultures that resist well-established typecast and patterns. Lionnet's thoughts here, on one point, picture a more pluralised, associative and intercultural form of identity construction. This is just like Khatibi's "thought on languages", gainfully acts contrary to the damaging doubles of colonial thoughts. Studies on Sebbar relate to how she tries to bring out the socio-historical realities of the Maghrebians in her narratives. They point out how the second generation of the Maghrebians gets

confused because they were born into a mixed culture, that of their parents and that of the colonisers and they must strike a balance.

A close study of Sebbar's partly fictional autobiographical novels, nonetheless, does not unavoidably immobilise such a mode of reasoning; however, it discloses the tensions that would continue to disturb this process of blending. In Sebbar's works, languages exist next to one another and her entire fantasy is the result of the meeting between the French and Arabic languages. This encounter is necessarily also defined

by a crack, and this is a type of conflict that theories of mixture, at any rate based on the postcolonial Maghreb, cannot yet claim to eliminate.

The trace of Sebbar's Algerian childhood in her several autobiographical essays, short stories, and in the novel, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, continuously alludes to a sense of enclosure within the intimately protected francophone, republican space of her family home. There are various images of obstacles and sequestration that emphasise on the disconnection between this environment and the outside space of the local Arabic-speaking population. Sebbar (2001) describes the house they live in her father's school as "a small France". The house is a secular space fenced off from the rest of the village. In "La Moustiquaire", a short story seen in Leïla Sebbar and Nancy Huston (eds.), *17 Ecrivains racontent une enfance d'ailleurs* (1993), the representation of the mosquito net is figurative to the hurdle linking the character of the young girl and the world she observes. This is as she snuggles up behind it, sheltered from the stare of spectators but gazing, by herself, at the offspring of the locals as they play around. Just as the story teller ponders over the young girl's lack of involvement with the girls playing hopscotch and the boys who yell out insults, she interrupts her ruminations with numerous allusions to the mosquito net that marks her separation. One would say that the real obstruction of the walls, the garden fence and the mosquito net, are forced on the French language itself, as the closed-up space of the local home is inextricably tied up with linguistic confiscation. French and Arabic languages are blocked off from each other by the

impressive walls that factually enclose the family abode and the secular republican school.

This substantial separation is strengthened by recurring allusions to Sebbar's narrator's obvious ignorance of the Arabic language in her several essays and narratives, beginning with "Si je parle la langue de ma mère", which was published in *Les Temps modernes* in 1978. Sebbar nearly compulsively goes back to Arabic

language not being seen in her works through a series of texts with headings that point to that silence in numerous ways, including "Si je ne parle pas la langue de mon père" in Sagalyn's (1988) *Voix de pères, voix de filles*. It could also be seen in "La Moustiquaire" in Sebbar and Huston's (1993) work, *17 Ecrivains racontent une enfance d'ailleurs*, also in "Les Jeunes filles de la colonie", found in Leïla Sebbar's (2001) *Une Enfance outremer*. There is also "Le Silence de la langue de mon père, l'arabe", in *Etudes littéraires* (2001) and also in her 2003's *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*.

The subject matter of these texts is basically related, as she comes back spontaneously to her lack of knowledge of her father's legacy and sense of exile surrounded by French culture. This is as if she attempts to make something out of it while she remains not satisfied with each of such ventures. Furthermore, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* also in number of forms repeats the proclamation that she does not speak Arabic, as she starts each segment with abrupt reference that echoes the title such as "mon père ne m'a pas appris la langue de sa mère" (my father did not teach me his mother tongue), or, "mon père ne m'a pas appris la langue des femmes de son peuple" (my father did not teach me the language of the women from his place).

The current close by connection involving Sebbar's lack of the knowledge of the Arabic language and her father's reluctance to speak concerning the War tend to be the unique characteristics of this newest and most long-lasting consideration on her father's language. Sebbar's father's unwillingness to instruct his children the Arabic language is related with his not being able to narrate the fine points of his

experiences during the war, how the French military put him in prison for a few months in 1957. Telephone conversations with her father are recorded at the opening sections of the narrative. In these discussions, her father pleads with her to forget what has happened in the past and these are put side by side with the story teller's reminiscences of talks between her father and his Arab comrades all through the same time which she is not able to comprehend. This silence, in turn, results to the

separation between French and Algerians throughout that conflict, and the alienated situation of the young Sebbar in connection to both sides.

Most of the works reviewed above actually reflect Leïla Sebbar's obsessive preoccupation with the condition of the Maghrebian migrant population in France, especially the youths and their search for identity. The absence of Arabic language in her writing is also examined. None of these works makes adequate and holistic appraisal of Leïla Sebbar's creative works as related to socio-historic writing and discourse. They also did not concentrate on how the experiences of these Maghrebians affect their way of life.

## **2.7 Narrative techniques in selected texts**

Orehovec (2003) defines narrative technique as any of the numerous exact methods through which a creator of a narrative puts into words what he or she wants. According to him, a narrative technique provides the reader with deeper meaning of the story and helps him or her use his/her imagination to visualise the situations. Narrative literary techniques, in the words of Orehovec (2003), are also known as "literary devices". Setting, plot, theme, style or structure, characters and perspective, or voice of the story make up the literary elements. One of these aforementioned elements helps to fully understand literary techniques. There are many types of literary techniques, but for the purpose of this study, literary techniques relevant to style, plot, and narrative perspective or point of view will be explored. Common techniques relevant to style or the language chosen to tell a story include metaphors, similes, personification, imagery, hyperbole and alliteration. Common techniques

relevant to plot, which is the sequence of events that make up a narrative, are back-story, flashback, flash-forward, foreshadowing and story within a story. Common techniques relevant to narrative perspective or who is telling the story are first person, second person, third person, and third-person omniscient.

### **i) Narrative techniques used by Sebbar**



**a) Back-story** in literature recounts something that has happened prior to the actual events described in the narrative. In Sebbar's *Mon cher fils*, she narrates a story of how the old man lives his life in France before coming back to Algeria. He is never close to his son. It is important to understand why the son never contacts him when he (the old man) leaves France for Algeria and probably why the son never answers any of his letters. It is also important to note that this act of not being close to his son is the reason his son does not know about his culture. This event is not depicted in the story; however, the narrator gives account of this 'back-story' just before the actual first event that is narrated.

**b) Flashback** is used when the person narrating or the protagonist decides to take the story back in time, and the events go back and forth between the past and the present. The technique is used in *La Seine était rouge*. The narrators often move back and forth between several events that occur in the past to the present. Amel's mother tells stories of the events that take place when she is seven years old and later the narrator talks about the present. Sebbar uses flashback to depict the socio-historical realities of the Algerians in her narratives and also to remind her audience the cause of certain problems among the Algerians themselves or between the Algerians and the French. These flashbacks in her stories also showcase the root of identitarian search by the Algerians.

**c) Foreshadowing** is employed when the writer allows the reader to see future events. This might be something experienced by the character or it could be future circumstances and situations. In "La robe interdite", the lady is made to see a very beautiful future in the form of promises made to her by a man. Sebbar uses

foreshadowing in "La robe interdit" to depict the promises of the colonisers that never come to pass. The Algerians who migrate to France see a very bright future there even before leaving Algeria, due to the many promises made to them by the French colonial masters. However, on getting to France, they discover that those promises are all lies.

**d) Story within a story:** This is a main story that organises a series of shorter stories as seen in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*. The story of Ali, his wife Aïcha and their son Mustapha, also the story of the woman who beats her daughter up and regrets it later are told in the novel. Sebbar also makes use of "story within a story" in *Mon cher fils* where she tells the story of Kamila who after graduating from law school leaves the man she is betrothed to and marries a French non-Muslim. This act of Kamila is seen as loss of identity and disobedience to her parents.

## **ii) Examples relevant to narrative perspectives as used by Sebbar**

**a) First person narration:** This is a narrative presented from the point of view of a character, especially the protagonist. This narrative technique is employed in *La Seine était rouge* where Amel's mother tells Louis her story. Amel's mother makes use of "I" and "We" while telling her story.

**b) Multiperspectivity:** This is a narrative where the writer decides to tell the story from the viewpoints of multiple characters that incorporate various perspectives, emotions, and views from bystanders or actors to varying particular events or circumstances that might not be felt by other characters in the story. Sebbar uses this perspective in most of her narratives as seen in the selected novels.

Sebbar's narrative techniques in the four selected novels- *La Seine était rouge*, *La Jeune fille au balcon*, *Mon cher fils* and *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* cut across the three types of narrative techniques which are: style, plot and perspective. Sebbar's style is a bit personal, she incorporates many figurative languages in her

writings. The plotting of her stories is done with a lot of back-story, flashback, flash-forward, story-within-a-story and foreshadowing. Usually, she uses third person narration as her narrative perspective but she also employs first person and multiperspectivity. Her stories are also detailed which is one of the characteristics of

a realist writer. It is equally noticed that Sebbar's fictions are mostly related to the Algerian past and present.

Sebbar remains one of the writers whose narratives deal with the colonial legacies as on-going procedure that influence a lot of aspects of the political, socio-cultural, and financial environments of territories that were formerly colonised. She also represents colonialism as a mutual process that has affected both colonisers and the colonised, albeit in a variety of degrees. She is particularly concerned in the psychological aspects of such violent meets. Her works could be found fascinating because they explore beyond the hard materiality of such violent legacies (which is something that should not be forgotten), and expose certain codes of fantasies and desires, certain emotions and affective responses that speak as much about the violence of colonialism, as about impossibilities, resistances and transcendences.

Leïla Sebbar is seen as one of the socio-historical writers by Anne Donadey in her work *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* published in 2002. Donadey (2002) shifts the emphasis of most postcolonial criticism from its preoccupation with male, largely anglophone writing to feminist writing in a postcolonial Algerian mode. Her analysis of the works of Sebbar in a literary, social, political and historical context involves the reader in the significant issues of cultural hybridity, counter-hegemonic strategies, cultural pluralism, and intertextuality, which serve to refocus postcolonial theory in crucial ways.

### **2.8.1 Postcolonialism and socio-historical writings**

Postcolonialism is an academic tendency, which is also known as an era (post colonial) or the postcolonial theory. This theory/era has existed since the mid of the 20th century. The era resulted from and mainly refers to the period following

colonisation. Postcolonialism as a theory takes into consideration the colonial period in addition to the period after colonisation. The postcolonial trend was invented as countries that were colonised gained their independence. In this day and age,

characteristics of postcolonialism can be seen not only in sciences relating to history, literature and politics, but as well as in move towards the culture and identity of both the colonised countries and their previous colonisers. Dobbie (2009) maintains that since postcolonialism started, there is no total conformity about its tenets and objectives. In this instance, even the way it is written (post-colonialism versus postcolonialism) is debated. Some critics see post-colonialism as the era/period, while postcolonialism is the theory.

According to Mills (1998), postcolonial theory did not develop by the works of a united group of theorists. Absolutely on the opposite, those whose writings were in relation to the postcolonial theory are people from diverse parts of the world such as India, Australia, South Africa, America and Europe. These people, as stated by Mills (1998) signify various practices, while their texts deal with a broadscale of hypothetical points. Postcolonialism as a theory takes care of a great array of topics; for instance, the configuration of the postcolonial debate, cultural amalgamation, racial discrimination and portrayal of the subaltern. They all are in one way or the other tied to the impact of colonisation on cultures and societies. This outcome ceases not to survive even with the coloniser leaving actually, but its effect is felt for an indefinite period in a supposed postcolonial condition. John McLeod (2000) provides a general idea of the growth of the major trends in postcolonial theories. McLeod scrutinises basic texts, for example, Saïd's (1978) *Orientalism* that brings about the progress of the colonialist discourse theory, which is also the focal point of studies by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Even though crucial to the work of these critics, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) are the ones that employ the word "postcolonial", for the first time in their renowned study, *The Empire Writes Back*. The study deals generally with the cultural relationships in colonial societies. They posit that:

The term 'postcolonial' can be used to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupation throughout the historical process initiated by European Western aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-

cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989:2).

This definition which seems to be widely accepted by the West, has been criticised by many non-Western scholars such as Saghal (2003) who decries a situation where the West defines concepts and ideas from other cultures in relation to Western concepts as if these societies, which had all existed before the incursion of the Europeans into their cultural space, owed their existence to the Europeans.

In a later work by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, they state that:

Postcolonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquest, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of the empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities. (1998: 187)

Looking at their position on postcolonialism above, it could be inferred that postcolonialism does not cover just the post colonial era. According to them, it covers from the colonial era to post colonial era.

There are many aspects and concepts of Postcolonialism, this work has therefore adopted the Edward Saïd's Postcolonial Theory (Orientalism) and Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity.

Saïd(1978) opines that the connection linking understanding and operations of supremacy is a fundamental subject in the postcolonial concept. Mills (1998) refers to Saïd as a "post-colonial discourse theorist". She also maintains that he, Saïd,

questions the manner in which Europe, during the 19th century denoted a lot of the cultures with which it got in touch through imperial growth. She writes that he also

claims that the Western world manufactured these other cultures as the Other to a Western norm.

Bhabha's notion of hybridity also addresses clashes of identity and cultural assimilation. The colonial masters came into their colonies and wiped out major fractions of indigenous practice and culture. In addition, they incessantly substituted those indigenous cultures with theirs. This act of replacement of cultures frequently leads to clashes, especially when countries gain independence and all of a sudden have to confront the challenge of having to build up a new national identity and poise. Most generations had relatively taken up the Western way of life just because they had lived under their power. These countries' challenge was to discover a distinctive method of proceeding to call their own. They were not able to do away with the Western culture instantly, neither were they able to produce an entirely brand new one. Alternatively, previous colonial authorities had to transform their self-appraisal. Decolonisation appears to be all about this inconsistent classification procedure, whereas postcolonialism is the scholarly part that deals with it and upholds a stable analysis from both positions.

Postcolonialism could also be seen as the study of the bequest of the period of the European, and occasionally the American, direct worldwide dominance which came to an end approximately within the middle of the 20th century. It also includes the outstanding political, socio-economic, and emotional consequences of that colonial account. Postcolonialism studies the style wherein up-and-coming societies struggle with the challenges of independence. It also examines how these societies integrate or refuse the Western customs and principles such as legal or political systems which the colonial masters left behind with their direct administration. Strangely enough, the initial postcolonial theory, with its stress on obvious dismissal of forced Western ideologies, was tied to Marxist theory, which also has its origin in Europe. Modern-day studies have its focal point more on the effects of postcolonial globalisation and

the growth of original resolutions to indigenous needs. The main focus on this study is to use postcolonialism as a theory to analyse works written by a citizen of a colonised country.

### **2.8.2 Postcolonialism in literature**

Postcolonialism in literature comprises the study of concept and creative writing in relation with what the coloniser and the colonised lived through. Edward Saïd is the foremost theorist in this subject area, despite the fact that Chinua Achebe is one of the principal writers with the publication of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, two years before Nigeria's independence. According to Ayeleru (2011), there is no gainsaying the fact that Chinua Achebe's narrative is presented to the literary world and in particular to the African continent at a point when there is an extreme necessity for the protection of the African tradition which was at the edge of being displaced by Western styles. Saïd's (1978) *Orientalism* is seen as the foundation of postcolonial studies. Saïd (1978) examines how European countries instigated colonisation as a product of what they described as their own racial supremacy. Saïd (1978) also allocates a significant function to exoticism in the discursive demonstration of the Orient. This he does because to him, exoticism is pertinent not only in the illustration of the West, but in the depiction of the world in common, the helpfulness of his theory goes much further than the Western world and it may be practical to postcolonial representations almost everywhere.

As indicated by Saïd, Western treatises designed a specific Orient with the intention of justifying its economic, intellectual and moral dominance over its territory and its subjects. The postcolonial method of writing is a section of post-modern literature apprehensive with the political and cultural independence of nations previously dominated by colonial empires. It takes care of the clashes between monarch and subjugated, majority and dominated, persecutor and persecuted and, at the same time, commemorates the suppressed "Other", by confronting the domineering culture and asking questions about the concepts of the instituted authority. This literature that has been created in previous colonised areas indicates modifications in the

social, political, economic, and cultural traditions in freed states and revolts against whatever thing that rings a bell about the coloniser. As soon as the past colonial masters left, the countries, now newly independent, had to cope with, not only the multiple economic and social matters such as penury and lack of schooling, but also with the repercussion of colonisation. Long period of centuries of abuse, total lack of respect and refutation of the residents' worth and culture, estranged the conquered peoples from their own homelands and brought a wearing away of their identity. The convictions ascertained by colonial masters that the natives were savages and that their culture was not as much of important as that of the colonisers proved to be wrong. The postcolonial writers' challenge is to recover and restore their national identity, history and literature, lost during colonisation and to outline their association with the home and language of their previous masters.

The postcolonial perspective is concerned with the manners in which the legacies of colonialism (understood as a set of ideas and practices) have affected people previously under colonial rule. However, a distinction needs to be drawn here. In spite of much criticism of the word 'postcolonial' (more specifically such criticism was directed against the dubious implications of the 'post' prefix), postcolonial literature does not assume that colonialism is something that can safely be relegated to the realm of the past, which implies that one can objectively investigate it and retrieve it for exploration. Critics such as Dirlik (1994), Shohat (1992) and Appiah (1992) suggest that the 'post' in 'postcolonial' makes a very problematic statement; it implies that colonialism has somehow evaporated with the newly formed states gaining formal independence; that there has been a clear succession in terms of historical periods, meaning that post colonialism is what naturally followed after colonialism. On the contrary, most of postcolonial literature deals with such legacies as still being in progress. Authors such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Homi Bhabha, Robert J. Young, Ashis Nandy, Rey Chow and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are specifically interested in the psychological dimensions of the colonial encounters which they perceive as being violent. The above mentioned authors works could be



found fascinating since they investigate further than the hard materiality of such violent legacies that should not be forgotten.

### **2.8.3 Otherness, subalternity and stereotypes in postcolonial discourse**

Challenging the consequences of colonialism on cultures is the definitive aim of postcolonialism and these consequences include otherness, subalternity and stereotypes. It is also not merely apprehensive with recovering former worlds, but finding out how the world can progress further than this period together, in the direction of a place of reciprocated esteem. Postcolonialist theorists acknowledge the fact that a lot of the postulations which lie beneath the sense of colonialism are in spite of everything dynamic forces today. Revealing and deconstructing the xenophobic, royalist nature of these suppositions will take away their power of influence and persuasion and intimidation. Acknowledging the fact that they are not basically simply airy objects but that they have extensive material effects for the nature and scale of worldwide inequality, makes this assignment all the more urgent.

Making sure several voices are heard is a major goal of the postcolonial theorists. This is particularly factual of those voices that have been formerly put to silence by domineering dogmas. It is extensively established inside the debate that this space must first of all be cleared within the academic world. Saïd (1978) is actually the person to offer an understandable image of the methods social scientists; explicitly, Orientalists can take no notice of the standpoint of those they really study. Saïd maintains that the people, as an alternative, prefer to rely on their intellectual supremacy and that of their peers.

Furthermore, postcolonialism aims to reconsider and to pull down weary and biased ways of thinking in a vivacious dialogue of colonisation. These mind-sets could be characterised into three major areas:

- (i) The World with the us-other mentality (Otherness), dehumanisation of colonised peoples (Subalternity) and distorted world view (Stereotypes).

(ii) Nation with value shifts, loss of identity and challenges to faith, language and politics.

(iii) Self with dehumanisation of self, inability to support/protect self/family and self-doubt.

To ignore the aspects of realism in texts that have been examined by literary critics as either postmodern in one hand or a sort of humanism on the other hand has been the postcolonial theoretical inclination. Susanne Baker makes a case that the yearning to study realism out of a novel is commonly an eroticising scheme carried out by an audience who are not initiated in the patterns of a specified culture, despite the fact that the craving to scan through the plurality of the fictional story is as expected frequently stirred by a longing to study beyond a colossal global view. This view positions the postcolonial field of study on a point of alterity. An idea like this is unavoidably rooted on the basis that this kind of realism strengthens such a monumental opinion.

## **2.9 Social realism and socio-historical writings**

Realism is a theory that pictures life as it really is. The first time it started in French literature was when authors were affected by the social and historical changes that happened because of the scientific discoveries, industrialised revolt, the increasing intellectuality and the quest for broader understanding in all fields of life that came into view. Writers from formerly colonised countries use realism to present a critical depiction of their everyday problems. These countries were those that in reality make use of the term for the representations of daily crisis in response to its predecessors. Without doubt, loads of postcolonial writers do have enough awareness concerning the Western literary chronicle. They also have adequate political group, which makes it possible for them to create realist fictions that surpass its origin in the dissemination of an European feeling.

Realism in literature could be seen as the practice of fidelity to real life and a precise representation of it with no form of idealisation of it. Coles (2001:163) defines realism as thus:

Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively. In contrast to romance, this concerned with the bizarre and psychological in its approach to character, presenting the individual rather than the type. Often, fate plays a major role in the action.

According to Coles' (2001) position, the eighteenth century works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett are some of the major proponents of realism in English literature. During the middle of the 19th century, this theory was deliberately embraced as an artistic agenda in France. This was as soon as people became interested in documenting phases of modern-day society that were uncared for in the past. Towards the end of the 19th century, the realist accent on lack of involvement, together with thought through but controlled social assessment, turned out to be fundamental to the narrative. The word has also been used essentially to represent undue little details or concerned with unimportant, distasteful or filthy topics.

Literature as an art does have many threads that can weave it beautifully together. Every string has its personal significance in the innovative work. Likewise, there are diverse techniques of narration for literary stories. These narrative techniques include Realism. This is an approach that tries to portray life devoid of letting one's imagination run riot or idealistic subjectivity. Lagarde and Michard (2003) state that while realism is not narrowed to just one century or a collection of authors, it is usually associated with the French nineteenth century literary faction, in particular, the French novelists Flaubert, Emile Zola and Balzac. It was Mary Ann (George Eliot) and William Dean that introduced realism into England and United States of America, respectively. Realism as a theory has been mainly concerned with the day by day life in the midst of the middle and lower classes.

There was a line drawn by the 20th century predominant brand of literary criticism involving realist and the opposition literature, inserting realist works on one part of the line and imaginary works on the other extreme side. Notwithstanding this natural probing of the limits and creation of reality, the worldwide literary picture has been mainly consistent in its positioning of magical realism in the anti-realist class, by that means competing it with realist imaginary tale. Besides, the present significant atmosphere advances the separation linking realism and magical realism in the finest that it puts on magical realism at the detriment of the prior social realist tradition. This is deplored for manufacturing creatively underdeveloped stories that do not have any durable aesthetic worth. This pecking order and opposing divide of social and magical realism into the groupings of real and anti-real literature, respectively is very straightforward. This approach of letting go of social realist invented story has to be comprehended surrounded by the framework of the historical styles of literary appreciation as it moves together with the fading away of the Marxist review.

Social realism is a term drawn from the Russian instigated convictions regarding the role of literature in a ground-breaking socialist group. The characteristic of the international invention of social realist creative writing is faith in the strength of the word and also in the author's capacity to depict in a fulfilling textual approach the composition of social reality. However, this characteristic is now seen as naive by many critics. As earlier mentioned, social realism is motivated in numerous ways by the Russian insurrection, the Soviet communalism, the global Marxism and, of course, the necessity to react crucially and in a reproachful manner to the diverse methods of subjugation and the dissatisfaction of individual and communal desires. As opposed to presenting simply one or the other features of man and society, true realism portrays them as absolute units. It is not merely a resound, on the contrary it is the actual sound of a person, group of people or together the voice of their existence. Consequently, Anand (1979:5) a fictional realist, declares that he was confirmed in his hunch and that, unlike Virginia Woolf, he must confront the total reality, including its sordidness, if one was to survive in the world of tragic contrasts

between the exalted and noble vision of the blind bard Milton to encompass the eyes dimmed with tears of the many mute Miltons.

What gave rise to social realism in Europe were the political transformations. The nineteenth century European political improvement was promoted by social factors, for instance, the increase in literacy and particularly the growing force of the bourgeoisie as it turned out to be enfranchised to cast its vote and as it increased in financially viable standing as a product of commerce and mechanised enlargement. This growth produced better success for it and bigger suffering for the manual workers that were being exploited. A number of the most excellent works of literature became visible for the duration of this period because this change has pulled towards it all the extremely read individuals to concentrate on them. Starting from the mid 19th century forwards, an exceptional depiction of working stipulations is specified in realist narratives such as *Mary Barton* by Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dicken's *Hard Times* and Emile Zola's *Germinal*.

The main concern of social realism is the energetic analysis of life with the intention of substituting the reality on ground. Common themes of social realism include social injustice, racial injustice, economic hardship and putting the working class as heroes. During the nineteenth century in England, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Meredith and Thackeray made an effort in this particular course of changing the existing reality. Similarly in India, Sarat Chandra, Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand blazed the trail. Hindi and Indian English languages, respectively dealt with political harassment; however, they were eventually acknowledged.

