Reconstructing Identity by Subverting Language(s): A Reading of the Use of Language(S) in the Writings of Leila Sebbar

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Abstract:
This article examines the strategies employed by North African French-speaking writers, with a focus on the Algerian novelist Leila Sebbar. Sebbar's unique approach involves deconstructing the French language, in her writings, to reconstruct her mother languages, including classical Arabic, dialectal Arabic, and Berber. The researcher is intrigued to Sebbar