The social realism theory in the precisely scientific and philosophic meaning has come up to us with the viewpoint of Marxism. The English novelists are near to socialist understanding of the close to socialist interpretation of the difficulties of their period even as a number of the Indian authors look as if they were totally manipulated by the leftish philosophy in the invention of their world of imaginary tale. One of the followers of social realism theory, in the person of Leo

Tolstoy, discloses that the actual world handed over for the purpose of art is also not capable

of the intention. Reality for the purpose of art is similar to only imagination. Models of arts that appear to be good to Tolstoy have been created by Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Eliot and others. Nevertheless, he attributes no value to his own preference. He, just like Charles Dickens and Anand, chooses the extinction of "art for art's sake" and confesses "art for ourselves".

Literature comes out of life and documents human visions and thoughts, expectations and desires, breakdowns and dissatisfactions, motivations and zeals, along with human experiences and remarks. Literature, over the years has replicated the predominant collective concerns in countless renowned literary works beneath the shade of realism. Social reality is one part of the image in realism, although it cannot be secluded as if it were a body by itself. This means that it cannot be removed out of the framework of the universal cultural prototype of a period. Yet, there existed sincere efforts to create again events from distinguished literatures of the past ages. At this juncture, it is as well vital to note that the rapid advancement of the contemporary age with its recent technology is escorted by extensive transformations in cultural direction. The economic phase of living is totally fashioned in another way, because of the current states of industrial yield, although world peace is upheld at the periphery of the abyss. The modifications spread beyond those that commemorate the surge of the era of capitalism above the rot of the feudal command. Consequently, it is suitable to take a note of how that new age acts in response to its past literature and that is why realism is not anything other than the feedback of the past and a valid depiction of life in opposition to the idealist image of Romanticists.

Lewis (1961) states that there exists really more than one type of realism, including realism of presentation, psychology realism, realism of content and moral realism. A novel can be realistic in a way and at the same time not realistic in an alternative logic. Lewis (1961) distinguishes realism of presentation, which he also calls

"presentational realism" from realism of content. He makes it clear that realism of presentation depends on how things are portrayed to people. According to him, if

they are presented or depicted in detail, if we get a clear sense of how they look, feel, taste or smell, then we are dealing with some kind of presentational realism. He posits that if realism of presentation is expressed through physical description, then realism of content is put across through the plot. Lewis equally maintains that the work is realistic in content if the occurrences of the plot look true to life, the type of thing that possibly will really occur to people.

However, psychological realism, according to Lewis (1961), is intimately attached to the way characters are treated and developed. He explains that what a psychological realist does is to try to hand over an influential explanation of how the personages think and feel. To Lewis, psychological realists frequently track down emotions back to former incidents, which suggest that the human character suggests that the human personality is shaped in infancy and near the beginning of teenage years. Alternatively, works of moral realism do not demand from people to bestow ethics, they only want individuals to go above snap verdicts. Examples of types of questions asked by works of moral realism include: "How can you be aware that individuals do not have nice explanations for doing things that are not good?" and "Why are you so sure that you are not capable of doing those same things?" An example is taken from Chekov's *The Lady with the Dog* where Gurov does not really look like a bad man even though he lies and cheats on his wife, and also refers to all women as the lower race. He has no intent of harming somebody, not even his wife and at the end of the day, he portrays himself as having the ability to love, forgive and to show empathy. Thomas Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* is another example. The novel starts with a horrendously morally wrong act; the major character sells his wife to another man after getting drunk. All through the narrative, he tries his best to redress this particular scene and to make up for what he did but in the end, he does not succeed. In spite of everything, he acknowledges his wrong doing and he tries to make it right. Lewis (1961) furthermore, states that each type of realism is linked to a

dissimilar characteristic or trait of the work. While realism of presentation is connected to the purpose of description, realism of content is related to plotting and

just as psychological realism is associated to characterization, moral realism is linked to judgement.

Moreover, realism is a product of history. This is so because apart from the writers' ability to formulate stories, they have to be inspired by a reason and motivated by nearby issues that can lead to their inventive fabrication. Owing to this, the foundation of their works has to be on a real, truthful and precise happening. This should be in supplement to connecting their philosophies and their personal remarks to add power to the work and not just bring it down to a documentary act of historical footage. Realism also covers range of significances. It has as well been used to exemplify uncommon writers. It is important to understand the fluidity of the word as a historical category and its numerous local variants across time and among writers. Realism could be viewed as both a particular historical time and as a far more extensive modus operandi that performs a role in various ways in the majority of the novels.

While discussing social realism, a socialist community, socialist understanding and socialist interpretations were mentioned and this brings up the idea of socialist realism. One should not confuse social realism with socialist realism. The latter tries to build socialism and a classless society. A socialist realist could admit imperfections but is also expected to take a positive and optimistic view of the socialist society and keep in mind its larger historical relevance. Socialist realism identifies the problems in a society and looks for a way of solving these problems while social realism identifies the problems without proposing any solution. This study will be using social realism because Sebbar in her works represents the causes of a hybridised identity but never proposes any solution on how to avoid having a hybridised identity.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ALGERIAN WAR IN SELECTED NOVELS OF LEILA SEBBAR**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter analyses the context of the Algerian war and its consequences as represented in selected works of Leïla Sebbar. The writer's depiction of such concepts as home, immigration, racism, culture, exile, conflict of identity, search for identity and assimilation as related to setting and the characterisation of the text is examined. Also the condition of the immigrant North African families, the source and by products of immigration and the writer's attempt to use young male and female protagonists born after the Algerian independence, who have almost similar characteristics as hers, in order to achieve her aim are critically explored.

#### **3.1 Algerian War in the texts**

Leïla Sebbar's literary works, just like many of the Maghrebian writings of Algerian origin, are concerned with the Algerian war, which reveal the socio-historical reality of the Algerian and North African society as a whole. The motif of the Algerian war takes a very important place in the novels of Algerian writers since 1963, that is to say after independence; close to 23% of the novels are entirely about the war, while 12% have at least a chapter talking about it (Déjeux,1994). These writers not only write about the war fought in order to gain independence, but they also talk about the

consequences of these wars, such as racism, exile, conflict of identity, loss of identity, search for identity, assimilation and many other themes.

According to Alexander, Evans and Keïger (2002), the pied-noir writer and specialist of the Second World War and the Indochina war, Jules Roy, may have been referring to Algeria when he asserts that it was barely important going to war against the Nazis only to turn to the Nazis of Indochina. He states because he perceives the French soldiers act like Nazis in Algiers. According to Stora (1993), the Algerian war and the Indochina war were the toughest wars of French decolonisation. This shows how brutal and deadly the Algerian war was.

Stora (1993) states that the Algerian war which started in 1954 and ended in 1962 with the independence of Algeria was the most violent and protracted decolonisation struggle of the twentieth century. This war continues to be fought in the official, the academic, and the artistic and popular circles both in France and in Algeria. Alexander, Evans and Keïger (2002) note that in France, the contested legacy of the conflict variously described as a revolution, police operation, war, civil war, or simply "the events" has shaped debates about colonisation, torture, immigration, Islam, democracy and multiculturalism. They remark that in Algeria, the war fuels controversies about historiography, censorship, and state legitimacy and repression. Alexander, Evans and Keïger (2002) also argue that while the Algerian war undeniably remains an iconic emblem of anti-colonial resistance around the world, it also violently opposed The Front de Libération National Algérien (FLN) and The Mouvement National Algérien (MNA) supporters, independence fighters and harkis, pro- and anti-French Algerian militants, among others, making it a civil conflict in more ways than one. As many critics such as Alexander, Stora, Déjeux and Evans have noted, it is also a battle of ideas fought through in fictional and non-fictional books, films, memoirs and essays. Far from being a bloody episode of the recent past, the Algerian war is thus constitutive of both Fifth Republic France and contemporary Algeria, and a point of entry into French and Algerian literature, popular culture, and intellectual history.

The dispute between France and Algeria is not merely about war as the operations of the military, it includes also clashes over objectives, opinions, allegiance, awareness

and customs. The French colonial masters not only took over Algeria but also tried to force their culture on the Algerians through their politics of assimilation. These colonial masters advocated ethnic abhorrence and religious extremism as well as the unfair terrorism of a one party despotism. The French colonial masters, to gain the empathy of the people, became medical practitioners, managers, water irrigation project executives, administrators of the local economy and also those who protected them. They, in addition, became members of the police force, judges and exterminators. Alexander, Evans and Keïger (2002) establish that inside the Algeria that had just got their independence, the war was hyped as a tussle for nationwide emancipation. The champions were the common populace who had come together behind the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). The war was pronounced as a war of one and a half million sacrificial victims, the number that was formally declared by the FLN to have been killed by the French between 1954 and 1962 before the independence of Algeria.

Owing to the war, Algeria regained nationwide independence and an Arabo-Islamic identity. These happened to be the exact connotations given to the war after independence and it turned out to be the original pictures of the new Algeria. After 1962, instructions in schools in Algeria were strictly supervised by the authority. Prominence was put on the eruption of the nationalist action on the 1st of November, 1954 and the position of the FLN. No attention was mainly paid to the input given by all the competing organisations such as the Mouvement Nationaliste Algérien (MNA) and the Parti Communiste Algérien (PCA). The Algerians were continuously reminded that those who were involved in the fight and who afterwards took over power were the guardians of historical memory. That the Algerians had come together as one behind the revolution was the leading image circulated by the present government.

If really the winners had written any story, the chronicle of wars would be a typical case. When it comes to the Algerians, the Algerian war is fundamental in their history due to the fact that the war led to their independence. Maybe, without the

war, the Algerians would still be colonised by the French. Nonetheless, this is usually simply the primary stage of a sequence of Historicisation. Every age group has its particular classic position on a past that has become unavoidably and lawfully further challenged as time goes by. Wars frequently appear to be decisive to the age group participating in it. However, to the subsequent age group, the result appears to be less long-lasting. A general idea is how what the Algerian war means and signifies have been subjected to incessant modernisation and re-organisation. What has been a combat zone with the rival groups and individuals is the reminiscence of the Algerian war. These people try to possess the public area, print and publicise media to launch their own account of the past. It is against this backdrop that the study interrogates Sebbar's representations of the Algerian war and its aftermath on the Algerian identity.

On the 17th October, 1961, just a little while ahead of French official recognition of the independence of Algeria, about thirty thousand Algerian nationals, both adults and children, organised a peaceable protest within the Paris polity. This demonstration was to dispute an embargo imposed on the North Africans alone. The comeback by the police force was brutal, further than one hundred Algerians were executed; thousands were brutally injured and detained, while about one thousand five hundred were extradited. In spite of that, not until the 1990's, this event concerning the massacre of Algerians in the streets of Paris practically vanished from the public memory.

However, Sebbar's *La Seine Etait Rouge* restates the account of this aggression through the recollections of her characters and the response of the youths whose parents witness the challenge. The novel is centred on the happenings of 17th October, 1961; this event takes place in Paris between the Algerians and the French police. Sebbar declares: "Ils appelaient à la manifestation du 17 octobre 1961. Une

manifestation pacifique pour protester contre le couvre-feu imposé aux seuls Algériens par le préfet de Paris, Papon..."(They were recalling the demonstration of 17th October, 1961. A peaceful demonstration to protest against the curfew imposed

only on the Algerians by the prefect of Paris, Papon...) (Sebbar, 1999:42). Sebbar makes it clear that she talks about this particular aspect of the struggle of the Algerians against French domination. On that particular day, many Algerians lose their lives in what is a peaceful protest they embark on to express their displeasure against oppressive policies of the French. For instance, they are banned from going out at night, while the French citizens could go out at anytime they felt like it. This does not go down well with the Algerians so they decide to protest against it. The fact that the Algerians are banned from going out at night while the French nationals could move about anytime is dehumanising; it is also a sign of the *us-other* mentality. The Algerians are seen as Subalterns and are also Stereotyped as being violent which led to the French police's attack even when they, Algerians, come in peace. By trying to impose curfew on the Algerians alone the French present themselves as superior beings, while the Algerians' protest against the idea is an act of social identity. The Algerians, by their protest, challenge the idea of inequality presented to them by the French. They insist and challenge the unequal society where they live in and at the end they achieve their aim of independence.

In *Mon cher fils*, Sebbar refers to this same event of 17th October, 1961 in Paris. Even though the novel is not entirely about the war, Sebbar depicts one or two things concerning the Algerian war and its aftermath. The narrative portrays fathers who witness the war and as a matter of moral value, do not wish to torment their children with stories of the war. On this point, Alma accuses her father and grandfather to which the father replies thus:

Mais, toi, père, tu ne m'as pas parlé de ces années-là, ni grand-père et ... Il ne parlera plus... Je sais ma fille, je sais, J'ignore ce qui t'intéresse, cette guerre ... Si les enfants ne cherchent pas à comprendre, à savoir, s'ils ne posent pas de questions, comment leur raconter sans les ennuyer, comment dire plus juste, avec des mots

simples et précis, des mots qui les touchent des histoires de guerre, de camp, d'exode et de mort qui ne sont pas leurs histoires? Comment? (Sebbar,2012:59)

But you father, you did not tell me about those years, neither did grandfather and... he will no longer tell me... I know my daughter, I

know, I ignore what interests you, this war... If the children are not searching to understand, to know, if they do not ask questions, how can one tell them without bothering them, how can one say correctly, with simple and precise words, words that touch the histories of war, camp, exodus and death which are not their histories?

Alma's father explains why he felt it is not necessary to talk about their painful past since their children never bothers to ask. To him, talking about the war might traumatise the children due to the gravity of the events that take place during the war. He is also of the view that if he wants to talk about it, he may not find the right words to use in explaining the situation. Alma's father's refusal to talk about the war with his daughter and his excuse of not wanting to hurt her with the truth is a social reality. Parents tend to keep things from their children with the excuse of "trying not to hurt them". If these parents have their way, they would not mind changing the existing reality just like social realism, which has to do with the vigorous interpretations of life with the aim of altering the reality in existence.

Sebbar makes reference to the Algerian war of independence in *La jeune fille au balcon* which is a collection of six short stories. In "La photo d'identité", she recounts the experience of a young boy Yacine, who loves to watch war movies. Yacine's mother who witnesses the Algerian war detests his love for war films. The trauma she witnesses during the war is so much that she would want to have nothing to do with war again. This is a typical example of social reality; parents who witness a war would never want their children to go through a war especially if they are at the receiving end during the war just like the Algerians. At the bookshop, Yacine sees some pictures of women during the Algerian war and he wonders why there are only women in them: " La guerre d'Algérie? Pourquoi que des femmes?" (Algerian war? Why are there only women?) (Sebbar, 1996:72). At this point, the bookshop manager wants to remove the pictures but Yacine pleads with him not to. When

asked if he is interested in the Algerian war, Yacine replies: "Je ne sais pas. Oui... non... mon père me dit rien. Quand je lui demande, il répond pas..." (I don't know. Yes... No... my father told me nothing. When I ask, he doesn't answer...)(Sebbar, 1996:73). It would appear that Yacine loves wars and so loves watching war movies

but he is apparently a bit confused when it comes to the Algerian war. The image of the war looks remote and exotic. He, therefore, becomes curious and perhaps anxious to know some truths about the war fought in his country by his forefathers, hence his love for war films.

"Couché dans les maïs" is another story from Sebbar's *La jeune fille au balcon* (1996). The story is about a family living in war torn area. Anytime they listen to the radio or watch the television, the only thing they hear are stories of demolition, problems, explosions and war.

In "L'Enfer", Sebbar presents the irony of the Algerian war, where some Algerians have to fight against the cause of their people. A young man's father whose name is not mentioned is one of those who, during the Algerian war, work for the French military: "Il m'a dit que mon fils travaillait avec l'armée française, les soldats ennemis" (He told me that my son worked with the French army, the enemy soldiers) (Sebbar, 1996:138-139). The young man's grandmother talks to him about his father. She explains to him how his father, her son, decides to betray his country by joining the French army. Her husband, that is, the young man's grandfather is also involved in the war but he fights for Algeria and when the war ends, he comes back home but his son, the traitor, out of shame, could not return home (Sebbar, 1996:127). The young man whose father joins the French army and whose grandfather defends Algeria also complains that his father never tells him anything concerning the Algerian war (Sebbar, 1996:125). It is his grandmother who decides to tell him at last why his father refuses talking about the war with him:

Tu sais pourquoi ton père ne t'a pas parlé de sa guerre, et pourquoi il ne revient plus au village, dans la maison de sa mère. Je ne lui ai pas interdit le retour au pays, c'est lui, les amis d'enfance encore vivants, ceux qui n'ont pas traversé la mer pour l'autre pays, les autres femmes,

ces hommes qu'il a trahis, il a peur du silence, du regard détourné, des pas qui ne s'arrêtent plus pour le salut de bienvenue (Sebbar, 1996:139).

You know why your father did not tell you about his war, and why he never comes to the village anymore, to his mother's house. I did not forbid him to come to the village, it is himself, his childhood friends

who are still alive, those who have not crossed the sea for the other country, the other women, those men that he betrayed, he is afraid of silence, of indirect looks, of people not stopping to say the usual welcome.

The Algerian citizens, who during the Algerian war decide to work for the French army instead of working for their country, are popularly known as the Harkis. The man in question here, refuses to talk to his son about the war and, according to his mother, he never speaks about the war because he does not know how to tell his son that he has betrayed his country. The man who fights for France against his own country does so because he wants to belong to the more powerful side. He categorises/defines France as being 'more powerful', while Algeria is the "less powerful". After the war, all the Algerians who join the French army refuse to go back to Algeria just like the young man's father in "L'Enfer". This is an example of social reality because people, who betray their countries are either killed, imprisoned or they go on exile to avoid being captured. Sebbar reveals that the war has several consequences both for France and for Algeria.

### **3.2 Discourse on the consequences of the Algerian war**

The Algerian war was not without consequences both for France and Algeria. According to Alexandre, Evans and Keïger (2002), the more the complications of the Algerian war are looked into, the more the questions about the experiences of the Algerian race become more imaginative, and those experiences seem to appear more ambiguous. They also maintain that the war was occasionally petrifying, sometimes thrilling and from time to time absolutely unexciting. They claim that major sweeps were carried out by some French soldiers and that during these sweeps; the soldiers thoroughly searched the land to see if they could find any enemy. These soldiers understood what real fear was and many of them experienced long boring nights on



quiet guard duties in the freezing desert. Some of the Algerians spent the war as internal refugees under armed guard, uprooted by the French military administration to resettlement camps (*centres de regroupement*) hundreds of kilometres from their homes.

Discourse on the consequences of the Algerian war could be examined from the political, psychological, social and cultural perspectives. It could also be a combination of any of these perspectives. A consequence could be both cultural and political. A cultural problem can lead to psychological consequence.

**(a) Political consequences of the Algerian war**

Politically, the Algerian war has consequences on the French and the Algerians. France lost its dominion over Algeria due to the Algerian independence which came with the end of the war in 1962. This is in line with the position of Stora (1992) that due to the war; Algeria has not only recovered its national sovereignty but also an Arabo-Islamic identity. According to Stora (1992), the Algerian war, on one side, made clear the birth of the Republic of Algeria, while, on the other side, it exposed a France in the dusk of her colonial power, trying to adjust with difficulty to the ordinary hexagonal status as she discovered once again her identity as an European power. Inside the newly independent Algeria, the war was seen just as a struggle for national liberation and those that fought the war were just ordinary individuals who had united behind the FLN. Stora (1992) also states that ironically, the rest of Africa benefitted from the Algerian war in the sense that the colonial administrators felt constrained to speed up a managed and comparatively peaceful decolonisation south of the Sahara from 1956. Yet, at that very moment the resolve of Algeria's own political future became ever more violently determined.

In *La Seine était rouge* (1999), Sebbar depicts the pre-independence event of 17th October 1961. This event claims the lives of many Algerians. The curfew imposed on only the Algerians, the peaceful demonstration by the Algerians against the curfew and the eventual killing of thousands of Algerians are all political. The

French treat the Algerians as second class-citizens which signifies otherness; thus they are not seen as equal to the "real French nationals" rather they are seen as subalterns, so they must be shown in one way or the other what they really are; hence, the curfew. The Algerians are tired of being treated as second-class citizens or even being treated as subjects. They want to be seen as real citizens because that is what

France promised them. They demonstrate against the curfew to show the French that they no longer want to be pushovers. To them, it is either an equal right or independence. The killings could be seen as a political consequence; hence France wants to use it to scare the Algerians. They think that by killing many of them, they could be able to keep the rest under control but it eventually does not work out that way.

Up till 2016, more than fifty years after, the Algerian war is still having its toll on the political axis of France. In an article written by Stephanie Trouillard on the internet site of FRANCE 24 titled "Le refus de la commémoration du 19 mars ou la nostalgie de la colonisation" on the 18th of March 2016, Trouillard discusses the decision taken by the French president François Hollande to pay homage to the victims of the Algerian war on the 19th of March which is the day the war ended. This decision by Hollande, does not go down well with the people from the opposition "la droite". Trouillard, Gilles Manceron, an historian, informs France 24 that for the opposition "La droite", this decision taken by Hollande, to reverence the victims of the war, on this particular date will only wake up the colonial ideology. He also says that even the former president of the Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, criticises Hollande's decision by explaining that the date is not accepted by all. The problem here is not that the president should not pay homage to the victims but that he should not do it on the day chosen by the Algerians.

According to the same article on France 24, former president Jacques Chirac has chosen 5th December in 2002 as the date for the commemoration of the end of the war and also the date to pay homage to the victims. The fact remains that this date chosen by Chirac has no historical background or meaning for the Algerians so they

have refused to use it. Could it be that some of the French still believe they have the right to tell the Algerians what to do and what not to do or is this just another political stunt from the opposition? It is believed that France as a nation still sees itself as superior to Algeria and this is a major aspect of postcolonialism: the us-other mentality (otherness), dehumanisation of colonised peoples (subalternity) and

distorted world-view (stereotyping). That is why some of them find it difficult to believe that the French president could agree with the Algerians to honour the victims of the war on a date that is not accepted by "all". 'All' here definitely refers to the French alone.

### **(b) Psychological consequences of the Algerian war**

The war has some psychological effects on both sides. For the French side, the events in Algeria, which took place between 1954 and 1962, involving France and Algeria were not officially recognised as a war until June 1999. These events, where many Algerians lost their lives, were described as counter-insurgency operations or as a law-and order predicament. The ALN units and the Algerians were tagged as outlaws, rebels, brigands and terrorists; they were also methodically and intentionally denied the status of warriors or combatants by French governmental and military discourse. This act of not recognising the Algerian war by the French nationals made the war to become a taboo officially in France. According to Stora (1992), one French recruit was told while he was being demobilised, that he has seen so many things in Algeria, so he should never discuss those things in France, because, according to them, revealing what he saw would only fuel the propaganda of the Communists and of bad Frenchmen, of the François Mauriac type. This is an example of social identity that tries to downplay the other side/group which is also what Edward Saïd's postcolonialism interrogates. The French soldiers who are involved in the war are tortured psychologically. They are not allowed to discuss freely their experiences of the war.

The Algerian side is not left behind when it comes to the psychological effects of the Algerian war. Sebbar tries as much as possible to portray these psychological effects of the war on her characters. In the four novels selected for the study, all the parents who witness the war are not willing to talk about it. This is because of the psychological trauma caused by the war. In *La Seine était rouge*, Amel's mother and grandmother refuse to tell her about the war and whenever they want to discuss the war, they speak Arabic because they know Amel does not understand Arabic. In

*Mon cher fils*, the young lady Alma also complains that her father never tells her about the war. The father replies by telling her that the story of the war is not a pleasant one. One of the short stories in *La jeune fille au balcon* "L'Enfer" is about a young man whose father does not tell that he works for the French army during the war. His mother lacks the courage to tell him the story of his father's betrayal; at the end it is his grandmother that explains it all to him. In "La photo d'identité", Yacine also complains of his father's refusal to tell him anything about the war. The argument here is that all these older generation Algerians that witness the war refuse to talk about it, not because they hate their children, but because they do not want their children to be traumatised. Most of them are still in the colonial master's country, they would not want their children to hate the owners of the country where they live in. They know for sure that the war story, if told, will definitely affect the new generation psychologically just like it affects those that witness it.

To buttress the psychological effects of the war on the Algerians, the Franco-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira (2003) shows a video taped conversation between herself and her mother in Arabic and French in which the artist's mother recounts her experiences during the Algerian war. The central event in the mother's narrative is the forced photographing by the French Paratroopers of Algerian women in her village in order for the occupying army to issue the insurgent indigenous population with identity cards. If the violence of this act was undeniable, the French army wanted a photographic inventory of women who would not normally show their faces to male strangers in a rural culture where the photograph was considered a

threat to the soul. Sebbar portrays those Algerian women who lose their minds because they are photographed by strange men. In "La photo d'identité", the old man who meets with Yacine at the bookshop tells Yacine that his mother loses her mind because she is forcefully photographed by a French soldier during the war.

**(c) Cultural consequences of the Algerian war**

Another consequence of the Algerian war could be seen in the cultural perspective. In her novels, Sebbar makes mention of those who betray Algeria during the war by

joining the French army. In "L'Enfer", the young man's father is one of those who betray Algeria during the war and because of this betrayal; he has refused to come home to his family. He does not want people to point fingers at him or saying unpleasant things to him. Culturally, he has made himself an outcast, just for betraying his country during the war. Not only the Algerians betray their country during the war, in *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar depicts the French people who betray their country by supporting the Algerians. Louis' parents are part of those who betray their country and the mother Flora ends up in prison during the war. Flora is one of the anti-colonial activists who make sure their voices are heard during the Algerian war.

Some women in the Islamic culture do not show their faces to men who are not their husbands. During the Algerian war, some French soldiers force some of the Muslim women to remove their veils so as to take their pictures. This unveiling of faces by these women is against their cultural belief, some of them lose their minds because of it. An example of those women is the old man's mother in "La Photo d'identité", the man tells Yacine that his mother loses her mind after a French soldier forcefully takes a picture of her. The photographers are sent to Algeria in order to take pictures of all Algerians by the French government. These pictures taken are to be used for identity cards. What the French government fails to understand is that the Algerians also have their own cultural beliefs. They, the French, try to impose their own culture on the Algerians and that is why even the veiled women are forced to unveil

themselves for the photographer. "La Photo d'identité" deals with the idea of social identity where Sebbar tries to portray how people characterise themselves as part of a social group and also people defining who they are as functions of their similarities and differences with others. The old man's mother in "La Photo d'identité" and the other Algerian women define who they are when they refuse to be photographed by the French photographers. They portray their culture which does not allow another man that is not their husbands see their faces. Nevertheless, the French photographers force them and take pictures of them and these results to a psychological breakdown of the women.

**(d) Social consequences of the Algerian war**

The war has some social effects on both the French and the Algerians. The Algerian parents who witness the war but decide to keep the details to themselves are seen as hiding information from their children. This eventually causes a social rift between the old generation and the new generation Algerians as seen in *La Seine était rouge* and some other novels of Leïla Sebbar. Amel in *La Seine était rouge* at a point accuses her mother and grandmother of punishing and making jest of her: "Tu me punis parce que je ne connais pas la langue de ton pays ou si mal que tu te moques de moi?" (You are punishing me because i do not know your country's language or too bad if you are making jest of me? (Sebbar, 1999:14). Amel cannot speak Arabic and each time her mother and grandmother want to talk about the Algerian war they speak Arabic, knowing fully well that Amel does not understand. This act of speaking a language that Amel does not understand in her presence makes her feel that her mother and grandmother are playing on her intelligence. She is aware they are hiding something from her and as each day passes, she gets more and more anxious to find out what it is they are hiding. In the short story "L'Enfer", the young man's mother has to lie to him about his father being a member of the group that betrays Algeria during the war. The woman lies to her son because she does not want her son to see his father as a traitor, she feels it might traumatise the boy if he realises that his father is a traitor.

From the French social perspective, they make sure that they hide most of the evidence pointing to how brutal they are to the Algerians during the war. There are some revelations about the singular lack of photographic images emerging from the insurgents' side of the conflict, a gap in Algerians' visual reality. Stora (2004) posits that access to photographic coverage of the Algerian war is still extremely limited and largely skewed. Gurrin (2004:19) equally states that:

Le fait central est que nous avons une masse de photos françaises et très peu de photos faites par des Algériens. L'ennemi est de ce fait invisible ... On ne voit pas, ou très peu, les exactions commises par

des Français, alors qu'on voit très bien celles commises par des Algériens. (Gurrin, 2004:19)

The key fact is that we have a huge pile of French photos and very few Algerian ones about the Algerian side. The enemy is thus invisible ... You do not see or hardly at all see the atrocities committed by the French, whereas those by the Algerians are clearly evident.

The injustice the French mete out to the Algerians is enormous, even pictures taken during the war are uneven. They do this to make themselves feel less guilty of the atrocities and killings they perpetrate during the Algerian war. This same imbalance in the photographic work can also be seen in Leila Sebbar's short story "La photo d'identité", which is a literary chronicle of the Algerian war and how the young Franco-Algerian children who never witness the war try to find out what actually happens.

Sebbar portrays how her protagonists search for their Arabic roots with themes like immigration, racism, culture, exile, transculturation, acculturation, conflict of identity, search for identity and assimilation. These themes are also seen as some of the consequences of the war.

### **3.3 Rootlessness and otherness: search for Arabic origin**

Search for identity is part of the post-colonial author's challenge. Most of the protagonists in Sebbar's works most often second generation Algerians, are seen searching for information about the Algerian past. Both those who are born, raised

and living in France and those who are born, raised and living in Algeria tend to be oblivious of this past. This generation of Algerians will look into any evidence seen around in order to be informed about the past and this will definitely help them to define their identity.. For instance, Yacine in "La photo d'identité" intends to use some photographic evidence of the Algerian war seen in a bookshop to decipher the past. Not only do captions become critical given anonymity and propagandist aims of the images, but so do the moment and overall context in which the photographs are shown and seen. It could even be argued that re-representations of photographs alter radically, if not totally the meaning and significance of each image

"La Photo d'identité" narrates the attempts of Yacine, a young man of Algerian parents who clearly knows nothing of his homeland to find out more about the Franco-Algerian past and his place in it. In her 1997 interview with Dominique Le Boucher Sebbar opines: "L'image c'est ce qui reste quand tout a disparu" ("Image is that which remains when everything else has disappeared")(Laronde, 2003:160). Thus, even when the older generation that witnesses the war refuses to tell the younger generation its experiences, there are images/photos taken during the war that can retell the story. In this scene, it is not a story about memory as such because the man is very young and he does not witness any of the events of the past. The story is about access to the past and a need for history. With all his family and friends seemingly conspiring to deny him access to his past, Yacine sees a book of pictures called *Femmes algériennes* (1960) in a bookshop window. Later, it is revealed in the book that the author/photographer is Marc Garanger and a friend of the bookshop owner: "Il lit le nom du photographe. Marc Garanger. Un nom Français" (Sebbar,1996:72). (He reads the photographer's name. Marc Garanger. A French name). This is the main point of the short story, a pun on the "Photo d'identité" suggests not only the photo of the women displayed in the bookshop, but also that the boy finds in the photo, at least, some sort of access to the drama of his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents as Algerians living through the war. Yet this seemingly secondary meaning of the title "The search for Yacine's identity via a photograph" is, in fact, the more obvious meaning in the story. It also indicates



that the novel represents how Sebbar's protagonists search for their Arabic roots through any available means, in the case of Yacine, through photographs.

The hidden, more painful and thought provoking aspect of the story is found in the various actions of the mysterious man who joins Yacine at the window and in his subsequent story and final act. The man comes to the bookshop almost every day and each day he comes, he looks at the pictures displayed by the window, the bookshop owner says: "Il s'arrête presque tous les jours et il regarde les photos de la vitrine". (He stops by almost every day and he looks at the showcased pictures) (Sebbar, 1996:73). Later, the man confesses to Yacine that he is looking for the

photographer who takes all the pictures (Sebbar, 1996:75). The man explains to Yacine that it is the same photographer who makes his mother to lose her mind after taking a picture of her. Finally, he manages to enter the bookshop, take the album where they have pictures of Algerian women, go through it until he gets to the picture of a young woman, he tears the picture into small pieces and throws the pieces into the fire. After all the act, he tells Yacine that he has finally killed the French photographer and that his mother will be sane and will recognise him as soon as he gets to his village. In terms of social and historical realities, the photographer, Garanger, actually exists in France and he is the one who takes most of the photos of the war. The man's tearing of and burning the pictures is a way of bringing closure to what has been tormenting him for a long time. Thus, in Sebbar's story, Garanger's photographs are indeed "identity photos" which refers beyond Yacine's own search for identity to a stolen or captured identity, but one which is then finally liberated.

This liberation is brought about by this mysterious man who appears beside Yacine outside the bookshop. It turns out that the man is seven years old during the Algerian war, probably Yacine's age now and is told by his grandmother that his mother has gone mad because the French soldiers force her to be photographed. The grandmother in Sebbar's earlier short story about Garanger's photography "La photographie" in Zimmermann (1992) also goes mad because of being photographed by the French army, and she describes graphically the shame and the curse which

she thinks will befall all those women who allow themselves to be photographed without the veil.

The man himself in "La Photo d'identité" is now deeply suspicious of all acts of recording on celluloid. He explains to Yacine:

Le photographe français, il était soldat, il a volé l'esprit de ma mère avec la photographie. Si tu prends l'image, tu prends l'âme et il reste seulement le corps, le visage, ils sont vides ... Fais attention, tu ne le sais pas, personne ne t'a appris. L'; image, le prophète a interdit l'image, il faut aimer Dieu, pas son image, tu comprends. Si on veut te photographier, tu dis non. (Sebbar, 1996: 76)

He was a French photographer, he was a soldier, and he stole my mother's mind with photograph. If you take the picture, you take the soul, all that remains is the body, the face, they are empty ... Watch out, you don't know, no one has told you. Pictures, the prophet forbade pictures, you must love God not his image, you understand. If someone wants to take a photograph, you say no.

The man explains to Yacine what his grandmother tells him about his mother, that she runs mad because she is forced to be photographed by a French soldier. He does not only tell Yacine his story but also advises him never to allow anyone to take a picture of him. According to the man, "if you take a picture, you take the soul". It is sometimes unimaginable how angry the average Algerian that witnesses or learns about the war gets. The man ends it by promising to take revenge on the French soldier photographer who takes his mother's picture thereby making her to go insane. At the end, Sebbar's protagonist Yacine finds the answers about his Algerian roots not from his family but from a stranger with the help of photographs taken during the Algerian war.

The protagonists' search for their Arabic roots is not only seen in "La photo d'identité" but also in some other works of Leïla Sebbar. Sebbar's novel *La Seine était rouge* (1999) is one of testimony, but it begins with a statement about silence: "Sa mère ne lui a rien dit, ni la mère de sa mère" (Her mother told her nothing, neither did her grandmother) (Sebbar, 1999:13). This opening sentence introduces one of the central themes of the novel: communication gap and silence within the

family. The central figure in the narrative, 16 year old Amel, complains that she wants to hear the truth, but her elders reply that the truth will only bring sorrow to her.

Amel's family is closely involved in the Algerian nationalism and the Front de Libération Nationale's (FLN) demonstrations of 17th and 20th October 1961. Noria, her mother, grows up in a town called La Folie in suburban Nanterre. Amel's parents and grandparents are reluctant to discuss the past with her. This reluctance is because they do not want Amel to hate the French society; hence, she lives there. There is a probability that Amel might hate the country of her birth (France) if she learns that

they massacre many Algerians who go on a peaceful demonstration, hence her mother and grandmother avoid telling her the story. Louis, Amel's friend, makes the same plea to his mother and receives vague promises that when she has time, she will tell him the story. Though in the end, both young people will hear the story not from their parents. Amel is not happy that her mother and grandmother would always discuss the past in Arabic language, a language she neither speaks nor understands. She sees it as deliberate strategy to deny her knowledge of what they know. The fact that Amel could not speak her mother tongue is a pointer that she has lost a vital aspect of her identity since cultural values and norms are embedded in and conveyed by the language. She is very conscious of this, hence the use of "... the language of your country" instead of "... the language of our country" (Sebbar, 1999:14). Amel's inability to speak the Arabic language is a social reality because most children born and bred outside their country find it difficult to speak their country's language. They would rather speak the language of their host country just like Amel.

Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* (1999) represents the most expressive model of narratives in connection with the events of 17th October, 1961. The novel deals with several complex and delicate subjects. The necessity to develop the idea of recollection of the events of October 1961 is not only what the novel is all about. The novel also deals with people and individual's tactical silence and how they

create and spread the silence. Nevertheless, Noria's silence to Amel, her daughter, is in contradiction to her reaction when Louis, a documentary film maker and son of Flora, a family friend, asks her about her experience. Noria could not tell her daughter her experience of the war but she is willing to narrate all she could remember to Louis, a friend's son, who also is not Algerian.

Noria's account comprises all the experiences she can recollect as a nine year old concerning the October 1961 demonstrations. Besides the 17th October, 1961 event, Louis' documentary is also to investigate his parents. He actually wants to understand why they decide to fight against their own country. During the war, his

parents help many Algerians, including Noria, to escape the police violence. Noria's declaration and that of some individuals who witness the events of October 1961 are spread all through the narrative. Amel and Omer, during their quest for the truth, enter a shop close to the Grands Boulevards, where the lethal police violence takes place on the 17th October, 1961. On getting to the shop, they start asking the shop owner some questions concerning the events of 17th October, 1961. She turns out to be a French lady who is not concerned by the happenings, even though she is in Algeria in October 1961. On the other hand, the declaration of an Algerian who works with her and who also is a spectator during the events as a sixteen-year old, further exemplifies the complex overlapping of personal and historical memory that today characterises many accounts of the October 1961 events.

The testimonies in the narrative emphasise not only French racism or unresponsiveness, in addition to the part played by the French colonial and postcolonial during the Algerian war of independence, but also the wrong idea that all Algerians support the FLN. The violence between the FLN and its bitter rival the Mouvement National Algérien, is heard all over the place, and, then, through the character of Omer, the misrepresentations and insufficiencies of estranging official narratives on the war in post-colonial Algeria is depicted. Omer, who is a journalist, and Mina, his mother and also a lawyer come to France in order to flee from radical Islamist violence and they have been living with their friend Flora. Collectively, the

geographical route followed by Amel's family as they come from Nanterre to protest in central Paris is retraced by Amel with the help of Omer. While on it, the two young stars decide to paint a substitute, contradictory commemorative declaration next to an official memorial inscription that marks major events of the Republican past. They do this so that they could highlight the different ways people feel and remember the postcolonial city. Place de la Concorde, in Amel's view point, calls to mind the subjugation that takes place on the 17th of October, 1961 at the metro station.

In their quest for their Arabic root, Amel and Omer's conversations are frequently centred on the notorious and responsive uncertainty of the possibility of terrible violence of the 1990s being a continuation of the Algerian war for independence. Supposedly, the violence is between some radical Islamist groups and the Algerian security forces. It can be submitted that the narrative tries to do a lot looking at its volume, which is not much. Then again, Omer and Amel's discussions on this subject of the Algerian war and violence and some other issues make them to acknowledge the fact that growing up in different countries, Amel in France and Omer in Algeria, their view on these questions of war and violence differ sometimes. However, Amel still prefers Omer to Louis as a possible partner, probably because she has the same Algerian root with Omer, while Louis is French. Again, they both (Amel and Omer) have the same objective, which is to discover their lost identity, an identity lost due to colonisation and migration.

Another story is also written in "L'Enfer" about the protagonists' search for their Algerian roots. "L'Enfer" is one of the six short stories in the novel *La Jeune Fille au Balcon*. At the beginning of the story, the young man makes it clear that his father did not tell him about his war (Sebbar, 1996:125). Just like in most of Sebbar's stories, he is also ignorant of what happens during the era of the colonial masters because his father is not there to tell him the story. His mother, on the other hand tells him his father's story in her own way, she lies to the boy because she does not

want to spoil the good memory the boy has of his father. However, the boy's grandmother refutes the story his mother tells him.

-Le petit-fils interrompt la vieille femme: Il a pris le maquis? Comme mon père? Ton père? Il a pris le maquis? C'est lui qui t'a raconté cette histoire? Et crois qu'il est monté au maquis pour se battre contre les soldats de la France, c'est ce que tu crois? -Mon père ne m'a rien raconté. C'est ma mère. C'est quoi la vérité? -Tu es grand. Tu dois savoir. Ton père est mon fils, mais je ne vais pas te mentir pour sauver son honneur. Son honneur, il l'a perdu, je le sais, je te le dis, tu dois savoir. Le silence de ton père, c'est le silence de la honte Ta mère, ta pauvre mère, elle a menti parce qu'elle ne pouvait pas dire la vérité à son petit garçon, au fils de son mari, à son premier-né, l'enfant chéri. (Sebbar, 1996:134)

-The grandson interrupts the old woman: He went underground? Like my father? Your father? He went underground? Was he the one that told you this story? And you believe he went underground to fight against the French soldiers, is that what you believe? -My father did not tell me anything. It was my mother. What is the truth? -You are grown. You must know. Your father is my son, but I am not going to lie to you in order to save his honour. His honour, he lost it, I know it, I am telling you, you must know. Your father's silence is the silence of shame. Your mother, your poor mother, she lied because she couldn't tell the truth to her little son, to her husband's son, her firstborn, the darling child.

The grandmother is furious because the boy believes his father's disappearance is for a noble cause, fighting for his home country against France, not knowing that his father leaves because he betrays his country during the war. We also see a woman just like any woman in reality who would not want to spoil her husband's memory in the presence of her son. The grandmother understands what the boy's mother does but she is not willing to do the same thing. According to her, the boy's father, who is also her son, loses his honour when he decides to betray his country by fighting for the colonial masters, so there is no need protecting an honour that has already been lost. The young boy who is confused with what the grandmother tells him could not help but try as much as possible to understand why his father decides to betray his people. He is confused and that is what makes him to decide to search for the truth by himself and to defend the honour of his father.

In *Fatima ou Algériennes au square*, Dalila the protagonist of the novel is born and bred in France just like every other Beur. She wants to learn about her root but her parents would not tell her the truth. Her father always talks to her about Algeria as if going there is a punishment: "L'Algérie était donc un pays de rééducation? Pourquoi les pères disaient toujours et parfois les mères, qu'ils allaient y envoyer le fils ou la fille qui leur donnait du mal". (Sebbar,2010:132) ("Was Algeria a country for re-education? Why were fathers saying always and sometimes mothers too that they were going to send the son or the daughter who was giving them problem there?"). Dalila wants to find out what Algeria is like before going there, even though it is

obvious that she does not like France either. She would go to Algeria but definitely not as a child. Dalila is a child who is interested in knowing her root, her language and her culture but she is being scared by her own parents. At the end of the day, Dalila decides to leave her parents house to go in search of her real identity. She does not want to be French; she does not want to be like her parents who are living like subjects in France. She wants to be Algerian but she must learn one or two things about Algeria before setting her foot there.

### **3.4 Conditions of the North African immigrant families in France before, during and after the war**

The conditions of the immigrant North African families in France are the social/living, political and economic conditions faced by them before the Algerian war, during the war and even after the war.

#### **(a) Social/living condition**

Leïla Sebbar, whose father is Algerian, tries to rebuild the world of immigrants like her in her narratives. Immigrants are marginalized and stereotyped in France. She projects these conditions in order to reduce her own individual experience as an immigrant in France. Eventhough Sebbar's mother is French, she is still regarded as

an immigrant in France because of her Algerian father. During the past decade, she has written seven novels that explore the world of the Beurs. These Beurs are those new generation of the Maghrebian immigrants, those who are born in France and who also live in the urban ghettos of France. Sebbar writes:

Ta mère n'avait pas le temps comme moi, dans la baraque du bidonville ... Le bidonville, tu m'as seulement dit qu'il se trouvait à l'endroit du grand parc ou vers l'université, je ne sais plus, de l'autre côté de la cité. Dis-moi, le bidonville, Nanterre, maman, et la vie ...c'était la guerre ... (Sebbar,1999:14).

Your mother never had the time like me in the shack of the ghetto ... The ghetto; you only told me it was located at the place of the big park or towards the university, I no longer know, the other side of the city.

Tell me about the ghetto, Nanterre, mama, and life ... it was the war ...

The above quote shows Amel asking her grandmother to talk to her about the ghetto called Nanterre, where they, her grandmother and mother, live before and during the Algerian war. The Arab-Berbers, colonised by France are the first and the most extensive to migrate from Algeria to France before the 1960s that is before Algeria's independence. According to *La Seine Etait Rouge*, Amel's parents are already living in France, even before the Algerian war which started in 1954, and they are still living there after the war.

*Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* depicts Ali who is offered a job in France after the Algerian war and who has no choice but to go with his wife. Ali and his wife Aïcha have five children and they live in one of the worst areas in France. They are on the verge of losing one of their children, Mustapha, because of their poor living condition:

Elle l'interrompt "Et Mustapha?" Il lui expliqua que tant qu'ils habiteraient l'arrière-boutique, Mustapha ne reviendrait pas. Il restera à l'hôpital tout seul? En observation a dit le médecin, un mois peut-être, on ira le voir. Après, le juge le placera dans une famille. (Sebbar, 2010:128)



She interrupted him "And Mustapha?" He explained to her that as long as they would be living at the back shop, Mustapha would not come back. Will he be staying at the hospital alone? In observation said the Doctor, a month maybe, we shall see. After, the Judge will place him in a family.

The doctor in the hospital where Mustapha is admitted makes it clear to Aïcha, Mustapha's mother that she would not go home with Mustapha, if they do not find a better place to live. This shows how bad their living condition is, for the doctor to be sure that a Judge will rule that Mustapha should be taken to a foster home if they do not find another place to live.

Even the youths who are born in France and who also live there are not left behind when it comes to racial discrimination and stereotyping, which are part of the social condition the Algerians find themselves in. Sebbar writes in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*: "Deux bandes rivales s'affrontaient ... D'un côté les Français et les Portugais ... de l'autre, les Arabes, Nord-Africains mélangés mais les Algériens étaient toujours les plus nombreux ..." (Sebbar, 2010:160). ( Two rival gangs were clashing ... In one side are the French and the Portuguese .. on the other side, the Arabs, North Africans mixed together but the Algerians were always more in number). These rival gangs in France distinguish two opposing sides: the French/Portuguese side versus the North-African side. The Portuguese are not French but just because they are Europeans, the French tend to see them as equal, so they join forces with them while the North-Africans are socially under them, probably because they colonise them.

Just before Algeria gained her independence from France in 1962, Algerian immigrants were not seen as leaving one country to enter another, since by the virtue of their being part of the French Union, they were French citizens. It is worthwhile to note that Algerians were French subjects and not French citizens for a very long

time before the decision to make them citizens during the Brazzaville conference that took place in 1944. The Algerians, after being named as French citizens, represent an important exception to the instituted French republican standard of having a combined nationality and citizenship. Algeria, just like the other French colonies, such as Mali, Senegal, Tunisia, Morocco, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritanie, Niger, Chad, Gabon, Congo and others made up a colonial territory that was fully an integral part of the French Republic. Nevertheless, being named French citizens did not stop the racial discrimination by the real French citizens, those from the metropolis. Dalila and her sister witness one of these discriminatory acts:

Dalila et sa sœur avaient assisté ce jour-là à des manifestations de haine raciale qui les avaient terrifiées ... Dalila ne connaissait pas tous ces mots que les femmes criaient d'une femme à l'autre, surtout une Française et une Martiniquaise que la Française avait d'abord prise

pour une Algérienne parce qu'elle avait la peau à peine colorée.(Sebbar,2010:75)

Dalila and her sister had witnessed that day a show of racial hatred that had terrified them ... Dalila did not know all those words that the women shouted one to the other, particularly a French woman and a Martinique woman whom the French woman first of all took for an Algerian woman because she had a skin that was barely coloured.

The French woman decides to attack the other woman just because she thinks that she is Algerian. That is pure racism, which is also social discrimination. Dalila and her sister are terrified to see such hate coming from the women, the hate they have for one another especially that of the French woman.

The second World War alters the French colonial climate. The fact that they are defeated and also, the loss of some of their cities contribute to the weakening of French colonial authority. Nationalist claims are favoured by this context. However, while Algerians are hopeful for a noteworthy improvement, or else absolute independence, the post-war Republican agreement in Paris decides to go in the alternative direction so as to invigorate the ruthlessly spoilt colonial grandeur of France. They decide to introduce some reforms in their colonies, one of these reforms is the one that grants Algerians full citizenship in metropolitan France and this

establishes free-for-all passage between France and Algeria. Nonetheless, Algerians, Arab-Berbers, are formally named French-Algerian Muslims, and this brings about an ethnically sub-category of citizens, which the Algerians never like. Without any doubt, Algerian immigrants coming into France have just left behind one colonial society to enter another, which is the municipal France, even though many of the immigrants see a considerable amount of social, cultural and linguistic differences to cope with. The French must find a way to show their superiority no matter what, and this points to postcolonialism and the us-other mentality of the colonial masters.

Famine and anti-nationalist repression are some of the reasons many Algerians have to migrate to France, hoping that they would be treated as French citizens. However, French people, being who they are, always feeling that they are superior to the Algerians, would always treat the migrants like the "Other". The living conditions of

the Algerian migrants are habitually awful. They could not afford better living conditions because they always do odd jobs that do not fetch them enough money. The only places they can afford because of their socio-economic status are the ghettos that grow around Paris, Lyons and Marseille as represented in *La seine était rouge*, "Le bidonville, il s'appelait: La Folie ... c'était le nom du quartier de Nanterre ... C'est mon village natal " (Sebbar,1999:33). (The slum, it was called: La Folie ... it was the name of the Nanterre neighbourhood ... it is the village where I was born). Amel's mother explains that she is born in Nanterre, in a neighbourhood called La Folie, she also makes it clear that the area is a slum.

While not more than one out of five Algerians in France most likely inhabited in these ghettos at any one time, they are frequently the first place of abode for migrants who have just entered France, especially those that come with their families and that is why many Algerians are familiar with these ghettos. These Algerians narrate the social shame that they face by living in such dirty conditions. However, these shanty-towns or ghettos are little communities of their own. The largest found in Nanterre outside of Paris is called Al-Qahira by Algerians.

As maintained by Jim and Neil (2006), oppressive strategy used by the police in France against the Algerians, information concerning the violence in Algeria and structural favouritism in the place of work, do not go down well with the Algerians. It is all these and also the constant effort to assimilate immigrants by force, that strengthen Algerians in the resistance to colonial rule and make them to start supporting the FLN as Sebbar represents in *La jeune fille au balcon* and *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*. In March 1958, Police commissioner, Maurice Papon, is sent over to monitor Paris from Algeria in reply to the FLN. Papon's move to Paris brings about an intensifying of tyranny made to intimidate all Algerians to submit to the colonial masters. Maurice Papon, while moving to Paris from Algeria, takes along with him some Algerians to help him fight the FLN in conjunction with the Paris police. The Algerians who fight their fellow countrymen with the French

police are known as the "Harkis". Sebbar foregrounds Harkis in her narratives, just like it is seen in the short story "L'Enfer" where the writer reveals the young man whose father betrays his country by fighting alongside the French army. There is a response by the FLN to Maurice Papon's curfew on only the Algerians in October 1961. They do this by arranging a boycott, which is in a manner of a peaceful demonstration which in the least involves 30,000 Algerian nationals. They march through the streets of Paris on the 17th October, 1961, a true life story that is recorded by Sebbar. The conventional aggression towards the Algerians by the Paris police is aggravated by FLN armed officers who attack and kill many of their colleagues. Paris police officers decide to seize the occasion to assault the innocent and peaceful Algerian activists, whose only sin is to have the courage to confront the French authorities for their racial and spatial segregation. Sebbar portrays that more than fifty Algerians are killed by the French security forces on the 17th October, 1961 and also over the following few days while in detention centres. They are shot, clubbed and drowned, and their bodies are usually thrown into the Seine: "On a jeté des manifestants dans la Seine" (The demonstrators were thrown into the Seine)

(Sebbar, 1999:47). More than a thousand are wounded, and over a hundred are seriously injured. The cruelty and the rather small-scale responses from the French government, reveal the conditions of the immigrant Algerians in France during this period.

France has to put up a more provisional work on immigration measures. This is a strategy that ensures families being together, they make sure that spouses and children of Algerian immigrant workers come join them in France, and they often demand that they be given a place to stay. Sebbar gives an example in her first ever full length work of fiction, *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square*, the story about Ali, who gets a job in France and has to take his wife along. This idea of allowing Algerian workers in France, to bring their families to come live with them in France considerably changed the profile of Algerian immigration. It marks the third stage of migration that is described by Sayad because a lot of Algerian immigrants make up

their minds to continue living in France even with the poor conditions as Sebbar depicts in all the narratives being used for this study.

Nevertheless, Algerian nationals in France keep on having grave difficulties concerning housing condition as seen in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square*. The only remaining shanty-towns are merely torn down in 1977. A lot of Algerians spend so many years in isolated provisional accommodation in make up buildings all through the 1960s, 1970s and even near the beginning of 1980s; Sebbar uses Ali and his family in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square* to buttress this. They stay in these places because the French authorities see the Algerians as being under developed to consent straight away to council housing. The public housing agencies go ahead to make a priority housing for French nationals, immigrants from Europe and about hundreds of thousands of European immigrants who leave Algeria after the independence. Spire (2005) maintains that police and welfare officials who are formally in Algeria or Morocco get employed to take care of the Algerian population. These officials bring with them approaches and systems that are used during the Algerian war and which are instigated in the 1930s. One can only

understand the origins of the social and racial isolation in France's poor neighbourhoods by studying these policies.

Moreover, the era linking 1975 and 1985 as well stands for a major intermediate decade. This decade ascertains the manner in which many formal and media dialogues keep on representing Algerian immigrants and their offspring. Dialogues like that single out a new generation, this new generation are the children of Algerian immigrants also known as Beurs. This makes the intricacy of age groups and the profile of Algerian migration seem so simple by depicting a harmonised migratory route of male migrants, who are followed behind by their wives and children during the 1960s and 1970s. This interferes with the actuality of migratory routes and histories, concealing the presence of immigrant families while the Algerian war is on. Again, discourses like that make young people look like they are problems, this discourse is highly gendered and it brings about the post-colonial

typecasting/stereotyping of Algerian young males as being criminals and also accused them of refusing to integrate into the French culture. Sebbar writes: "Ces Arabes ils font des gosses, ils les surveillent pas, ils s'en occupent pas ... C'est comme les rats. Y en a un, y en a dix" (Sebbar, 2010: 87). (These Arabs, they make children, they do not supervise them, they do not take care of them ... They are like rats. Where there is one, there are ten). This is one of the French women complaining about the North African parents and young men. The woman believes that they do not have home training and she insists that they are not good company for the French youngsters. On the other hand, the young women of Algerian descent are made to look passive and submissive, and can easily integrate into the French culture; for instance are Dalila, Kamila, Dina and Amel. These young ladies seem to have integrated into the French culture because of some of the attitudes they portray. They all leave home at a certain stage in their lives, Kamila marries French, and non-Muslim man that is not approved by her parents and normally an Algerian Muslim girl will never do any of these.

Furthermore, the aiming at young males, which, of course, is negative, has space dynamics being that it is centred on the public housing estates where most Algerians and their families stay. The major targets of such images are always the Algerians and their families, although these are done within the umbrella of immigrants, immigration or youths. The Algerian youths are singled out by the State to assimilate or integrate and even the Front national insists that Algerian youths could not assimilate into the French culture. These youths manage with the discrimination coming from the police and the judicial system and other sectors of the French society.

A major aspect of the Franco-Algerian nomadic dynamic is openly related to colonial heritage as recorded by Tom (2006). Close to a hundred thousand Algerian traitors, that is, those who betrayed Algeria by joining the French army, also referred to as the "Harkis", in 1962 came into France as they were running away from being killed by the Algerian nationalist sympathisers. Sebbar depicts this in the short story

"L'Enfer", the protagonist's father leaves home, not because the mother asks him to, but to avoid his people's wrath, because he fights against his people with the French army. Even though these traitors have the French citizenship, they have most times lived in remote camps in the country side with their families. They have also gone through the exact form of discrimination as the other Algerians who come for economic purposes. They are never given any preferential treatment, not even for the fact that they fight with the French army against their own country. Furthermore, their being in France establishes a basis for tension among the Algerian migrants and them, being that those migrants fully support the Algerian independence. In some of the small towns in France, the Algerians could not relate well socially because of the bad blood between them, the Harkis and those who support their country. In general, Saïd (2003) argues, the offspring of the Algerian immigrants have most times been the ones to inherit the aftermath of the Algerian war. They have been unsuspectingly caught up in the lasting effects of their parents and grandparents conflicts.

**(b) Political condition**

The political condition of the Algerians in France is not better than their social condition. The major players during the Algerian war of independence are the Algerian diasporas in France as represented by Sebbar in *La Seine était rouge*: "Une manifestation pacifique pour protester contre le couvre-feu imposé aux seuls Algériens par le préfet de Paris Papon" (A pacific riot to protest against the curfew imposed on only Algerians by the leader of Paris Papon) (Sebbar,1999:42). Algerian immigrants in France decide to fight against injustice and demand their right. This is a political condition as well as a social condition. The curfew set by the French government, for only Algerians is political in nature, in the sense that they want to show their authority and also show that they are the ones ruling and not the Algerians. It is also social because it shows that the French regard the Algerians as subjects and not citizens. France plays a political trick on their colonies, including the Algerians. They tell them that they would be citizens of France but with this

curfew made for only the Algerians, it is established that the French Union is really a deceptive union.

During the 1920s, France established some federal agencies whose duty was to politically control and monitor Algerians. This was done often from the side of the pretence of affectionate welfare measures in order to fight the growing threat from particularly, Algerian patriotism. An example of this could be seen in Sebbar's *Fatima ou les Algérennes au square*:

Le lendemain au square, les femmes avaient beaucoup parlé de l'incident, racontant souvent toutes à la fois ce qui s'était passé à des dates différentes dans leur bloc: cambriolages, descentes de police, incendies, viols dans les caves, visites des huissiers, poursuites de bandes rivales, règlements de comptes et parfois même arrestations. Chaque événement provoquait des scènes de violence avec injures, insultes contre les Nord-Africains, les Noirs...(Sebbar,2010:78),

The following day at the square, the women had talked a lot about the incident, often speaking, all at the same time, what had happened in



their block at different dates: burglary, police brutality, fire outbreaks, rapes in the cellars, visits from officers, hunts for rival gangs, settlement of accounts, and sometimes even arrests. Each event was provoking violence scenes with injuries, insults against the North-Africans, the Blacks ...

These women gather at the square to discuss the incidents happening where they stay. Incidents like burglary, rape, police brutality, attack from opposition gangs and arrests. These incidents are politically structured by the French government just to have power over the Algerians and to keep an eye on them.

### **(c) Economic condition**

The Algerian supporters of independence who belong to the National Liberation Front (Front de libération nationale) (FLN) are seen as they twist the colonial economic inequalities that have been structured among the metropolis and its colony to their own favour. They achieve this by contributing immensely to fund the bulk of their military campaigns against France by way of payment of taxes regularly; these

taxes were on only the Algerians in France (Sebbar, 1999:43). It also becomes a reality due to the fact that a gory internal war between rival Algerian nationalist groups has been fought in the following towns: Paris, Lille and Lyons by 1957 to 1958. This war is a rejoinder to the pro-independence and the massive police identity check procedures which had begun in the early 1950s that brings together exactly thousands of people on the streets. These people are pronounced Algerians by the French officials.

Male labour migration is initiated towards the end of the nineteenth century but it picked up the pace because of so many Algerians working in factories in France and those in the army during the First World War. With this, male labour migration turned out to be an instituted part of the colonial economy near the beginning of the 1920s. As represented by Sebbar in her works, most of the fathers are factory workers who come to France to work and make a living for their families. Noria, Amel's mother in *La Seine était rouge* talks about her father who is an "Ouvrier Spécialiser"

(Specialised factory worker) (Sebbar,1999:35), just like most fathers. According to Neil (1997), Algerians used to be France's most important immigrants. He establishes that immigration from the metropolitan France, Italy, Spain and Malta to Algeria did involve a guiding principle of land expropriation of the native populace. The land expropriation gradually scraped the customary economic, social and cultural composition of the Algerian peasantry. Neil (1997) also argues that the model of labour migration that exists in Algeria was extended to the metropolitan France.

Macey (2004) states that prior to 1945, Algerians migrating to France were just about entirely men. According to Macey, these men worked in factories such as coal mining factory, iron and steel factory and car manufacture factory, and most of them were in Marseille, Lyon, St. Etienne, Lille, Paris and its suburbs, including other industrial estates around Strasbourg. This is described by the sociologist Sayad (1997) as the "first stage" of Algerian immigration to France, and it was arranged by networks that were firmly controlled. During this time, migration was mostly

temporary, and it also made available necessary economic support to the impoverished Algerian villages. The Algerian men, who left their families behind to look for greener pastures in France, had to save every money they make so as to send it home to their families in Algeria. Sebbar represents such men in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* with Ali's uncle who lives and works in France while his wife and seven children stay in Algeria. This act of sacrifice by the men necessitated a high degree of economic self-sacrifice. A small number of these male immigrants, because of group solidarity and male honour, spoke openly of the undisputed sufferings caused by migration. Some well known singers such as Cheikh El-Hasnaoui expressed grief over exile; for this reason, he provides a channel for feelings of suffering.

The conditions of the Algerians living in France to a large extent portray others, subterfuge and stereotyping by France. Even the educated ones are not given any good job, as seen with Omer's mother: "... je ne travaille pas, une avocate algérienne à Paris, c'est une chômeuse ..." (... I do not work, an Algerian female lawyer in Paris,

is a jobless woman ...) (Sebbar,1999:21-22). To the French, she is not a real lawyer, since she does not study in France and besides she is also Algerian. It also shows how the French people dehumanise the Algerians living in France

### **3.5 Characterisation of post independence Algerian protagonists**

In most of Sebbar's works, she employs male and female protagonists. It is also observed that all these protagonists were born after the Algerian independence, which implies that they are all post-colonial children. *La Seine était rouge* represents the young Amel who lives in the remote area of Nanterre with her mother and grandmother. Amel is born in France by Algerian parents, thus, it can be said that she is beur. She does not know or speak her father's language neither does she know what happens between her home country and her country of birth because she is born after Algeria had already gotten her independence. In one of the short stories in the book *La jeune fille au balcon* also titled "La jeune fille au balcon", Sebbar uses the young Mélissa as the protagonist of the story. She lives in a dangerous part of

Algeria called Kaboul. She is not afraid of anyone and at the end of the day; she decides to find her own path and not to follow sheepishly the tradition of her people.

Another of Sebbar's short story titled "Vierge folle, vierge sage" has two female protagonists, the twins, Dina and Dora. They both live with their parents but later decide to leave their house in a bid to rediscover themselves and define themselves as members of a particular social group and eventhough they are twins, they chose different parts. *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* has Dalila as the protagonist. Dalila, at a young age, witnesses an act of brutality from her own father. She also decides to leave home so as to prove to her father that she can make it in life by herself. Alma in *Mon cher fils* is another female protagonist deployed by Sebbar. Her duty in the novel is to help the old man who misses his son to communicate with him. She herself misses her mother who lives far away.

In "La Photo d'identité", Sebbar uses Yacine, a young boy, born and raised in France by Algerian parents as her protagonist. Yacine, obviously is born after the Algerian

independence, which justifies his quest to know what actually takes place between his home country and his country of abode. The young man in "L'Enfer" whose name is not mentioned is also the protagonist of the story. He is born like others after the Algerian independence.

These Sebbar's protagonists' identities have been hybridised because of colonisation and migration. The ones living in Algeria like Mélissa refuses to be like her mother and aunts who do everything their husbands and religion order and the ones in France like Dalila, Yacine, Dina and Dora also reject most of the Algerian cultures being imposed on them.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Leïla Sebbar is one of the Algerians who though has mixed blood and is not totally accepted by her own people, still knows and believes that she is an Algerian. Her works portray the realities the Algerians have faced and are still facing. This chapter has been able to show how Sebbar portrays the Algerian war and the conditions of

the immigrant Algerians in France. Similarly, the chapter establishes how the Algerian children born and raised in France (the second generation Algerians, the beurs) react to the war when they find things out by themselves. These youths' identity have been hybridised by western education so they no longer accept all the Algerian culture has to offer. It equally foregrounds Sebbar's employment of male and female protagonists who are born after the Algerian independence (post-colonial era) in her works.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **COLONISATION AND GENERATIONAL CONFLICTS IN SELECTED WORKS OF LEÏLA SEBBAR**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

Leïla Sebbar's main thematic thrust in her narratives is the Franco-Maghrebian immigrant populace in France, especially the Algerians, both old and young. This chapter, which focuses on colonisation and generational conflicts in her works, deals with the way families connect in the midst of edging cultures and geographies. The

family representations, which, of course, is between generations in her narratives, survey the losses of colonisation and exile, and in spite of that, ascertain that memory is a form of redemptive instrument used to connect the Maghrebians sons and daughters to their mixed culture. Sebbar in her 1999 narrative, which she co-authored with Huston, confirms that she has an outlook for exile. In that same narrative with Huston, she discusses about her family and how she inherits from her family neither French nor Algerian culture, but a mixture of the two, because her father and mother are Algerian and French, respectively. She explains in her writings that exile is the only place where divergences and separations can be expressed.

This chapter explores the Franco-Algerian youths and their relationship with their parents as portrayed by Leila Sebbar. It equally examines the cultural and generational gap between the old and the new generations of Algerians caused by colonisation; the old generation has refused to speak to the new generation about the past. It gives details of the cyclic type of relationship the mother and son have. In this relationship, the mother and son bond, after some time they separate and later reunite in a symbolic way. The relationship between the mothers and daughters in

the works of Leila Sebbar are also investigated. These mothers and daughters experience a sort of disconnection because of their generational and cultural differences. It is noticed that the mothers are very submissive, while the daughters tend to be rebellious. They, the daughters, seem not to like the ways chosen by their mothers, most especially the idea of being a housewife. Nevertheless, the daughters never forget the teachings of their mothers when it comes to religion or culture. These religious and cultural teachings help give strength to these girls whenever they leave home to face the world. This chapter also analyses the gap that exists when it comes to the relationship the fathers have with their daughters in Sebbar's fictions and also how fathers relate to their sons.

#### **4.1 Algerian youth in Sebbar's works**

Most of Sebbar's works are categorised youth literature because of her thematic focus on the young people. The youths in Sebbar's fictions are young adults who are

caught in-between two cultures: the French culture and the Algerian culture. This is so because all of them are post-colonial children, born after the Algerian independence and also most of them are born in France. They go through the discords produced by colonisation, immigration, violence and age. They also encounter rifts surrounded by their families as a consequence of their parents' and grandparents' cultural and geographical exile. The youths could be compared to Sebbar herself because, while growing up in Algeria, Leïla and her sister were not allowed to mingle with the other Algerian children due to their being half-castes, but even at that, she never felt like one of the children of the French colonials. Her parents, both school teachers, who were neither Muslims nor Christians, neither Arab nor French, were not assimilated into the society because of their way of life which was neither French nor Algerian. At twelve, just after the Algerian independence in 1962, Leïla Sebbar and her family were forced to go on exile in France because of the crack caused by the France and Algerian war. This means that Sebbar herself is also caught in-between two cultures, maybe not because of colonisation but because of her parents. However, these youths still have the capacity to rebuild what they stand for and their identity in a web of opposing

societal gaps. They end up establishing their lawful spot in their families and their communities.

In *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar's main character, Amel, is 16 years old and this means that she is born around 1980. Amel's friend, Louis, is 25 years old, while Omer is 27 years old and this also implies that they are born in 1971 and 1969, respectively. Their ages go a long way to confirm that they are all born after the independence of Algeria. The short story "La Jeune fille au balcon" has Mélissa who is just 15 years old and the historical time of the story is 1994. In other words she is born in 1981. In another short story entitled "La photo d'identité", the main character is a boy of about 13 years old named Yacine. *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, another of Sebbar's work, has Dalila who is just 7 years at the beginning of the story which took place in 1980. The ages of the other Youths in the novels are not

mentioned but judging with the message passed across by the writer, one can decipher that they are all children born after the colonial period.

An example of these postcolonial youths, whose ages are not mentioned are Alma, the young lady who is a public writer and Tahar, in *Mon cher fils*, whose father refuses to talk to about Algeria when he is with him in France. There are also the twins Dina and Dora in the short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage" and their brother Tarik. Another one of these post-colonial era Algerian youth is the young man who happens to be the protagonist of "L'Enfer", the one whose mother never tells the truth about his father's betrayal during the Algerian war. Some of these youths are born by Algerian immigrants in France while some are born in Algeria.

These young protagonists in Sebbar's narratives all go through nostalgia for their homeland, Algeria, even while living in the same country. In "La jeune fille au balcon", readers encounter a young girl named Mélissa who lives with her parents and younger siblings in a dangerous part of Algiers called Kaboul. Mélissa's inquisitiveness leads her to ask many questions about the Algerian colonial past. Mélissa's action here could be likened to what postcolonialism does; to ask questions

about the colonial period during the post-colonial period and trying to undo the wrongs done by colonisation. She watches the television for information, yet she could not understand what is shown about Algeria. She needs some explanation but she is not given any answer because, according to her parents, she is too young to understand what really happens: "Tu es trop jeune pour comprendre ..." (You are too young to understand ... (Sebbar, 1996:13). She tries to go out and find out herself but she is restricted because of the dangerous nature of the neighbourhood where she lives with her family. Mélissa is seen struggling so hard in order not to end up like her mother and her aunts, who stay at home, just to take care of the children. Mélissa's struggle is not just to prevent herself from ending up like her mother and aunts who just stay at home to take care of the children, but also to understand what happens between Algeria and France during the colonial era.



The youths who live in France battle with their economic and social status. They also have to face racism by the French and mistrust of the society around them, even that of their own parents and siblings. An example is Dora in the short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage", a strong Muslim girl who would rather be sent out of school than go without her hijab. In Algeria, they are allowed to go to school with their hijabs on; in fact, it is compulsory as revealed in the short story "La jeune fille au balcon". Mélissa, who does not like the tradition of putting on the hijab, is forced to do so, if she must enter the school bus (Sebbar, 1996:23). However, it is not the same in France, because no form of religious activity is allowed in public schools in France. Dora vehemently refuses to remove her hijab, even when asked to do so by the school principal. Nevertheless, the parents applaud her courage but remind her that she is in another man's land: "Le père a dit : "Ma fille, tu es courageuse, mais tu perds ta vie" La mère a dit: "Ma fille, tu es forte, mais ton père a raison, Réfléchis. Ici, dans ce pays, tu n'es pas chez nous". Le père a dit: "La loi de ce pays est ta loi, tu dois le savoir"...". (The father said: "My daughter, you are courageous, but you are wasting your life", the mother said: "My daughter, you are strong, but your father is right, think. Here, in this country, you are not in our place". The father said: "This country's law is your law, you have to know that" ...) (Sebbar, 1996:122-123). Dora

struggles with the idea of not going to school with her hijab as a strong Muslim, which she sees as racism and probably mistrust.

Furthermore, the twins, Dina and Dora, second generation of Algerians, even though they do not have the same notion about their society, decide to go away and not live with their parents anymore. Dora enjoys being a good Muslim daughter, while Dina loves social life, but at the end of the day, both decide to leave home. Dora as a good Muslim gets tired of being told where to wear her hijab to and where not to wear it to, as it is forbidden to wear the hijab in schools in France (Sebbar, 1996:122). Dina herself is also fed up with her twin sister, always judging her and looking at her as one bad person and that is what makes her to run from home. She says to her sister "Arrête! Arrête! Laisse-moi tranquille, laisse-moi vivre. Toi tu veux pas vivre, tu es

comme une bonne sœur, une vieille fille..." (Stop! Stop! Leave me alone, allow me to live. You, you don't want to live, you are like a good sister, an old girl...) (Sebbar, 1996:121). Here, Sebbar depicts two young girls who want to be themselves and not what the society wants them to be, an idea of social identity and self-categorisation; knowing what the society wants but still deciding how to live.

The youths also feel a deep depression, which necessitates them to split from family norm and go out just like the young man in "L'Enfer", who, after hearing the story of the Algerian past and how his father betrayed his country by joining the "Harkis", decides to go out and find justice by himself. What the young man does is more or less an oblivious acknowledgement of the anguish his father lived through and an effort to connect with him by also living through the grief exile brings.

As for "La Photo d'identité", the young boy Yacine, struggles to find out about the Algerian war. He meets a stranger at the bookshop who tells him so many things about the war. He has to listen to this stranger because his own father refuses to talk to him about their past, which includes the war. Sebbar tries to paint youths who do not know what happens before they are born. She also portrays them as being eager to find out what actually transpires between their country of origin (Algeria) and

their country of birth (France) during the colonial era as represented in "La Photo d'identité".

*La seine était rouge* tells the story of Amel and Omer, two Algerian youths living in France and their friend Louis, a French boy through who, with the help of his documentary film, the duo, Amel and Omer, are able to discover the event of 17th October, 1961. Amel is born and raised in France and could be regarded as "Beur", while Omer comes to France with his mother to live due to the hardship they are experiencing in Algeria. Amel and Omer are determined to find out the truth about the relationship between Algeria and France before their birth, no matter the cost.

Furthermore, *Mon cher fils* depicts Alma, the young public writer, whose mother leaves to settle in Britain. The novel recounts the tale of an elderly man living in Algeria who has not seen his son for a long time. The son is born and raised in France (example of a Beur) and still lives in France. Another young Algerian mentioned in the novel is the young Minna who loses her mother and never meets her poet father, because he abandons her mother while she is pregnant with her.

It is also observed that most, if not all of Sebbar's youths, are rebellious. There is Mélissa, who questions everything and who does not want to be controlled by her parents. She refuses to stay at home like the women in her family and abhors wearing hijab like other Muslim girls/women. Dina and Dora also refuse to obey their parents or even the law of the school, which they see as oppressive. Wearing of hijab is prohibited in schools in France but Dora insists on wearing hers to school even against the advice of her parents. At school, she is sent back home because she refuses to listen to the Principal who wants her to remove her hijab. Eventually, Dina and Dora choose to run away from home.

Dalila in *Fatima ou les algériennes au square* is beaten by her father when she is just seven years old, because she comes home late. This beating changes her perspective towards her father and Algerian men in general. In a bid not to end up like her mother, a housewife, who has no say at home, she decides to leave home. Amel in

*La seine était rouge* does not listen to her mother and grandmother when they advise her to wait until when she gets older to find out what transpires between France and Algeria. She also leaves home in search of the truth.

The attitude of revolt is not limited to girls alone, the boy in "L'Enfer", though advised by his grandmother not to join the gang, decides to go contrary to the grandmother's wish. Yacine in "La Photo d'identité" does not also listen to his mother who tries to correct him about his left-handedness. The young man Tahar in *Mon cher fils* practically refuses to communicate with his father. Kamila in the same novel, *Mon cher fils* rejects the man her family wants her to marry as tradition

demands. She goes ahead to marry French man who is not even a Muslim and this leads to her father disowning her and her mother cursing her.

The struggle by the youths in Sebbar's narratives is a product of colonisation and migration. They have been exposed to the western culture which influences their Algerian culture. Now their culture has been hybridised and they are living in the third space. They all struggle to end what they feel is not good for them and their future. The post-colonialists are fighting against the dehumanisation and marginalisation caused by colonisation, while the youths are fighting against most of the cultures they find dehumanising such as women having to stay at home as housewives, forcing women to study some particular courses in school, choosing husbands/wives for one's children etc... It is revealed that Sebbar somehow sees herself as similar to the main characters in her works who obviously, are mostly youths.

#### **4.2 Sebbar and the Main Characters in her Works**

Leïla Sebbar portrays the symbols of her identity in the course of the survey of the inter-documentary tapestry she creates in her narratives. She uses her experience as a young Algerian in France to understand the Maghrebian youths she writes about. Sebbar does not only examine the post-independence Maghrebian immigrants' presence in France, but she also explores how the young Maghrebians find out the

cultural input made by the Maghrebian presence in France from the nineteenth century until date. Consequently, the young generation Maghrebian populace re-establishes its lawful heritage and being in the right place in Europe using Sebbar's narratives. The youths in Sebbar's writing deal with their multi-cultural identity by exploring the languages, arts and as well their interactions with people outside their home. By their French education, the youths may have been exposed to a lot of concepts and philosophies that differ from one another. This act of exploring their environment and people in it is an essential link to reconciling them with the older generation and their origin.

Sebbar states that the characters in her works are not really her identity, but they represent the symbol of her identity as a half cast. They also represent her passion for the intersecting and encounter between "Us" and "Other", tradition and modernity, as well as the "Orient" and the "Occident" (Sebbar and Huston, 1986). Sebbar's passion which is displayed in her novels helps to wake up a French and Franco-Maghrebian populace from its memory loss and adds to a modifying of history. Contemporary youths are conscientised to wake up from loss of memory, if they really want to influence societal changes in the coming generations.

It is observed that Sebbar's main characters are mostly youths and most of them are "Beur", born and bred in France, far away from their culture. Like Amel in *La seine était rouge* who could not even speak the language of her ancestors, there are others like Alma and Tahar in *Mon cher fils*, Melissa in *La Jeune fille au balcon*, Yacine in the short story "la photo d'identité", Dalila in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Dina, Dora and their brother Tarik in the short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage" and many others.

Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* depicts three young adults who get to know about the day in Paris when a lot of Algerians, about some hundreds are brutally killed during a peaceful demonstration. These youths decide to investigate and commemorate this particular day, the day dozens of bodies of Algerian nationals are thrown into the

Seine. The novel is the only Sebbar's narrative that adequately represents the events of October 1961. Sebbar's three young protagonists in the novel are all born after 1961, the year the event takes place, while the book was written thirty-five years after the event. Those young protagonists in all Sebbar's works long for their native country, even when most of them have never been there. This longing for their native country seems unsure to them probably because of the way their parents talk about it.

The inability of young protagonists, especially those in France to communicate in their native language is thematised in Sebbar's narratives. How they connect to this

native language of their parents, which is also meant to be theirs, and which they may never learn is another thematic preoccupation. This is the case of Amel in *La Seine était rouge*, whose mother and grandmother continue to make fun of by discussing whatever they do not want her to know in their language. She states: "Vous parlez en arabe maman et toi, pour que je reste une petite fille qui ne sait pas la langue du pays, la langue de sa mère et de son père? ... Tu me punis parce que je ne connais pas la langue de ton pays ou si mal tu te moques de moi?" (Sebbar, 1999:14). (Mama and you are speaking Arabic, so that I remain a little girl who does not know her country's language, her mother's and father's language? You are punishing me because I do not know your county's language or even worse, you are making fun of me? ). Amel is worried that they might be punishing her because she does not speak or understand the language of her people. She even thinks that they might also be mocking her by speaking it in her presence.

These young characters are neither economically nor socially stable, they have to face racial discrimination, stereotyping and mistrust of the people around them. Alma's mother in *Mon cher fils* leaves without telling her anything but she decides to look for the truth by herself. Yacine in "La photo d'identité" also looks for the truth about his country with the help of an older man, whom he meets at the bookshop. Amel, Omer and Louis do the same thing in *La Seine était rouge*, when their parents refuse to tell them what happens in the past, they decide to find out themselves. Leïla

Sebbar portrays this search by the young Algerians with a lot of compassion, which permits them to rise above the ordinary and the discouraging, but emphasises in its place the legendary part of the person. In Sebbar's writings, the absence of father is prominent, making most of the boys grow under the care of their mothers. It is therefore, important to examine the relationship between children and their parents.

#### **4.3.1 Mother-son relationship**

Many of the boys represented in Sebbar's narratives stay with their mothers and grandmothers. Mother-son relationship in Sebbar's works is multifarious. There are

cases where mothers act as counsellor/adviser to the son such is the case between Yacine and his mother in "La Photo d'identité". The young boy lives with his mother who at one point tries to make him change the habit of using his left hand to write or eat, even though she does not succeed because Yacine sees nothing wrong in using any of his hands. The young man in "L'Enfer" also had a conversation with his grandmother. He did not know that his father betrayed their country by joining the French army, until his grandmother told him the story which his mother hid from him (Sebbar,1996:134). The grandmother thereafter warns him not to follow the footsteps of his father. The young man travels to the metropolis along with the little praying mat given to him by his grandmother while he is a child, but what his grandmother does not realise is that he leaves the house with a small gun, covered with the praying mat. In "Vierge folle, vierge sage", a son who acts as an adviser and a counsellor to his mother is depicted. When his sisters left home, Tarik advises his mother to stop crying because he believes they would come back someday: "Ne pleure plus Imma, elles reviendront ..." (Sebbar, 1996:124). (Do not cry anymore Imma, they would come back ...).

In *La seine était rouge*, Louis' mother also acts as an adviser to him. She advises her son not to go on with the documentary about the October 17, 1961 event, even though he eventually convinces her otherwise. The mother asks: "Et toi, tu as vraiment besoin de faire ce film...?" (Sebbar, 1999:24) (And you, do you really need to shoot this film ...?) And the son replies: "... je veux le faire... vous vous êtes battus avec les Algériens... je dois savoir, pas tout, mais comprendre un peu" (Sebbar,1999:26-27). (... I want to shoot it... you fought yourself with the Algerians... I must know, not all, but to understand a bit...).

In some other cases, the mothers are regarded as confidants to their sons and some of them also confide in their sons. This could be seen in "La Photo d'identité"; the Algerian man Yacine meets at the bookshop tells him about his relationship with his grandmother. He says that his grandmother confides in him that the camera of the French soldiers masterminds the mental illness his mother suffers. He also makes a promise to his grandmother that he is going to locate the soldier and convey his camera to her so that she could break the spell. These confidential talks between the

sons and their mothers are extraordinarily strong that they form an everlasting connection and most times effect the sons' choices in life. Some of the sons who actually confide in their mothers and whom their mothers confide in tend to build a strong trust for their mothers. Because of the trust built, the son believes everything his mother tells him and acts on them, just like the older man who is with Yacine at the bookshop in "La Photo d'identié". He buys his grandmother's story hook line and sinker, to the extent that even after his grandmother's death, he continues looking for the French man whose camera makes his mother to run mad until he finally finds him in the picture of the white man he sees in the bookshop.

Moreover, mother-son relationship serves as a moral support system, where they support each other. In "Vierge folle, vierge sage", Tarik is always there to console his mother whenever she has a problem with the daughters. He is also the one who stays by their mother's side to take care of the twins right from birth. At the end when the two girls leave, Tarik is always there for the mother. In *La seine était rouge*, Omer comes to France with his mother, while his father stays back in Algeria and both he and his mother serve as moral support system to each other.

On the other hand, Leila Sebbar furthermore makes sure that the young men in her works never forget their upbringing and that they have a desire to be familiar with where they come from. This comprises them meeting with divers individuals in

related life stages and an extremely premeditated arrangement by way of the world culture and media. These young men find out extra sources and the affluence of where they come from, in addition to what binds them to their mothers, through travelling. They go on to revere their mothers and grandmothers as "sacred beings", even though they do not do all things their mother's ask them to do due to western education and colonisation. Unlike these young men, the daughters see themselves somehow similar but also different from the mother.

#### **4.3.2 Mother-daughter relationship**



Mother-daughter relationship as foregrounded in Sebbar's works is determined by similarity in gender and generational gap. Leila Sebbar's narratives include mothers who live in countries that have experienced war, colonisation and maybe suffering from the aftermaths such as Algeria, as well as those ones who live in France as immigrants. *La Seine était rouge* focuses on two women, Noria and Lalla who are Amel's mother and grandmother and they are Algerian immigrants in France. Sebbar in the same novel also has something to say about Mina, a mother and an Algerian immigrant in France, who comes to look for greener pasture with his son Omer. There is also Flora, Louis' mother and a French woman who supports and helps the Algerians during the war. Fatima in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* is another mother who is exiled in France with her family. Mélissa's mother in "La jeune fille au balcon" also lives in a war torn area in Algeria called Kaboul. Yacine's mother in "La Photo d'identité" stays in France with her son. In "Vierge folle, vierge sage",

Dina and Dora's mother is an Algerian immigrant who stays in France with her husband and children. The young man's mother and grandmother in "L'Enfer" live in Algeria and they witness the war in which the young man's father betrays his country. Alma's mother and the old man's wife are examples of mothers in *Mon Cher Fils*. As a matter of choice, Leila Sebbar does not usually give names to the mothers in her narratives as represented in most of the novels studied, for example Mélissa's mother, Dina and Dora's mother, the young man's mother and grandmother in

"L'Enfer", Alma's mother, and Yacine's mother. All these women are prominent in the narratives but Sebbar chooses not to give them names.

In North Africa, which is dominantly Islamic region, Muslim women are usually veiled or kept at home. But Sebbar's daughters do not want this tradition, so they question their mothers about it. In "La jeune fille au balcon", Mélissa, a fifteen year old girl, resides with her folks in Kaboul, one of the most aggressive neighbourhoods of Algiers. Mélissa frequently stays with her mother and her aunts, and sometimes they watch the news as it shows on the television. One day, as they are watching the

news, they watch the report of a protest march on the streets of Algiers by women. These women protesters are angry and they are not veiled. Mélissa, at this stage, becomes curious and wants to find out why her mother and aunts are usually veiled and always at home while she could see these unveiled women in the streets. She decides to challenge them: "Et vous, pourquoi vous restez dans la maison? Les femmes à la télévision, elles habitent Alger elles aussi..."(Sebbar, 1996:13). (And you, why do you stay at home? The women on television, they live in Algiers too ...). Melissa's mother refuses to answer but the older aunt answers and tells Melissa that the women are new generation women (post-colonial women) and not the old generation women (pre-colonial or colonial). At the same time as they are watching the news footage of Algeria, Melissa also notices that her mother and aunties feel like they see Algeria for the first time, because they are always at home or within their neighbourhood.

Through the mothers, the oral traditions, matriarchal and spiritual knowledge are preserved and transmitted down from mother to daughter for generations but this is not the case in *La seine était rouge*. Amel's relationship with her mother and grandmother is not one to be envied. They hide secret of their past from her and they always discuss in the language of their country (Arabic) knowing that she does not understand this language. At a point, she feels humiliated and betrayed by both women and decides to leave home. However, in the case of Dina and Dora in "vierge folle, vierge sage", they have to learn how to pray, do the ablution and observe the

Ramadan from their mother: "A sept ans, elles ont fait un jour de Ramadan ... Elles prient avec la mère " (At seven years old, they observed a day of Ramadan ... They prayed with their mother) (Sebbar, 1996:119).

Mélissa is the one taking care of her younger siblings as the eldest child. She also does most of the house chores with the help of her mother. Dalila in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* also stays very close to her mother and she is the one taking care of her younger ones. These mothers also protect and pass on their linguistic

legacy to their daughters. They all sing and tell stories to their children. An example is seen in "Vierge folle, vierge sage": "La mère trouve les mots tendres, les mots du soir avant le sommeil. Les jumelles, qui ont pleuré sans larmes, s'apaisaient dans les bras maternels ..." (Sebbar, 1996:117). (The mother finds tender words, evening words before sleep. The twin girls who had cried without tears, calmed down in the maternal arms...). These Algerian mothers do not misplace the profound relationship they have with the Arabic oral history of their people. Fatima and the other Algerian women living in their neighbourhood in France always gather at the square to discuss Algeria and France's relationship and they always speak Arabic while interacting. These women also make sure, even in far away France, that their daughters go to Islamic school where they learn how to read the Koran and how to speak Arabic as portrayed in "Vierge folle, vierge sage": "La mère n'est pas allée à l'école française ... mais ses filles à elle, ses filles ... premières à l'école de la France et premières à l'école coranique du quartier." (The mother did not go to a French school ... but her own daughters, her daughters ... first at the French school and first at the Islamic school in the area)(Sebbar, 1996:118-119).

Sebbar's young lady characters are in two categories; she portrays those who at a stage in their lives decide to leave home and breach traditional gender lines and those who, even when they do not agree with their parents, decide to stay put and live with them. Melissa in "La Jeune fille au balcon" stays by her mother even though she is against most of the traditions the mother believes in. However, in "Vierge folle, vierge sage", Dina and Dora, the twins, prefer to leave home because

they neither agree with each other nor their parents, not even with the French society where they live. They pick contrasting paths, at the age of fifteen; Dora becomes a staunch Muslim. She dedicates her entire free period in the room, studying the Koran, whereas her sister goes out partying with her peers. Initially, Dina is the one seen as the bad girl of the house, who has been corrupted by the European culture, whereas Dora would always be the obedient and well behaved Muslim daughter. Nonetheless,

Dora leaves home the same day as her sister Dina to become a member of an Islamic terrorist group.

Dalila in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* has a good relationship with her mother; she is always by her mother's side instead of being with her mates but she leaves home because of her father. Kamila in *Mon cher fils* refuses to obey her parents by marrying a French man who is also a non-Muslim. She grows up with her parents and her twin sister, who is not as rebellious as she is. Kamila leaves home after her marriage and her mother decides to curse her because she disobeys her by marrying a non-Muslim. The twin sister, who stays in contact with her parents, says: "Elle a souhaité que Kamila soit stérile, pas d'enfant ..." (She wished that Kamila may remain sterile, no child) (Sebbar, 1996:86).

Those daughters who run away just like Dina, Dora, Amel, Kamila and Dalila, do so in order to be free from their parents, especially their mothers, as they do not want to be monitored by anyone. Dora is sent out of school for wearing hijab which is prohibited in French schools. Dina is represented as a rebel by her parents so she has to move out from the house in order to be free from her family's judgmental comments, even her own twin sister sees her as a bad person. Amel could not stand her mother and grandmother keeping important things from her. Dalila herself could not bear her father's excesses, always telling her what to do and what not to do and the fact that her mother could not defend or protect her from her father's excesses, rather she supports him even when it is against her wish. Kamila, on the other hand, could not stand her parents dictating to her whom to marry and whom not to marry and not even her mother understands her.

It is observed that the daughters who run away from home in Sebbar's narratives are those born and bred in France (the Beur). Mélissa, who is born and is living in Algeria, even though she rebels against most of the cultures does not run away from home unlike Dina, Dora, Dalila, Amel and Kamila who are all born and bred in France. This act of the youths leaving home is a social reality; most youths living

abroad prefer leaving home to live on their own once they turn 18 years old. This is as a result of the effect of Western culture on their lives.

Some daughters who believe that their mothers hate them are also depicted. In *Mon cher fils*, the daughters believe that their mothers are against them: "... vous savez que chez nous, les mères sont contre les filles" (Sebbar, 2012:83). (You know that in our place, mothers are against daughters). This is the young lady, whose twin sister, Kamila, leaves home after disobeying her parents by marrying a French non-Muslim, talking to Alma, the public writer, whose mother is also absent in her life. The young lady goes ahead to emphasise that: "Oui, les mères sont contre les filles. Si mon père nous avait interdit les études, ma mère aurait accepté" (Sebbar, 2012:83). (Yes, mothers are against daughters. If my father had banned us from school, my mother would have accepted.). The daughters believe that their mothers are supposed to be protecting them from some of their fathers' decisions; they believe that their mothers should be on their side and not support their husbands sheepishly. Amel in *La seine était rouge* also believes that her mother is against her when she thinks her grandmother and mother mock and even punish her. The same thing goes to the mothers; some of them also believe that their daughters do not love them as revealed in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Fatima's friend says: "Elle préfère son père...Ma fille ne m'aime pas. Elle me l'a dit" (Sebbar, 2010:86). (She prefers her father... My daughter does not love me. She told me so).

It is basic that one understands the mothers and daughters in Sebbar's narratives, where they are coming from and where they are, so as to understand where they are heading to. The mothers in Islamic context or even in African context are generally blamed when their daughters misbehave. An example could be seen in the short

story "La jeune fille au balcon" where Melissa's father accused her mother of allowing Melissa do whatever she wants to do (Sebbar, 1996:38). The mothers, in order to avoid such accusations, try as much as possible to guide their daughters no

matter what it takes. The mothers even go to the extent of pretending in the presence of their husbands but will go back later to apologise and cuddle with the daughter.

This is revealed when Melissa's mother slaps her after her father also slaps her. She, the mother, goes back to apologise to Melissa behind her father. The daughters themselves, being born in this modern era, may not want to be "caged" like their mothers.

Sebbar depicts the relationship between the mothers and the daughters as being tangled with the life of the rest of the household. This signifies that the father's presence and that of the brothers and members of the community represents a vital piece in how the mother and daughter relationships are formed.

#### **4.3.3 Father-daughter relationship**

The fathers in Sebbar's works are portrayed mainly as striving to defend the family reputation from being slandered. The slander could come as a result of the daughter's moral comportment. Leïla Sebbar is extremely conscious to the fact that a father fears that his daughter might turn out to be promiscuous or victim of sexual abuse. She vividly depicts how these men and their girls respond to this fear in "La Jeune fille au balcon". While fathers fear the possibility of their daughters' becoming victims of sexual abuse, which invariably is a dent on the family honour, daughters are completely indifferent or oblivious of the perceived danger by the fathers. Mélissa is slapped by her father because she stays late at the balcony, trying to find out if she could see the Ninjas who only come out at night: "Elle va peut-être voir les invisible qu'on appelle les Ninjas" (She is maybe going to see the invisibles called the Ninjas) (Sebbar, 1996:36). For Mélissa, she sees nothing wrong in staying out late at the balcony but her father is afraid that she might end up being kidnapped and used as a sex slave. He intends to buy better keys for the house so that no one could

break in, not because of his property but to protect his daughter. He says to Mélissa's mother: "Je ne plaisante pas. Pour les verrous, fais attention, avertis Mélissa. On enlève des jeunes filles lorsqu'elles sont seules dans les appartements..." (I am not joking. About the keys, be careful, warn Mélissa. Young girls are being taken away when they are alone in the house ... (Sebbar,1996:31).

Paradoxically, in a lot of conservative Muslim households, the authority a father displays on his daughter is unequal to the quantity of time he actually spends with her. Mélissa's father barely stays at home because he has to work so as to fend for the family. He gets home late at night, takes his bath, eats, reads the newspaper and goes off to bed because he is already tired from work : "Il travaille loin du quartier, le soir il revient épuisé" (He works far from home, in the evening he comes back tired) (Sebbar,1996:17). The same thing could be seen with Dina and Dora in "Vierge folle, vierge sage". Their father is not always there for them because of his job. Due to his constant absence, he does not know Dora, like her sister, has left the house, too: "Le père est parti au travail, la mère a préparé le petit déjeuner de Tarik et de Dora ... Elle frappe à la porte de la chambre de Dora ... Dora n'est pas dans sa chambre". (The father left for work, the mother prepared Tarik and Dora's breakfast ... She knocks on Dora's door ... Dora is not in her room)(Sebbar,1996:123). In the same vein, the old man in *Mon cher fils* who is not there for his seven daughters and never witnesses any of their weddings, the seven of them, rather it is his wife that gives them out : "Sa femme a marié ses filles ... sa femme l'a surpris sept fois, sept fois pour les sept mariages ..." (His wife gave out his daughters' hands in marriage ... his wife surprised him seven times, seven times for the seven marriages) (Sebbar,2012:18-19).

In another of Sebbar's novels entitled *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, the young girl Dalila is also beaten by her father because she comes home late: "Elle comprenait mal sa violence lorsqu'elle rentrait tard à la cité " (She could not understand his violence when she would return late from the city) (Sebbar,2010:15). Just like Mélissa in "La jeune fille au balcon", Dalila refuses to understand why she

should be beaten by her father, only because she comes home late. At a point she feels that her father's interference in her life is getting out of hand. She wants to be free to live her life; like Mélissa, she does not want to end up like her mother, a housewife, who does everything to please the husband, even when it does not favour her. At the end, Dalila decides to leave home when the threat of taking her back to Algeria becomes so much.

Alma, on the other hand, in *Mon cher fils*, unlike Dalila and Mélissa, relates very well with her father. She grows up with her father because her mother leaves home when she is little. Alma's relationship with her father is very cordial, her father never has to beat her because she misbehaves, rather he speaks to her and encourages her to do things right. He tells her: "Travaille pour que je t'accompagne, ta voix est belle mais tu es paresseuse, ton professeur me le dit ... " (Work so that I may accompany you, your voice is beautiful but you are lazy, your teacher tells me this) (Sebbar,2012:28).

Though men are responsible for the protection of their daughters, yet in Sebbar's works some of them are often portrayed as being so hard on them, like when Mélissa's father slaps her in order to stop her from going to the balcony late at night. Similarly, Dalila's father in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* beats her up for coming home late. However, Mélissa's father goes to work each day, not minding that the streets in Kaboul, where they live, is very dangerous. He comes back home in the evening, tired and tells Mélissa's mother how young girls are being kidnapped in the neighbourhood from their homes. The young girls are taken to abandoned armed forces camps and enforced to be their kidnapper's wives. He puts across this sincere interest for Mélissa's well-being and the fear that if she is not restricted in her movements, she may willingly allow those men to seduce her. His fears become justified when Mélissa starts corresponding secretly with a young man whose name is Malik. On the other hand, Dalila's father, in a bid to make sure she grows up with good manners as a Muslim girl, decides to take her back to Algeria where she would



be living with her uncle. This decision he makes because he does not want her daughter to be like the French girls who do whatever they want to do.

In the Muslim community and the African society, generally, the decency of the married ladies and the virginity of the girls who are yet to marry bring honour to the family. The parents need to help their daughters protect their purity in the eyes of the community if they really want to hold on to their family honour. This is exactly what Méliissa and Dalila's fathers try to achieve in "La Jeune fille au balcon" and *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*. Méliissa's father insists that Méliissa should be kept under check by her mother, while Dalila's father suggests that taking her back to Algeria would be the best. Méliissa's father is also depicted as gentle and supportive of his daughter. He comes home with a heap of blank notebooks to encourage Méliissa's love for writing. He emphasises that the notebooks are all for her when Méliissa's mother objects and suggests that the books be shared among all the children. Yet, because of the Islamic militants around their neighbourhood, his rules which conform to that of the community must be respected; Méliissa must not play any music, she must not wear make-up and she should not be seen outside or at the balcony after curfew. Likewise, in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Dalila enjoys the Arabic songs the father sings each morning while he shaves. But after the beating she gets from him, the songs feel cruel to her. As a result, the father-daughter relationship in Sebbar's writings is depicted from a number of standpoints and it is not the same type of relationship the father has with the son.

#### **4.3.4 Father-son relationship**

Sebbar explores two main thematic preoccupations while explaining the bond the fathers and sons have in her narratives, they are: the father's absence/silence and the son's recognition of the father's anguish.

i) Fathers' absence

Fathers in Sebbar's works share the common blame of being absent in their son's lives. Almost all of the fathers in her works own rather big families, they work in industrial units or do menial jobs that do not give them enough time for their children. Some of them also migrate to France to look for work or they are obliged to look for political asylum during the war of independence and the civil unrest that follows, leaving their families behind. In "La jeune fille au balcon", Mélissa's father, who stays in Algiers, works so hard to take care of his family. He comes home tired and has little or no time for his wife and children. The young boy in "L'Enfer" does not even know his father because he never returns after the war. He runs away because he betrays his country by fighting for the French army during the Algerian war. Yacine in "La photo d'identité" also complains about his father's absence when he says that his father does not tell him anything about the Algerian war: "Je sais pas. Mon père me dit rien" (I do not know. My father is not telling me anything) (Sebbar, 1996:73).

Dina and Dora's father in "Vierge folle, vierge sage" is also always working; he never has time for his sons. In the text, Tarik, the son, is always with the mother and not the father. The old man in *Mon cher fils* is also absent in his son's life, that is why he finds it difficult to relate to him; the narrator has this to say: "Et lui, pas là quand il fallait, il aurait travaillé même le dimanche pour être loin," (And him, not there when it was necessary, he would have worked even on a Sunday in order to be far ...) (Sebbar, 2012:18). According to the narrator, the man could even go to work on a Sunday just to be away from home. The narrator sounds like the man's absence is on purpose. The old man who lives in France for so many years leaves France for Algeria without his son. He never sees or contacts his son for a long time. The narrator continues: "... son fils, il ne l'a pas vu depuis si longtemps ..." (... his son, he had not seen him since such a long time ...) (Sebbar, 1996:29). Even the old man himself makes his own confession on how he is not there for his son; he has this to say: "Quand j'y pense, j'y pense souvent ... Il a été élevé par ma femme et par ses

sœurs aînées ... je ne l'ai pas élevé, c'est vrai, jamais à la maison même temps que lui ..." (When I think about it, I think about it often ... He was raised by my wife and by his older sisters ... I did not raise him, it is true, i was never at home at the same time with him ...) (Sebbar,2012:115). According to the old man, he is never at home for his son and even when he stayshome; his son would not be there. Similarly, in *La seine était rouge*, the young man Omer stays in France with his mother, while his father is in Algeria and he never wants to leave his job at the hospital: "Son père à Alger ... et il ne veut pas quitter son poste à l'hôpital" (His father is in Algiers ... and he does not want to leave his post at the hospital) (Sebbar, 1999:22).

The sons also feel their fathers' silence even when he is living with them. The short story "L'Enfer" begins with: "Mon père ne m'a pas parlé de sa guerre" (My father did not tell me about his war) (Sebbar,1996:125). Speaking here is the young man whose father is a harki. According to him, his father never speaks to him about the Algerian war, even when he is living with them. The fathers are usually silent about the war, not because they want to create a set aside patriarchal space among members of their household. They tend to keep quiet because the trauma they go through is so deep that it cuts them off from the rest of the household, which, of course, includes their sons. Alma's father in *Mon cher fils* insists that: "C'est difficile. Personne ne peut tout dire ... chacun parle comme il peut de ce qui le tourmente, parfois c'est impossible. On ne trouve pas les mots" (It is difficult. Nobody can say it all ... each person talks as much as he can about what torments him, sometimes it is impossible) (Sebbar,2012:60). According to Alma's father, it is not easy for the fathers to talk about the Algerian war because of their traumatic and dehumanising encounters during the war. To him, mere thinking about it torments them.

Most times, an intermediary tells the story that the father should have told. This go-between could be the mother or grandmother, just like the case of the young man in "L'Enfer". It could also be a father figure who is not related to the son as seen in the case of Yacine. Everyday, Yacine, the protagonist of "La photo d'identité", in his quest to know more about the Algerian war, makes a stop in front of the bookshop

called "Librairie des Deux Rives". He goes there since war pictures are displayed at the bookshop. It is at this particular bookshop that he meets a stranger, who later becomes a father figure, telling him all he wants to know about the Algerian war, what his father never tells him.

Sebbar also depicts some fathers who are Harkis. These are Algerian men who instead of fighting for Algeria, fight for France during the war, just like the young boy's father in "L'Enfer". After the war, these men (Harkis) become objects of ridicule among fellow Algerians, both those living in Algeria and the ones in France. This is why, according to the young boy's grandmother in "L'Enfer", her son never comes back to his village. The young boy's grandfather and great grandfather are among those who fight as worthy soldiers for Algeria but his father decides to choose the opposing team. The boy spends his life believing that his father also fights for Algeria, even his mother lies to him about it because she wants to guard her husband's honour in the presence of their son. However, just before the young man goes to live in the city, his grandmother discloses his father's story to him, she says to him that he is grown, so he must know that she is not going to lie to him in order to save his father's honour. She says that the boy's father lost his honour and that his silence is the silence of shame (Sebbar, 1996: 134).

It is important to explore Leïla Sebbar's narratives as a whole so as to become aware of the reiterated factors of the father's absence and how these factors add to an important awareness of her inter-generational family ties. The man most times is too exhausted because of too much work, so interacting with his family becomes difficult. In *Fatima ou les Algeriennes au square*, Dalila complains that her father is working a lot, sometimes Saturday until evening or Sunday (Sebbar, 2010: 11). Also in *Mon cher fils*, Sebbar, while explaining the old man's absence from his family, says: " Et lui, pas là quand il fallait, il aurait travaillé même le dimanche..." (And him, not there when it was necessary, he would have worked even on Sunday...) (Sebbar, 2012: 18). Similarly, in "La jeune fille au balcon," Sebbar writes; "Il travaille loin du quartier, le soir il revient épuisé, il s'endort parfois sur son journal

ou devant la télévision..." ("He works far from home, he comes back in the evening tired, he sleeps sometimes while reading his newspaper or in front of the television ..." Sebbar,1996:17).

ii) Sons' recognition of their fathers'anguishes

Most of the sons in Sebbar's writings actually understand and recognise why their fathers are absent in their lives. In the short story "L'Enfer", the young man sees joining a militant Muslim street gang as a possible way to defend his father's honour, even after being advised against it by his grandmother. He has to physically attack and steal from a notable senior civil servant and his son as part of his initiation, which he regrets doing. After, he asks for forgiveness, saying: "Mère, mère, pardonne-moi. Je suis l'assassin de ton mari, je suis l'assassin de ton fils. J'ai perdu mon honneur et ma famille sera maudite si tu ne me pardonnes pas "(Mother, mother, forgive me. I am your husband's murderer; I am your son's murderer. I lost my honour and my family will be cursed if you do not forgive me) (Sebbar,1996:145). Here, he refers to the wife of the man he kills as mother because he is the same age as the son. Sebbar foregrounds the symbolism of the boy's action; the casualties are of a similar age as the young man and his father: "... il doit abattre un haut fonctionnaire et son fils. ... L'un a l'age de son père, l'autre comme lui, vingt ans" ("... He must kill a senior civil servant and the son. ... One is his father's age; the other like him is twenty years")(Sebbar,1996:141-142). He later prays from the Koran and defends his bloodshed in the presence of God. He may have joined the street gang because it presents itself as a powerful band that steals from the rich to help the poor in their community. During the France and Algerian war, his father also views France as the most powerful and winning side, probably that is why he decides to join the "Harkis".

Fathers who are immigrants in France would do everything to obey the rules and regulations of the country where they live, but would definitely reject integration by holding fast and tight to their traditions and religion. The sons may be more

integrated into the French way of life, but they never forget their root because they witness the discrimination from the French people. A lot of these young Maghrebians living in France notice that their fathers struggle to continue to exist in a progressively more aggressive and worldwide economic system. They see how the French people look down on their fathers and also how the menial jobs they do in the factory due to their inability to get better jobs make them to become disenchanted. In order to gain some economic control or help their fathers out, many of Sebbar's young male protagonists turn to crime or even male prostitution. Yacine and his friends in "La photo d'identité" are used to perpetrating crimes so as to be able to buy cigarettes. With the problem of unemployment in France and Algeria, the immigrants and the lower class are the ones that suffer mostly. Therefore, a lot of young Algerians who have little economic potentials and unstable situations are compelled to rebuff the communal traditions of rightful conduct. This could be seen in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* where most of the boys join street gangs because they do not have anything better to do, even Dalila's brothers, at one point, have to join the gang and their father never notices because he is busy monitoring Dalila.

These young men experience or feel their fathers' presence in their lives by identifying and imitating them. At this juncture, the son feels powerless and unable to help in order to cure the injuries that separate his father from him. The son watches his father's visions and aspirations as they discontinue at a particular point and he unintentionally desires to go back to that spot in the life of his father and to develop into the personification of his father's aspirations. Simultaneously, the son's impersonation of his father is a challenge. He attempts to surpass his father's status in the society. He adjusts his practice of empathy to the historical and demographic state of affairs wherein he resides.

Nonetheless, films and photographs of war narrate the figurative recollection of the people and the family as repeatedly overpowered or influenced by the armed forces. The armed forces are the sons' initial gut feeling route, since the fathers' wounds start

off there, at the extremist of the metaphoric command of the law. The sons do their best to turn out not just to be powerful enough to live through their fathers' injuries, but to prevail over them. The young protagonist, Yacine, in "La photo d'identité" is not good in school; however, his ambition is to become a soldier, so he puts his entire mind there. He says that he loves war, and that when he grows up, he will be a soldier, colonel, and that he will go to war (Sebbar, 1996:64). Yacine's intuition helps him to understand that his father becomes a helpless, needy labourer because of the war, which also makes him to go on a compulsory exile. He possibly empathises with his father's romanticised person in the past, in the splendour of army uniform, for the reason that, his father presently, is the replica of the overpowered lower class.

The memory a son could preserve for himself from his father in Sebbar's writings, for instance, his type of cigarette, turns out to be a piece of a bigger and more related repository of redemptive images. Yacine in "La Photo d'identité," sees the mirror image of an unknown man behind him in the bookshop window. Even though the unfamiliar man bears a resemblance to his father, he doesn't stink of coffee and tobacco the way his father does. His father could only afford to smoke the tobacco of poor migrants but Yacine smokes the more costly ones along with his friends. Nevertheless, he is conscious of the generational gap that would by no means permit him to smoke while with his father. For the boy in "L'Enfer", he connects the scent of hair dye with his grandmother's hands and her habitual tale regarding his grandfather. This means that whenever he perceives the smell of hair dye, he automatically remembers his grandfather. The father's symbolic recollection helps the young men to link up with their cultural root and also with their ancestors. Sebbar's young male protagonists may possibly have been born and nurtured in France, they may not be able to speak the language of their fathers and they may not be practising all their fathers' traditions and cultures, but they are exceedingly aware of where they come from and also their ethnic inheritance, which they usually find out through historical stories.

These young men try to find the historical truth following their parents silence and that of the society. The sons go forth to live through their fathers' companionship through his figurative recollection. Consequently, recollection turns out to be as pertinent as contemporary events. They find out their fathers' story through family members, like the young man in "L'Enfer" and people they just meet, just as Yacine does. These young male protagonists search for a new knowledge of their political and historical origins. The assimilation into the French culture by the Algerians today, most times, reduces the effectiveness of the patriarchal Muslim family. This gives many young Algerian men better liberty to discover their strength through other ways, for instance, schooling, art or social change. Sebbar suggests that young men in her narratives may seek for more equal and peaceful kind of authority, but she insists that they are as well susceptible to the brutality of the economic and military social organisation that hurts their fathers. In Sebbar's portrayal of father and son connections, she admits that growth and change are opposing and that pathways have to be traversed and returned to from inside and flanked by disagreement and unfairness. It is important to examine some of Sebbar's young ladies as models of new Maghrebian womanhood

#### **4.4 Dalila, Amel, Dina, Dora, Mélissa and Kamila as models of new Maghrebian womanhood**

Sebbar's thematic focus in *Fatima ou les Algeriennes au square* is Algerian immigrants' children, particularly girls, who are beaten, tormented and nearly killed for not obeying their parents' orders and for being courageous enough to uphold their sexuality, even when they do it unknowingly. Their family members carefully keep watch over them, making sure that they protect their bodies because of family and tribal honour. Fatima is not the main protagonist of this novel but Dalila, her teenage daughter is. Her father beats her up for coming home late but allows the boys to come home at any time they want. She tells her mother's stories, the ones she hears as a child and she also recounts to her younger ones the beatings she gets from her father.



However, all through the period she stays inside her younger siblings' room, she eavesdrops for the final time the voices in her house and remembers the tales she hears in the square as a child. Dalila would rather listen to her mother and the other Algerian women tell their stories than play with the other children of her age. Her mother and her friends usually wonder why she would not run off and play like her mates. They also wonder what she gains by listening to their conversations. Nevertheless, the women's stories about abused children lead to Dalila's being beaten by her father as a teenage girl. Dalila listens from her younger siblings' room as her father hums some tunes while getting ready for work in the morning, and she could not understand what makes him lay hands on her the previous night. She wonders: " Il m'a frappée et il chante" (He slapped me and he is singing) (Sebbar, 1981:14). The connection between the delight he seems to take from hurting someone is not unjustified. Sebbar writes: "Elle savait aussi a quel point l'air de son père, dans le secret et le silence de la toilette, c'était sa violence contre elle, qui ne lui obeissait pas lorsqu'elle rentrait tard dans la nuit" (She also knew the extent her father's happiness was, in the secrecy and silence of the toilet, it was his violence against her, who did not obey him when she came home late in the night) (Sebbar, 1981:19). Dalila's father's aggression to her is a reaction to a defiance that has some sexual implications. She challenges her father by coming home late in the company of some boys. In trying to safeguard his daughter's virginity, Dalila's father physically abuses her repeatedly and it seems he draws pleasure from it because he still goes ahead, enjoying his Arabic tunes, after hitting her, without any remorse.

Dalila makes a decision to leave home after eight days of locking herself indoors, and this is just three days before the family holidays in Algeria. Sebbar states that: "Pendant huit jours, Dalila n'a pas quitté la chambre des petits. Un matin, elle est partie pour ne plus revenir". (For eight days, Dalila did not leave the children's room. One morning, she left never to return again) ( Sebbar, 1981:10). She always believes that one day her father's violence would lead to her suicide or escape. Suicide is usually very rare in Islamic culture but escaping from home is even more complicated, especially for a girl, who is brought up in a traditional Algerian Muslim

family. Running away from home is a form of suicide for Dalila and other Algerian women, and in spite of that, while she is confined for eight days in her younger ones' room, she realises that she has no other option than to escape from home.

Nevertheless, her choice to run away from home eventually comes from her recall of the Algerian women's stories. These stories make her to understand that women are victims of an outdated and mean patriarchal order, which, in addition, is infuriated by exile in France. If the only thing the mothers can do is just to sit around and talk, then it is left for the daughters to break forth from this subjugation, and this unavoidably entails escaping from home. For Dalila, staying back at home will only mean that she will end up just crying and telling her siblings about the beatings she gets and this is exactly the cultural heritage she will transmit. Even though Sebbar undoubtedly reveals how desperate these immigrants are and the outcomes for their children, she never ascribes all the responsibility to living in France

The circumstances are not simpler for the immigrant children. Even though they seem to be closer to the French culture because of their education, which without doubt leads to a certain amount of assimilation, even at that, they are still victims of racial discrimination. A return to Algeria, their homeland, might look like a great way out but a large number of them do not like this option, especially the girls. Dalila escapes from home three days to her family's journey to Algeria, and it is not a coincidence. Sebbar reveals Dalila's thought:

*Elle n'irait pas en Algérie. Elle ne resterait pas chez son oncle pour connaître mieux son pays et la langue de son pays puisqu'elle était algérienne. Son père lui répétait assez. Même si elle ne voulait pas être française, aller vivre là-bas, elle le refusait aussi. Elle irait plus tard.*(Sebbar, 1981:109)

She would not go to Algeria. She would not stay at her uncle's house to know more about her country and her language since she is Algerian. Her father was repeating it enough to her. Even if she did not want to be French, to go live over there, she should refuse it also. She would go much later.

As portrayed in the foregoing, Dalila does not want to be French but she also does not want to go to Algeria yet. The way Algerian parents in France talk about Algeria

to their children is as if it is a reformatory for young girls who try to disobey their fathers' order. Sebbar further states that: "Si elle continuait, il ferait tout pour l'envoyer en Algérie". (If she should continue, he would do everything to send her to Algeria). And Dalila wonders: " L'Algérie était donc un pays de rééducation?" (Algeria was thus a country of rehabilitation?) (Sebbar, 1981:108). Dalila makes way for other characters, especially those that run away from home.

Amel, the young 16 year old girl in *La Seine était rouge*, is another young generation Algerian immigrant in France just like Dalila who fights for what she believes in. She lives with her mother and grandmother in France. She hears them talk about the Algerian past but she cannot decipher anything because they always speak Arabic and when she asks them what they are talking about, they tell her that she is too young to know:

Elles se voient souvent, la mère et la fille, elles bavardent en français, en arabe. Amel ne comprend pas tout. Si elle demandait ce qu'elles se disent dans l'autre langue, ... sa grand-mère lui répondrait, comme chaque fois : "Des secrets, ma fille, des secrets, ce que tu ne dois pas savoir, ce qui doit être caché, ce que tu apprendras, un jour, quand il faudra. Ce jour viendra, ne t'inquiète pas, ce jour viendra et il ne sera pas bienheureux pour toi ..." Et elle, Amel : "Pourquoi un jour de malheur? Pourquoi la vérité c'est le malheur?" (Sebbar, 1999:13)

They see themselves often, mother and daughter, they gossip in French and Arabic. Amel does not understand all. If she should ask what they are telling themselves in the other language ... her grandmother would reply her, like each time: "Secrets, my daughter, secrets, what you must not know, what must be hidden, what you will learn, one day, when you will have to. That day will come, don't you worry, that day will come and it will not be really happy for you ..." And she, Amel: "Why a day of sadness? Why is the truth sadness?"

Amel could not understand why her mother and grandmother hide the truth from her and why they say that the day she will learn the truth is going to be a sad day. She decides on her own not to postpone this day of "sadness". She would find out the truth that they are hiding from her, the truth about France and Algeria. She leaves home and with the help of some friends, she achieves her aim. Amel refuses to be a typical Algerian woman who sits down at home and does whatever she is asked to do by her husband, elders or tradition.

Dina and Dora, represented in the short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage", even though twins, take different parts. They are Algerian immigrants living in France with their parents. Dina decides to behave like a typical French young modern girl who likes partying and dressing like modern girls of her age, while Dora is the typical Muslim young girl who is reserved:

Dina et Dora ne se parlent plus. Elles partagent la même chambre, mais Dina revient seulement pour manger le soir et dormir. Elle met son Walkman, quand Dora lit le Coran à voix haut ou lorsqu'elle décide de lui faire la leçon. La mère ne le sait pas. Dora n'en parlera pas, mais si elle continue à sécher l'école coranique, à dire qu'elle va à la bibliothèque et chaque fois qu'elle passe, elle, Dora, emprunter un livre, elle la cherche, personne ... Si elle la voit encore au flipper avec les garçons ... la prochaine fois elle avertira Tarik ou la mère.  
(Sebbar, 1996:120)

Dina and Dora no longer talk to each other. They share the same room, but Dina comes back only to eat at night and to sleep. She puts on her Walkman when Dora reads the Koran loudly or when she decides to lecture her. The mother does not know this. Dora will not talk about it, but if she continues to skip the Islamic school, to say that she is going to the library and each time she, Dora goes to borrow a book, she looks for her, nobody ... If she sees her again playing pinball with the boys ... the next time, she will inform Tarik or the mother.

Dina loves to live her life and will not allow anybody to regiment her life or tell her what to do and what not to do. She becomes fed up with her sister Dora trying to control her: "Arrête! Arrête! Laisse-moi tranquille, laisse-moi vivre. Toi tu veux pas vivre, tu es comme une bonne sœur, une vieille fille ..." (Stop! Stop! Leave me alone, allow me to live, you, you do not want to live, you are like a good sister, an old girl ...) (Sebbar, 1996:121). Dora herself is also a girl who will not allow anybody to control her or to derail her from what she believes in. One morning, she decides to go to school with her hijab, knowing that it is not allowed in schools in France. Her parents try to persuade her to remove the hijab as soon as she gets to school but she refuses. The school principal, on seeing her, asks her to remove it but she declines and this leads to her expulsion from school. Dina and Dora represent the new generation of Algerian women portrayed by Sebbar, that is, women who are not

ready to live like their mothers, who stay at home and take orders from the men. These new generations of Algerian women want freedom of expression. Dina and Dora stay strong to what they believe in and at the end they decide to leave home so that they can have the freedom they desire.

Mélissa in the short story "La jeune fille au balcon" also represents the new generation of Algerian women, living in Algeria, who decide to stand up to what they believe in. They believe that women should not be kept at home as housewives, they (women), should have a voice. Mélissa questions her mother and her aunts who stay at home all day taking care of the home front: "Et vous, pourquoi vous restez dans la maison?" (Sebbar, 1996:13). (And you, why do you stay at home?). Mélissa is also beaten by her father for going to the balcony late at night. Mélissa's father has already given her the order not to go to the balcony late at night but she flaunts this order. Mélissa does not leave home just like the other girls; she never allows anybody not even her "super" father to stop her from living her life the way she wants. At the end, she continues her communication with her boy friend Malik without the knowledge of her parents.

In *Mon Cher fils*, Sebbar paints another character that epitomises a model of a young Algerian woman. Kamila is a young lawyer betrothed to her cousin by her parents when she is very young. After going to law school and getting a job, she decides to follow her heart and marry the French man, who is not a Muslim and whom she falls in love with, This infuriates her parents leading to them disowning and cursing her.

Her father says:

Tu n'es plus ma fille, tu nous as trahi, déshonorés ... Tu as laissé croire alors que tu savais ... C'est une honte ... La confiance, où est la confiance? Tu n'es plus ma fille, tu entends, je te renie. Tu prends tes affaires et tu pars, tu quittes ma maison, ma maison n'est plus ta maison ... (Sebbar, 2012:86).

You are no longer my daughter, you betrayed and dishonoured us ... You made us believe that you should know ... It is a shame ... The confidence, where is the confidence? You are no longer my daughter, you understand, I disown you. Take your things and leave, you are leaving my house, my house is no longer your house ...

Kamila's mother on hearing her husband disown their daughter says nothing because she also could not bear the fact that her daughter decided to marry someone that is not a Muslim. She on her own curses her daughter. Kamila's sister notes: "Elle, (la mère) a souhaité que Kamila soit stérile, pas d'enfant ..." (Sebbar, 2012:86) (She, (the mother) wished that Kamila would be sterile, no child ...). Kamila herself seems unperturbed, she marries the man she loves and leaves her parents house without looking back just like the other new generation of Algerian women who would not allow anybody or any tradition to control them. They fight against the us-other mentality and the dehumanisation of women by men and tradition. These girls socially identify whom they really are and stick to it.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The inter-age group relationship as portrayed by Sebbar in her writings highlights the disconnections and disparities between the old and the new generations. Fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, great grandfathers and great grandmothers form the old generation, while the new generation includes the sons and the daughters. The two generations live through either a social or geographical exile, if not both. So as to bring together what seems like a disorganised outlook of the Franco-Algerian youth and generational conflicts, the study examines familial harmony represented in Sebbar's narratives. She depicts mothers who suffer thinking about their husbands, who are always absent from home, their sons, who have no father figure and their rebellious daughters, who end up running away from home. Concurrently, the mothers fictionalised by Sebbar are strong women, they provide their families with pivotal support; they also have their own initiatives and ambitions.

Sebbar also paints youths who fight to protect whatever they believe in. Whereas many may see them as being rebellious, the fact remains that they do not want to end up like their parents. The daughters do not want to end up as housewives whose duty is just to be at home, nurturing the children and serving their husbands. They want to go out, work and make a living; they want to be heard in the society. The sons, on their own side, do not want to end up just as factory workers and being maltreated by

their bosses. They want to be greater than their fathers; they wish to find their identity.

The social and historical realities of the contemporary francophone society are vividly depicted by Sebbar's narratives. Similar to Sebbar, the young ones in her writings uncover the subject of exile owing to stories. The stories they learn of these historical events are not a procedure of healing former injuries. As for Sebbar and her protagonists, this procedure necessitates paying attention to the older generations' narratives in addition to studying and reshaping history. It is essential to learn maps and to relate current territories with events that have happened in the past. From time to time, it becomes basic to cross over all set up limits and go through either the damaging or the revitalising area of exile. She points out that putting things in writing is an imperative instrument for her and her protagonists, to institute and come into contact with this territory for up-and-coming generations. The memories of a child may be contradictory to that of his/her parents. Sebbar, through her narratives, allows diverse versions to live together in the same area. As soon as the grandparents' conventional point of view and their grandchildren's postmodern ambitions, obtain the same admiration among people in all works of life: politicians, civil servants, academics alike, a society develops past suppression and fright. The family pictures painted by Sebbar, eventually portray a complicated, however, optimistic Franco-Maghrebian youth, who is not afraid to let people know the cultures and generation to which they are lawfully part of.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LEÏLA SEBBAR AS A POST-COLONIAL REALIST WRITER

This chapter explores the postcolonial and realistic representations of socio-historical realities in the selected texts. It also examines Sebbar's deep commitment to fictional rewritings of history and assesses her uniqueness as an author who is ensnared by ethnic diversity of present French society. The chapter also investigates social and historical realities of Algeria as depicted in the selected novels by Sebbar.

#### 5.1 Leïla Sebbar as a Postcolonial Writer

Sebbar shows elements of postcolonialism in the four texts selected purposively for this study. *La Seine était rouge* recounts the tale of the war between the Algerians and the French, as well as the incident that took place in Paris on the 17th day of October in the year 1961. This happens to be the day many Algerians come out to demonstrate against the French government who enforced a curfew on them alone. The French citizens can move out any time they want but the Algerians cannot, they are obligated to stay home once it is midnight. The novel can be classified under fiction, nevertheless, this fiction tells the real life story that took place during the colonial era.

*Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* is the chronicle of some immigrants of Algerian descent who live with their families in France after the Algerian independence. The immigrants, who are mainly women, come together at the square of the little town where they stay in France to talk about the things that happened and is still happening in Algeria. They also discuss the relationship between their country



of origin (Algeria) and their country of abode (France) as well as the condition of all the immigrants, especially Algerians in France. Furthermore, these women do not fail to discuss their children, who they believe have lost their identity as Algerians. These children are born in France, most of them have never been to Algeria even though their parents constantly remind them that they are Algerians.

*Mon cher fils* is the story of an Algerian son, born and raised in France, who never wants to return to Algeria with his father. His father spends the majority of his life living as an immigrant in France. However, he decides to go back to Algeria at his old age with his son but his son rejects the idea of going back to Algeria. The man also tries writing letters to his son from Algeria but he never wants to answer his father's numerous letters. The focal point of the book is loss of identity.

The last but not the least of Sebbar's novels used for this work is a collection of short stories titled *La Jeune fille au balcon*. This collection comprises of six short stories, and in these stories, Sebbar recounts the type of connection that Algeria and France have, as well as conflict of identity, which is common for the Algerians born during and after independence. This conflict of identity brings dispute between those born before colonisation and those born after colonisation. Sebbar clearly shows in all her narratives how the legacies of colonisation have affected the Algerians.

### **5.2.0 Elements of the Algerian past and present reality in Sebbar's narratives**

A critical look at Sebbar's narratives reveals a large extent signs of socio-historical writing. Sebbar picks her stories from the social and historical events of the past and present Algeria and puts it in a form of fiction, making it hers and original. Her *La Seine était rouge* is the narration of a real life event rendered in a fictional form. The narrated events in *La jeune fille au balcon*, that of *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, and *Mon cher fils* may not all be of real life events but they are largely stories containing some representations of social and historical events concerning Algerian times of yore and the contemporary. Inside these narratives, themes of exile, immigration, search for identity, loss of identity, generational conflicts,

violence, oppression, injustice, child abuse, phallocentrism, colonisation as well as war are foregrounded. In all, Sebbar's novels add to an immense comprehension of French and Maghrebian society in a social and historical context. These themes are elements of the colonial and post-colonial Algerian reality.

### **5.2.1 Social realities and its effect in the Algerian identity in Sebbar's**

**narratives** In Sebbar's narratives examined in this study, the following social realities are identified: child abuse, traditions of patriarchy and Phallocentrism, immigration/exile, loss/search for identity and generational conflicts. These social realities are examined thus:

#### **a) Child abuse as seen in Sebbar's narratives**

Child abuse could be described as the physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment of children. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2006) distinguishes four different types of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse and neglect.

The issue of child abuse is foregrounded in *La jeune fille au balcon*, *Mon cher fils*, *La Seine était rouge* and *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square*. The idea of child abuse in the narratives could be viewed in three different ways: emotional abuse, neglect and physical abuse.

#### **i) Emotional abuse**

Sebbar usually depicts the African/Muslim family in her works. In the African/Muslim society, the girl-child is usually judged or criticised more than the boy-child. Any little mistake on her part can easily tarnish the family image. If a girl-child gets pregnant outside wedlock, it is usually a big shame to her family. While no one remembers the family of the boy that impregnates her, everyone will be talking about the girl and how her mother does not train her well. Because of issues like this, parents tend to be stricter with their female children. This idea of being strict most times leads to emotional abuse on the child involved. An example is depicted in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*. Dalila is playing with

the boys outside when her father comes back from work and sees her. She puts on skirt and

most times when she tries to kick, her underwear will show and this does not go down well with the father. He wants to protect his girl so that she will not bring shame to the family. Dalila's father's instructions affect her emotionally that she has to lock herself up in her room for days.

In the short story "La jeune fille au balcon", the main character is Mélissa, who lives in a dangerous neighbourhood in Algiers called Kaboul with her parents. Mélissa is a young vibrant girl, who wants to grow up into a woman that can make her own decisions and not like her mother and other Muslim women who do whatever their husbands tell them to do. Mélissa is not allowed to live her life the way she wants because of so many restrictions from her parents, the society and even her school. She is constantly emotionally drained. In school, they are given some ridiculous conditions by the principal. Some men come to the school to threaten the principal, they do not want the girls and the boys to sit together, they do not want the girls to come to school without hijab, and they also do not want the girls to study some certain subjects. They threaten: "... Si elle sépare pas les filles et des garçons, si elle garde les élèves qui portent pas le hijab, si les filles vont au cours de musique, de sciences naturelles et en éducation physiques ... ils reviendront"(Sebbar, 1996:23) (... If she does not separate the girls from the boys, if she keeps pupils who do not wear hijab, if the girls attend music, natural science and physical education classes ..., they will come back). This is pure emotional abuse for the girls, especially the idea of restricting them from studying some courses they may want to study. This is emotional abuse as one does well in things one really wants to do and not in things one is forced to do. Those courses the girls are being restricted from studying might be the courses they really want and the ones they are allowed to study might also be the ones they are not good at and studying them might frustrate the girls. It is also emotional abuse for the boys because they may not understand why they should not stay in the same class with girls who might be their friends or even their sisters. The idea of wearing hijab may not go down well with some of the girls. Mélissa never likes hijab, she puts it on only to enter the school bus because it is compulsory to put

on the hijab while inside the bus, Mélissa says: "Moi, j'ai toujours mon foulard dans mon cartable ... je le mets dans la rue pour prendre l'autobus du collègue" (Sebbar,

1996:23). (Me, I always have my scarf in my schoolbag ... I put it on along the road in order to take the school bus) Emotionally, Mélissa feels abused because it is not her style to wear hijab. It is also possible that she feels uncomfortable covering her hair with the hijab, probably because of the hot weather or because she wants to show her nicely made hair, not forgetting that she is a teenager. At home, Mélissa gets her fair share of emotional abuse, too. She is restricted from going out alone so she decides to stay at the balcony in the house but even staying there has its own limited time.

In *Fatima ou les Algériennes au Square*, Dalila, the main character, is a young girl who lives in France with her Algerian parents. She is also abused by her parents emotionally. They always threaten to take her back to Algeria whenever she does something wrong. Dalila, having lived in France all her life, always dreams of visiting her fatherland, Algeria, but because her parents always talk about Algeria to her as if it is a place where disobedient children are sent to suffer as punishment, she never wants to visit the place as a child. Dalila continues to ask herself so many questions about Algeria because she no longer understands the way her parents paint the country. At last she makes a decision of not going to Algeria until she becomes an adult. Dalila, being so emotionally traumatised by the idea of going back to Algeria, decides to run away from home. Kamila in *Mon cher fils* is also emotionally abused by her parents. They force her into marriage with someone she does not love. However, she ends up not marrying the husband of her parents' choice and they decide to curse her. This curse causes an emotional damage to Kamila who lives all her life not communicating with her family. Amel in *La seine états rouge* also suffers emotional abuse from her mother and grandmother. They always discuss in Arabic language things they do not want her to know. At a point, she becomes emotionally hurt and she insinuates that they are either punishing her or making a mockery of her. Apart from being emotionally abused, these children are also neglected in one way or the other by their parents.

## ii) Neglect

In the selected narratives, fathers are barely at home because they are always out working so as to fend for their families. Child training should be done by both parents and should not be left for only the mother. In most cases, mothers are always weak when it comes to child training. They are never consistent or strict in giving orders to their children. Mélissa's father in "La jeune fille au balcon" leaves the house at sunrise and comes back at sunset. Most times what he does as soon as he comes back is to shower, eat and watch the news channel on the television and sometimes he sleeps off while on it. The narrator declares: "Il travaille loin du quartier, le soir il revient épuisé, il s'endort parfois sur son journal ou devant la télévision" (Sebbar, 1996:17). (He works far from the neighbourhood, he comes back very tired in the evening, and he sleeps off sometimes on his newspaper or in front of the television). He does not really know his daughter because he barely stays at home and that is why he is so harsh on her to the extent of slapping her. He even insinuates that she might one day decide to run away with the militants without being forced.

Ali in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Aïcha's husband and Mustapha's father is also the only one working, so he is barely at home. Aïcha could not manage the five children alone so she becomes so frustrated that she has to maltreat her own child to the extent of inflicting injury on him. If Ali were to be at home, what happens to Mustapha might not have happened: "Ce matin-là, où les trois petits pleuraient et criaient, où son mari avait frappé au carreau à cause du bruit et où elle ne parvenait pas à les apaiser, elle avait été prise de folie". (Sebbar, 2010:111) (That morning, when the three little ones were crying and shouting, when her husband had knocked at the window pane because of the noise and when she could not manage to calm them down, she had taken to madness). Aïcha becomes frustrated with the children shouting and crying at the same time while her husband is busy at his shop, he locks his door to avoid the noise from his children. This is not to say that a man

should not work to take care of the family but the man must provide adequate care for the children, especially when they are many. It is obvious that five children are

too many for only a woman to take care of, especially when they are all below ten years of age.

### iii) Physical abuse

Both parents of the main characters in *Fatima ou les algériennes au square* and "La jeune fille au balcon" physically abuse the girls. Dalila is beaten by her father when she is only six years old. He beats her because she goes out of the house. The young girl, Dalila, after receiving the beating from her father, feels abused. She locks herself inside a room for eight days without talking to anyone. She also refuses to eat or to help her mother in the kitchen like before. She is also beaten by her mother another time when she asks her questions about the white people and how they abuse Africans. After the beating, however, the mother realises her mistakes and asks her for forgiveness.

One of the Algerian women who come out to the square also tells a story of how she physically abuses her daughter because she plays with boys. Instead of explaining to the girl, she beats her "to make her understand". After the beating, the girl does not stop playing with her skirt on and showing the world her underwear. The only thing she does is to do it when her parents are away. She becomes afraid of them instead of having respect for them. When the mother realises that she is still playing with the boys, she decides to be more severe with her beating to the extent that she inflicts her with injury: "... elle était sur elle, la frappant partout où sa main s'abattait, sur la tête, le visage, le dos ..." (Sebbar, 2010:81). (... she was on top of her, slapping her all over, anywhere her hand fell, on the head, face, back ...). At the end, the mother realises she is beating the girl out of anger and frustrations. She says: "J'avais frappé comme une folle vraiment je ne sais pas pourquoi" (Sebbar, 2010:83). ("I had beaten like a mad woman, truly I don't know why") She asks her daughter for forgiveness because she knows she abuses her physically, but the child never forgives her for that.

Ali and Aïcha is another couple that ignorantly abuses their children emotionally and physically in *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*. Ali works all day, while Aïcha

takes care of the home. At a point, Aïcha becomes frustrated because the husband works all day and she is left alone at home to cater for their five children. One day, Mustapha, their last child, who is barely two years, urinates on the parents' bed. The mother, Aïcha, does not take it lightly, she says: "Ça suffit, mais ça suffit.... Je vais devenir folle ici .... avec ces gosses .... et toi qui pisses encore.... tu vas voir, tu vas voir ...." (Sebbar, 2010:111) (It's enough, but it's enough .... I will become mad here ....with these children .... and you that is bedwetting again .... you will see, you will see). After making the above remark, she picks Mustapha up and throws him so hard that he hits his head on the wood used to build the bed and the poor boy faints.

One may wonder how a mother could do such a thing to her two years old son because of bedwetting. She may have regretted it later but the action is pure child abuse and not child training. She also loses at last because the child is taken away from her by the authorities. In reality, most parents today, especially African parents, physically abuse their children in the name of training. They hit them to the extent of inflicting injury on them just like the case of Mustapha and Dalila's mother's friend's daughter.

Mélissa's parents also give her their own share of beating in the short story "La jeune fille au balcon". Because of the nature of their neighbourhood, Mélissa is banned from going to the balcony late at night. On one of the nights, she decides to go to the balcony because she hears some noise; her father, who also hears the noise, comes out and sees her. He is angry with her and decides to slap her. The mother also comes out and gives her another slap, after hearing that she is seen at the balcony. The parents may have a good reason for asking Mélissa not to go to the balcony late at night but they do not give her the chance to explain why she is there by that time of the night. When training a child, one has to be just and considerate in meting out punishment on him or her. Mélissa's mother also realises her mistake and asks her for forgiveness. It is observed that Sebbar narrates stories of real life situations in the

Algerian/Islamic/African society. Child abuse is a major reality in the contemporary world, not just in Africa. In Africa today, many parents abuse their children in the name of training as seen in all the selected narratives. However, all the abuses on the

second generation Algerians by their elders and even the colonialists did not stop them from holding strong to what they believe in.

#### **b) Representations of patriarchy and Phallocentrism in Sebbar's narratives**

Phallocentrism is the act of putting the masculine point of view central. Sebbar's works reveal a growing concept of patriarchal authority as a consequence of the Algerian Islamic background. The patriarchal customs of Islam is sustained by the Maghrebian fathers in Sebbar's novels. Nevertheless, the levels and reasons for sustaining these patriarchal traditions differ from one father to the other. Maghrebian men maintain admiration and privilege in the Islamic societies and also in their homes. Further than their communities or homes, they are likely to feel helpless and without worth as they come in contact with racial discrimination and having to depend economically on an European superior. Therefore, the man in *Mon cher fils* believes that his life has been thrown away because he spends it overseas working for them. He no more involves himself in anything that has to do with the Islamic population, and when he decides to return home to Algeria, he loses contact with his only son, while his wife takes over the running of his family. She gives out their daughters' hands in marriage behind him: "Sa femme a marié ses filles" (Sebbar, 2012:18-19). (His wife gave out his daughters in marriage) This is a taboo in the Islamic community and Africa in general for a woman to give out her daughters in marriage, while her husband/the girls' father is still alive. The remorse he suffers for his life correlates with his ideas of respect and obligation for his family in Algeria, more willingly than the more contemporary perception of personal value and monetary freedom from one's household.

When it comes to relationships between the two genders, tradition makes men to be the ones with the power over women. Men are in charge of the public space, going out to look for money, still the economic and social standing of Sebbar's male



protagonists have an effect on these duties and frequently portray this public space as unfriendly and hazardous. "La Jeune Fille au balcon," narrates the story of a man, Mélissa's father, whose responsibility is to go out every morning and work as a

mechanic, even when they stay in a very risky neighbourhood. This man and his co-workers have been faithful to their jobs since the Algerian independence, but still they get threats of death from the Muslim military gang that fights for supremacy.

His wife is in charge of the household just like every Muslim wife and mother. She makes sure that her husband is well taken care of as soon as he comes back from work. She is accountable for making sure that everything goes well in the house and that the children do not misbehave by making sure that they value the family custom. The man of the house puts in force this duty when he accuses her of not being sufficiently firm with Mélissa. He tells her that her daughter is too free and that she allows her to do rubbish. He adds that it is her responsibility to supervise her and that one of these days, she will be taken and it may even be with her consent (Sebbar, 1996:38). Mélissa's father believes that the duty to protect their daughter belongs solely to his wife. As a man, he tries to exonerate himself if anything should happen to Mélissa. This is typical of African men; they believe that their children's bad behaviour is caused by their mother.

Sebbar's "La jeune fille au balcon" reveals that armed force and spiritual doctrine frequently permit men to exercise dictatorial and aggressive supremacy over women. Mélissa gets to know about girls like her who are being taken against their will from their houses; these kidnapped girls would be taken to military camps in the desert and they would be constrained to marry those who capture them. Her father shows this authentic worry for her well-being, but he also accepts the fact that if Mélissa is not kept in check, she might decide willingly by herself to be seduced without asking for his approval. Mélissa confirms her father's doubts by starting a very typical and naive swap over of secret letters with Malik. He reproduces Arabic poems for her, while she, in turn, drops her letter with a green band which stands for Algeria.

Djura (1995) maintains that Muslim customs are embedded in an immense terror of the burning craving that women bring out in men. She insists that the traditions of Islam differ according to the desires and interests of the culture or the period. Generally, Djura claims that amorous love in Islamic communities is a strength that

poses a threat to the family formation. In addition, she asserts that the "societies" have enforced a world of rules on both men and women. This is exactly the unifying agreement of Leïla Sebbar along with a lot of other Maghrebian writers who raise up against this world of rules and regulations, for example, Tahar ben Jalloun.

Ben Jalloun's write-up is not stable concerning the gender divide and how a father falls under the weight of phallogocentric tradition in his *Enfant de sable* (1985). The man is entirely overtaken by the figurative rule of the father, that he overlooks the real body and transfers the make-believe phallus on his newborn girl-child by proclaiming to the public that the new baby is a boy. The girl-child is raised as a son, she looks at herself and sees a girl but her parents make her feel like a boy. Later, she comes to the conclusion that it is an innate sickness to be born a woman, while to be a man is a figment of one's imagination, an action of hostility that without any grounds. While writing *La Voyeuse interdite*, Bouraoui (1991) also corroborates Ben Jalloun's stance through her language of deformation and frailty. These authors delve into their communities, where women are largely covered and her stare and body is hidden, completely suitable and conserved by both the textile and the emblematic covering. The Maghrebian migrants may sustain their cultures with the purpose of preserving their distinctive identity under the effect of colonisation of an European society that they might classify as selfish and abusive.

### **c) Immigration/exile**

Migration to France has been a social reality faced by the Algerians during and after colonisation. During colonisation, with the promise of "The French Union", One and indivisible Republic, which was part of the aftermath of the Brazzaville conference, Algerians were very comfortable migrating to France. According to Olayiwola

(2004), the French Union is an association founded in 1946; this association brings together France and its colonies. The French Union was given priority during the writing of the 1946 constitution of France (The constitution of the fourth republic). It was one of the articles in the constitution that declares The Union "One and Indivisible". Belonging to the French Union also gave the former "African subjects"

the right to become French citizens, the right to vote and be voted for and also the right to send a representative to the French national assembly.

After colonisation, migration to France became necessary due to the poor economic situation faced by the Algerians. Leaving one's home to go live in another country is usually a product of so many factors such as economic, political, personal, security and family. People from countries with poor economic situation tend to migrate to more economically stable countries in search of greener pastures. There are also people who migrate for personal and family reasons. Those who have their family members living in a foreign country may want to join them. People from war torn areas also migrate to safer countries to avoid being killed. There is also the involuntary exile/migration: for this category, there are kids born in France. They do not choose to migrate to France but involuntarily find themselves in there because of their immigrant parents. But in the case of most of the Algerians, who migrated to France during the colonial period, it was not really because of poor economic situation in Algeria but because they were promised that they belonged to "L'Union Française". Belonging to the French Union makes them French citizens, so living in France or Algeria would mean the same.

Sebbar in her works does not only portray those Algerians who leave home to live in France because they believe that they are French citizens too, but she also portrays those who leave home after independence in search of greener pastures or to join their families in France and those who involuntarily find themselves over there. In *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar portrays Amel, who is born in France by Algerian immigrants. Amel's grandparents and parents migrate to France when Algeria and France are "One", that is, before the independence of Algeria. Amel's mother has this

to say when she tells Louis the story of the Algerian war: "J'étais petite. Sept ans peut-être. Je me rappelle. On habitait au numéro 7". (Sebbar, 1999:33) (I was little. Maybe seven years old. I remember. We were living at number 7.) This shows that she has been in France right from the colonial days. In the same novel, Sebbar also portrays those who leave Algeria because of economic and security reasons; such is

the case of Omer and his mother Mina who, of course, came to France after Algeria's independence to look for greener pasture and to run away from Islamic militant groups.

In *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Dalila's parents migrate to France before Algeria's independence, while Aïcha and her husband, Ali, came after independence. Sebbar declares:

Lorsqu'il était revenu chez lui, à vingt-huit ans, il s'était marié avec Aïcha. ... Lorsque après les deux premiers fils, il avait décidé d'aller en France où on lui proposait de tenir une épicerie à Aubervilliers, il avait dit oui et elle n'avait pas hésité à le suivre (Sebbar, 1981:110).

When he came back home, at twenty eight years old, he got married to Aïcha. ... After the first two sons, he decided to go to France where they were proposing to him to take care of a grocery business at Aubervilliers, he had said yes and she did not hesitate to follow him

Ali is offered a job in France and he decides to migrate with his wife and children, his wife follows him without any hesitation.

Furthermore, the old man in *Mon cher fils* lives most of his life in France but decides to go back to Algeria after independence, while his son stays back in France and never contacts him. The old man says: "... il ne m'aurait pas écouté et puis je n'étais pas là souvent, il n'a pas voulu venir avec moi à l'île Seguin." (Sebbar, 2012:35). (He wouldn't have listened to me and again I was not always there, he didn't want to come to Seguin Island with me). Here, he refers to his son who does not want to go back to Algeria with him; he prefers to stay back in France. In the short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage", the twins and their parents are also Algerian immigrants

in France. Their mother tells Dora when she insists on going to school with her hijab on, knowing that it is not allowed in schools in France: "Ma fille, tu es forte, mais ton père a raison. Réfléchis. Ici, dans ce pays, tu n'es pas chez nous" (Sebbar, 1996:122-123). (My daughter, you are strong, but your father is right. Think. Here, in this country, you are not in our place). She reminds her daughter that even though

born and raised in France, she is still not French and should have it at the back of her mind.

Many Algerian immigrants travelled to France during the Algerian war. Stora (1993:40) records:

Le recensement de 1954 dénombre 211 000 Algériens en France, celui de 1962 fait état de 350 000. Le ministère de l'intérieur, à la même époque, donne le chiffre de 436 000. Indépendamment des considérations sur le problème délicat de la nationalité-citoyenneté (...), un constat s'impose: l'immigration algérienne en France a doublé entre 1954 et 1962, très exactement pendant la durée de la guerre.

The census of 1954 counts 211 000 Algerians in France, that of 1962 refers to 350 000. The minister of interior, at the same time, gives the number at 436 000. Independent of the considerations on the delicate problem of the nationality-citizenship (...), an official report is necessary: The Algerian immigration in France doubled between 1954 and 1962, exactly during the duration of the war.

According to Stora (1993), an official statement shows that the number of Algerian immigrants in France doubled between 1954 and 1962 which was during the time of the Algerian war. These Algerian immigrants in France have children whom are referred to as "Beurs". They are those Algerians who involuntarily find themselves as immigrants in France. These children are born after the Algerian independence and they are also part of the new generation Algerians who are searching for their identity because they know that they are not French.

**d) Loss and search for identity**

One of the consequences of colonisation and immigration is loss of identity. France after the Brazzaville conference of 1944 decided to use the policy of assimilation in all her colonies (Olayiwola, 2004). With the policy of assimilation, it means that the colonies would be arranged in regions and departments just like the French metropolis. They would be sending their representatives to the French national assembly. French would be the official language in all, the colonies and above all

they are now French citizens. With colonisation, France also brought her religion (Christianity) and Western education to their colonies. With the mixture of the French culture and the Maghrebian culture, most of the new generation Algerians lose their identity by following the Western tradition.

Leïla Sebbar does not fail to record this loss and search for identity in her works. In *La Seine était rouge*, the main character, Amel, is an Algerian immigrant, who lives in France with her family. Amel cannot even express herself in her native language which is Arabic neither does she understand the language. Language is part of one's identity and once one cannot speak or understand one's language, then it all bulges down to a lost identity. In reality, this is one of the problems being faced by colonised countries that have the colonial language as their official language. It is also a problem faced by most immigrants; their children learn the language of the country they live in, forgetting their own native language. Amel and her Algerian friend Omar struggle to find out what happens between Algeria and France in the past. They hear their parents whisper and discuss the Algerian past but when they ask, their parents would not tell them. The young Algerians decide to go in search of this past that their parents will not reveal to them, a past that forms part of their identity.

Moreover, in *Fatima ou les algériennes au square*, Dalila, the main character, is a young girl who lives in France with her Algerian immigrant parents. She sits with her mother and the other Algerian women anytime they gather to discuss Algeria and France. She wants to understand where she comes from and why they are being treated the way they are being treated in France if they are also French citizens. In

France, the immigrants do the meanest jobs and live in the remote areas of the country. Dalila and the other immigrant children cannot speak Arabic or Kabyla which is the languages spoken in Algeria. She needs to know her root, she needs to look for her identity, and she does not want to be French because she knows she will not be fully accepted. She needs to go to Algeria to find out more about her identity but she needs to do it on her own and in her own way.

In the short story "Vierge folle, virge sage", the twins Dina and Dora are both born and raised in France and they are living with their Algerian immigrant parents in France. While Dora refuses to lose her identity, Dina decides to integrate herself into the French style of living. Dora becomes a staunch Muslim and even dares to wear her hijab to school when it is prohibited in France. Dina, on her part, likes partying and dressing like the French girls. Dina completely loses her identity as an Algerian Muslim girl, while Dora decides to hold onto hers. At the end, both of them could not take the heat, Dora is criticised by the French society where she lives, while Dina is criticised by her own twin sister Dora. They both decide to leave home in search of what they believe in.

Yacine, the young boy in "La photo d'identité", also lives in France with his mother. He uses his left hand in place of his right hand and for Algerian tradition, it is not acceptable. His mother tries to correct him but he does not see anything wrong with it because in France, it does not matter. His mother also tells him that it is forbidden to write the verses of the Koran with left hand but he seems unperturbed as he replies : "Tu sais, Imma, moi, écrire des versets du Coran dans la langue du Prophète ... c'est pas possible, ou alors un miracle ... Un jour peut-être, j'écrirai des vers de La Fontaine ... " (Sebbar,1996:62). (You know, mother, me, to write the verses of the Koran in the Prophet's language ... it is not possible or it is a miracle ... One day maybe, I will write the lines of La Fontaine ...). Yacine is not interested in the Koran, in the religion of his people but he is interested in the lines of La Fontaine, a French writer. To him, writing in Arabic, what he refers to as "The Prophet's language" is impossible, or if it happens, then it is a miracle because he cannot speak or write

Arabic. He can also one day write the lines of La Fontaine because it is in French language and he can speak and write the French language.

Mélissa in the short story "La jeune fille au balcon" because of the white man's education loses her identity as an Algerian Muslim girl living in Algeria. Women in the Muslim community are supposed to stay at home and take care of the home front while the man goes out to work. Mélissa does not like this idea of staying at home as

a woman; she questions her mother and her aunties: "Et vous, pourquoi vous restez dans la maison?" (Sebbar, 1996:13). (And you, why do you stay at home?). Mélissa could not see herself staying at home just to cook and take care of the children after all her education; she wants to be more than a housewife. She also despises the idea of wearing of hijab; she does not want to wear her hijab as a Muslim girl should.

The old man in *Mon cher fils* complains about his son who is also born and raised in France : "J'ai tenté plusieurs fois, il me disait : Ça ne m'intéresse pas, c'est tes histoires et l'Algérie je n'ai pas envie d'en entendre parler, ni la guerre, ni avant la guerre, ni rien" (Sebbar, 2012:112). (I tried many times, he would say to me: That does not interest me, it is your histories and Algeria's, I do not want to hear about it, neither the war nor before the war, nothing). He tries many times to tell him about Algeria and the history they have with France but his son who has integrated into the French culture believes that he has nothing to do with those histories. He has practically lost his identity without knowing it. The young lady, Kamila, who marries a French man, who is also not a Muslim, that she meets in school loses her identity. An Algerian Muslim girl knows that it is forbidden to marry a non-Muslim, that is the tradition and one's tradition is one's identity.

During the Algerian war, all the Algerians who fight for the French army (The Harkis) also lose their identity. One's nation is one's identity and if one decides to fight against one's nation, then one has lost one's identity because one will never be accepted back in one's country and one will remain in exile in a foreign country just like the man in the short story "L'Enfer". Just like the Harkis who betrayed their



country during the Algerian war of independence have lost their identity, many other Algerians also lost their identity without having to betray their country during the war. The major cause of loss of identity for these second generation Algerians is colonisation. It was colonisation that brought about Western culture and civilisation into Africa. That is why Sebbar shows that not only the Algerian immigrants in France lose their identity but those living in Algeria like Mélissa also lose their identity. These Algerians, mostly the young generation, would do anything to

understand where they come from and why the older generation has refused to explain things concerning the past to them, especially the war between France and Algeria. Loss of identity and search for identity are the main aims of social identity approach.

**e) Generational conflicts**

Generational conflict is one of the social realities represented in Sebbar's narratives. The old and new generations tend not to agree in so many ways. The old generation does not want to do away with its tradition, even those living in France, while the new generation questions most of these traditions.

Mélissa in "La jeune fille au balcon" belongs to the new generation of Algerians. She challenges many of the traditions she meets on ground, like the wearing of hijab by the ladies and women as housewives. Dina and Dora, the twins, in the short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage" are also part of the new generation Algerians. They are born in France by Algerian parents, even though both of them are not following the same part but they want to be independent in their own ways. Dora wants to be a staunch Muslim, who wears her hijab everywhere, even in school where it is prohibited, while Dina is a free spirited girl, who wants to live her life. Eventually, both disagree with their parents and they leave home independently. Yacine in "La photo d'identité" also does not agree with his mother concerning many things, especially when his mother wants him to stop using his left hand. According to his

mother, it is against the tradition to use left hand but Yacine does not see anything wrong in it.

In *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Dalila, the main character, also has some disagreements with her parents. They want her to follow the tradition whereby a girl-child is supposed to be always at home with her mother. Dalila, born in a modern era, does not want to end up as a housewife just like her mother. She later runs away from home so that she can be free to do what she wants. *Mon cher fils* is another narrative where Sebbar portrays generational conflicts between the old and the new

generations. The young man in the story never agrees with his father and he never replies any of his letters. Kamila in the same narrative decides to go against her parents by getting married to a French man who is not a Muslim.

Sebbar in her narratives portrays two generations that do not agree in so many ways. The older generation, even after the French assimilation, still believes in their traditions and cultures while the younger generation, born after the independence, sees most of the traditions preached by their parents as not appropriate for them. The younger generation wants to change the existing reality put in place by the older generation. The conflict between the two generations is a social reality being faced by all countries that passed through colonialism and Sebbar does not fail to depict it in her narratives.

### **5.2.2 Historical realities and its effect on the Algerian identity in Sebbar's narratives**

Sebbar in her novels made some representations of the Algerian historical realities such as the war of independence and colonisation. She also uses historical topics and real names to show that she is talking about real life history. The historical realities and their consequences are investigated below.

#### **a) The war of independence**

In order to gain independence from the colonial masters, Algeria went into a war with them. This war lasted for eight years, from 1954 to 1962 and Algeria got her independence immediately after the war. With her novels, Sebbar makes a representation of the war of independence in so many ways. *La Seine était rouge* is a narrative which centers on the war between France and Algeria, particularly the experience of October 17, 1961 in Paris. Sebbar made mention of real dates in her novels, she writes: "1954-1962" (Sebbar, 1999:30). This is the actual date the war of independence took place.

The same war is also represented in "La jeune fille au balcon" when the protagonist, Mélissa talks to her mother and aunts regarding her friend's father who worked with the ALN during the war (Sebbar, 1996:14). Sebbar also gives details of the meaning of ALN in the annotation of the same page, she writes: "ALN: L'Armée de la libération nationale, pendant la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)". From the foregoing, Sebbar mentions the war and also the date the war took place.

"La photo d'identité" showcases Yacine, a young boy of Algerian origin, born and raised in France. He finds out about the Algerian war through books and movies. The bookshop where he picks a book from, according to Sebbar, always displays books that talk about the Algerian war of independence (Sebbar, 1996:60).

*Mon cher fils* as well makes reference to this particular war. The man who never got any reply to his letters from his son who lives in France mentions the war, (Sebbar, 2012:32)

The Algerian war of independence affected the Algerians in many ways especially in the aspect of their identity. Some of the Algerians lost their identity and decided to fight for France against their own country. No sane person fights against his or her people. These Algerians who fight against Algeria are psychologically not well. They want to identify with the people with the upper hand, that is why they choose to support another country instead of theirs.

## **b) Colonisation**

Sebbar examined so many subject matters in her works but colonisation remains a major and recurrent topic in her works. Colonial masters from France invaded the Maghreb in the year 1830 and Algeria is one of the Maghrebian countries. "La robe interdite" is one of Sebbar's short stories where she narrates the tale of a good-looking young lady. This particular lady is assured a good life and prominence by a foreigner who visits their home town once in a while. The foreigner guarantees the young lady that he will make her a well-known model. The young woman goes away with the foreigner after she consents to his offer. The foreigner uses the lady to make a great deal of money as a model and before she could realise it, he leaves her naked. This short narrative is actually Sebbar's way of depicting colonialism. The Whites

arrived in Africa saying they wanted to develop Africa only for them to end up taking advantage of Africans.

The four novels used for this work make reference to the colonisation of Algeria. One of the end results of colonialism is loss of identity or clash of identity and the previous chapters show how the new generation Algerians lost their identity and how they are struggling because of the colonial masters culture that interferes greatly with their Algerian culture.

### **c) Use of historical topics in Sebbar's narratives**

Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* is written in a way that each and every one of the Chapters have chronological themes. The chronological themes as used by Sebbar are as follows: The first Chapter is titled "Nanterre, Amel, Octobre 1996" while the second Chapter reads "Octobre 1961: Le patron du café L'Atlas" and the third Chapter is "Octobre 1961: Le harki de Papon". The fourth Chapter goes by the title "Octobre 1961: L'Algérien sauvé des eaux", the fifth Chapter is "Octobre 1961: La patronne du café La Goutte d'Or. Barbès", at the same time, the sixth Chapter is "Octobre 1961: L'amant français", the seventh Chapter is titled "30 Octobre 1961: L'étudiant français". The eight and ninth Chapters are named "17 Octobre 1961: La librairie de la rue Saint-Séverin" and "Octobre 1961: Le flic de Clichy" respectively.

All the aforementioned topics used by Sebbar suggest histories behind them because of the dates assigned to them. The first chapter carries the date; 1996 which is a postcolonial date while all the other Chapters have 1961, a date that signifies the colonial period. Sebbar here narrates the story of the colonial days during the postcolonial era.

**d) Employment of real names**

Sebbar brings into play actual names seen in real life in her novels. Examples of such real names are: General Charles de Gaulle (Sebbar, 1999:29). General Gaulle happens to be the president of France during the Algerian war of independence. He

was still the president as at the time Algeria gained her independence from France. Gaulle is very popular when it comes to the history of France and Algeria. Sebbar also made mention of Maurice Papon (Sebbar, 1999:42); Papon remains the police chief who never allowed the Algerians rest during colonisation. He imposed the infamous curfew that led to the peaceful protest by the Algerians in Paris, a protest that took the lives of many Algerians. Other real names she deploys in her narratives are Maupassant, Balzac, La Fontaine and Zola, all 19th century french philosophers and writers. Bill Clinton who happens to be a former president of the United States of America is as well mentioned. "La photo d'identié", is another narrative of Sebbar's where the name of Marc Garanger, a French photographer is seen.

Leïla Sebbar not only uses real names of individuals but she also uses real names of organisations. Some of these organisations existed during the colonial period while some are still in existence even after colonisation. Examples of these organisations are: "MNA (Mouvement national algérien) and FLN (Front de libération nationale algérien)" (Sebbar, 1999:43). According to Stora (1993:33), FLN and MNA are political groups founded in Algeria in 1954. Some other real unions mentioned are: SAS (Sections administratives spéciales), an organisation formed in 1956 which represents the Algerian civil authority. Les Moudjahidine: these are Algerians who fought for their independence (Stora, 1993:62).

Sebbar all through the four selected novels used for this study, makes use of the names of some well known Maghrebian countries: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and

Egypte. She as well mentions other countries such as France, Indochina, and some other towns namely: Sydney, Los Angeles, Algiers, Paris and Nanterre.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion summarises major findings and draws inferences and conclusions from the deployment of Saïd's postcolonial Theory, Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and social realist Theory in the selected novels. Some recommendations that would guide further studies are equally offered.

### **A. Summary**

Chapter One of this study espouses the socio-historical overview of the Maghrebian literature while offering the background to the study. It establishes the problematic as Leïla Sebbar's passionate narration of the socio-historical realities in the northern part of Africa, especially as it presents in Algeria and how these realities have (de)constructed the Algerian identity. It delineates the objectives and significance of the study. It also includes the organisation of the study, methodology and clarifies important concepts of the study. Four of Sebbar's narratives are purposively selected and they are: *La seine était rouge*, *La jeune fille au balcon*, *Fatima ou les algériennes au square* and *Mon cher fils*. Leïla Sebbar and her works in relation to social history are also looked into in the chapter.

In Chapter Two, literatures relating to the two key terms in the title, socio- historical and reality, the Algerian war and the Algerian youths born and raised in France (The Beur) are reviewed. The chapter engages in critical overview of works on immigration, exile, colonisation, identity and Franco-Algerian literature. It argues that the objective of socio-historical writing has not changed much. The purpose has been to put down the happenings both past and present of a particular community.

Chapter Two also focuses on the theoretical approaches, which are social realism Theory, Saïd's postcolonial Theory and Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity. It helps to clarify the relationship among social realism theory, postcolonial theory and socio-historical writing while outlining the characteristics of socio-historical

literature. Postcolonialism does not cover only the post-colonial era, it also includes the colonial era and deals with clash of identity and ethnic belonging. Colonisation damaged the major parts of local custom and culture, additionally; the colonial masters substituted those local customs and cultures with theirs. This frequently leads to inconsistency when these countries gain their independence and all of a sudden confront the trial of having to develop a new national identity and self-assurance. The major aim of postcolonialism is to reassess and to pull down biased, weary attitudes in a lively discussion of colonisation. These attitudes are: colonisers with otherness which leads to stereotyping of colonised people and seeing them as Subalterns, loss of identity/cultural hybridity, inability to support or protect self and self-doubt. Social realism is concerned with dynamic interpretations of life with the purpose of changing the existing reality. This existing reality is the one created by colonisation. These theories are linked by their concern with the processes which surround the way that people define themselves as members of a social group.

In Chapter Three, the context of the Algerian war (a historical reality of the colonial era) and its consequences are analysed. The Algerian war which is also referred to as the Algerian war of independence took place from 1954 to 1962. The war ended with Algeria gaining its independence. During the war, an event was recorded on the 17th October 1961, when many Algerians were killed in the streets of Paris, for

protesting against a curfew imposed only on them by the then commissioner of police, Maurice Papon. A curfew that portrays subalternity and otherness. Leïla Sebbar's novel *La Seine était rouge* restates the story of this violence of 17th October 1961 in Paris. In her other novels: *Mon cher fils*, *Fatima ou les algériennes au square* and *La Jeune fille au balcon*, Sebbar also fictionalises this same event of 17th October, 1961 in Paris. Politically, France loses its dominion over Algeria, while Algeria gains her independence due to the war. Psychologically, many of the Algerians who witness the war are traumatised to the extent that they refuse to tell their children what actually transpires during the war. As portrayed in all the narratives, the older generation that witnesses the war refuses to discuss it with the new generation. Another consequence of the Algerian war could be seen in the

cultural perspective. In her novels, Sebbar makes mention of those who betray Algeria during the war by joining the French army and those who betray France by supporting the Algerians. These people known as the Harkis, lose their identity, which is their culture. Lastly, the war has some social effects on both the French and the Algerians. The Algerian parents who witness the war but decide to keep the details to themselves are seen as hiding information from their children. This eventually causes a social rift between the older generation and the younger generation Algerians as represented in Sebbar's narratives.

Chapter Three also examines the young generation Algerians whose parents refuse to discuss the Algerian past with and how they decide to find the past by themselves. For instance, Yacine in "La photo d'identité" intends to use some photographic evidence of the Algerian war seen in a bookshop to decipher the past. Amel and Omer in *La Seine était rouge* with the help of Louis' documentary find out about the Algerian past. The social, political and economic conditions of the immigrant North African family in France before, during and after the war and Sebbar's use of young male and female protagonists born after the Algerian independence are investigated in Chapter Three. Sebbar portrays the North African immigrants in France as being marginalised and stereotyped. They are the ones to do



all the menial jobs and also the ones to live in the remotest areas of France. All the protagonists in the four selected narratives are post-colonial children: Amel in *La seine était rouge*, Dalila in *Fatima ou les algériennes ausquare*, Yacine, Mélissa, Dina and Dora all in the collection of short stories, *La jeune fille au balcon*, Alma and Tahar in *Mon cher fils*. The chapter concludes by noting that, with reference to the works cited, Leïla Sebbar is one of the Algerians who even though they have mixed blood and are not totally accepted by their own people, still know and believe that they are Algerians. Her works portray the realities the Algerians have faced and are still facing and how these realities have affected the Algerian identity.

Chapter Four explores the reason Leila Sebbar chooses to write concerning youths in various situations of exile and colonisation, also the ethnic and generational breach

the youths go through while relating to their parents, which is part of the social realities being faced by the Algerians. It explores Sebbar's demonstration of the importance of the mother's oral tradition. It gives details of the cyclic nature of the relationship the mother has with his son. This relationship has to do with connection, then parting ways, and finally a symbolic comeback. The mother and son should cut the gap they have in their connection among different languages, cultures and generations.

The issue of the mothers and daughters in the works of Leila Sebbar who go through separation because of their differences in generation and culture is also treated. It is noticed that the mothers are very submissive, while the daughters tend to be rebellious. The daughters seem not to like the ways chosen by their mothers, most especially the idea of being a housewife. This chapter also explores the type of relationship the daughters have with their fathers as well as how the fathers relate to their sons.

The inter-generational relationship in the works of Leila Sebbar emphasises the separations and differences between the old and the new generations. The old generation and the new generation all experience a social or geographical exile.

Sebbar also paints youths who fight to protect whatever they believe in; although many may see them as being rebellious, the fact remains that they do not want in any way to end up like their parents. The girls do not want to end up as housewives, they do not want their parents to dictate to them whom to marry and whom not to marry and they also want to be educated. The boys on their own want better jobs, not like the ones their fathers have or are doing, they want a better life.

Chapter Five entitled "Leïla Sebbar as a post-colonial realist writer" analyses the writings of Leïla Sebbar as postcolonial, autobiographical and realistic works, in which the exilic experiences of the Franco-Algerian immigrant population in France and Algeria are examined. It also analyses Sebbar's deep commitment to fictional rewritings of history and assesses her originality as a writer fascinated by the ethnic diversity of contemporary French society.

Sebbar's style is a bit personal; she incorporates many figurative expressions in her writings. The plotting of her stories is done with a lot of back-story, flashback, flash-forward, story within a story and foreshadowing. Usually, she uses the third person narration as her narrative perspective but she also employs first person and multiperspectivity. Her stories are also detailed which is one of the characteristics of a realist writer. A critical look at Sebbar's narratives reveals signs of socio-historical writing. Sebbar picks her stories from the social and historical events of the past and present Algeria. These realities are seen in two different perspectives: social realities and historical realities. The social realities identified include child abuse, traditions of patriarchy and phallogentrism, generational conflicts, immigration/exile and loss/search for identity, while the historical realities identified include the war of independence, colonisation, the use of historical topics, and the use of real names. Elements of the Algerian past and present reality as seen in Sebbar's narratives are also treated in Chapter Five.

## **B. Findings**

This study has attempted, using the interrogative prisms of Saïd's postcolonial Theory, Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and social realism to respond to interrogations concerning Leïla Sebbar's position as one of the socio-historical realist writers of the post colonial era. This has been done through the analysis of the Algerian socio-historical realities and how these realities have (de)constructed the Algerian identity in four of her novels. The four narratives are purposively selected. This study has as well engendered additional inquiries on how colonisation, immigration and Western schoolings shape individuals who come from an area that has been through colonisation, particularly the young ones, who have no idea of what happened during the colonial era, this is the case as seen with the new generation of Algerians. The major socio-historical realities pointed out are colonisation, immigration/exile and Algerian war.

All the selected texts are historical and social narratives that focus on the relationship between France and Algeria. *La seine était rouge* is the story of the

event of October 17, 1961 in France, where many Algerians are maltreated and some killed for protesting against a racially motivated curfew imposed only on them. This curfew imposed only on the Algerians shows them as the "Other" and as "Subalterns". This particular event is a pre-independence event which took place during the Algerian war. The texts also depict how the older generation of Algerians who witness the Algerian colonisation and war refuse to discuss it with the younger generation, thereby forcing the latter to look for answers by themselves and also causing generational conflict between the two generations. *La jeune fille au balcon* is a collection of six short stories. All the stories depict the relationship between France and Algeria, conflicts of identity and struggles between tradition and modernity. Mélissa, the protagonist of the first short story, is abused physically and emotionally by her parents because she wants to break out of the phallogocentric tradition of her people and define her own identity.

Furthermore, *Mon cher fils* expresses the frustrations of a man who returns from France after 30 years to live in Algiers. He has not spoken to his son who lives in

France for several years. The novel is all about the silence which separates generations. In *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square*, Sebbar paints the picture of the life of the Algerian women, young and old, living in a remote part of France. The older women get together in the town's square to discuss their lives as immigrants in a foreign country, while the younger ones try as much as possible to be educated and independent. The narrative brings out different forms of child abuse: physical, emotional and neglect. Dalila, Ali, Kamila and Louisa are physically abused, neglected or emotionally abused yet they fight to construct their own identity.

Sebbar portrays the Algerians as people who know what they want and are willing to search for it. The older generation, both those living in Algeria and France are not afraid to fight for their right and to instil their tradition on the younger ones, even if they must use force. The younger generation, who, of course, has been influenced by Western civilisation; still know who they are and what they want, Sebbar portrays them as those born into two different cultures: African and Western cultures and

they have to strike a balance. These youths know who they are and where they come from, most of them live in France and are French citizens but they are not ignorant of the fact that they are being marginalised and stereotyped. At the end of the day, they all choose to search for the truth concerning the Franco-Algerian relationship.

After a close study of Leïla Sebbar's four narratives, it can be submitted that she is a realist writer of the post-colonial era. Her use of language, invocation of poetic writing, cruel depiction of exile, the condition of the north African immigrants in France and the representation of the Algerian colonial and post-colonial conditions distinguish her from other post-colonial writers of Maghrebian descent such as Azouz Begag, Mohammed Dib and Mehdi Charef. Sebbar's depiction of the young generation born and bred in France is different from the way she depicts those born and bred in Algeria. Both are rebellious, with a hybridised identity according to Sebbar, but it is observed that the ones born and bred in France are more rebellious because at the end of the day, they end up running away from home as in the case of Dalila and Djamila in *Fatima ou les algériennes au square*, Dina and Dora in the

short story "Vierge folle, vierge sage", Amel in *La seine était rouge* and Tahar in *Mon cher fils* who refuses to go back to Algeria with his father. This rebellious action of youths and the fact that African youths trained abroad tend to be more rebellious are social realities of contemporary time (post-colonial era). It also shows how colonisation and migration have (de)constructed or shaped the identities of these second generation of Algerians because normally they are not supposed to challenge their elders as muslim rules stipulate.

Lastly, the recuperation of some old histories as Algeria's collective memory enables the young Algerians to deconstruct their historical experiences and to construct new postcolonial identity. The effects of socio-historical realities in Sebbar's writings are felt more by the new generation Algerians whose identities have become negotiated, fluid and hyphenated. Their in-betweenness is a product of dislocation, cultural hybridity and historical ambiguity. All new-generation characters, in France or in

Algeria, appear to inhabit "the third space" where their nationalistic allegiance is neither here nor there.

### **C. Recommendations**

This study which is based on the socio-historical realities of the Algerians in four narratives of Leïla Sebbar, could serve as motivation and basis for other Nigerian scholars who want to explore the Maghrebian literature. As noted earlier in Chapter One that one of the things that motivated the choice of author is the fact that many Nigerian literary critics are yet to explore Sebbar and her works; it is therefore, recommended that literary critics should pay more attention to Sebbar's works, especially those researching on emigration/immigration, post colonial, and realist literatures. A comparative study of Sebbar's works and that of any other Maghrebian writer from Tunisia or Morocco is recommended. This could help find out if there is any difference or similarity in the way the different Maghrebian countries respond to the post-colonial era. A comparison of Sebbar's works with those of some "Pied-noirs" from France such as Emmanuel Roblès is also recommended. This

comparison may reveal the disparities and the mutually existing scenes and circumstances in the two divergent political climates.

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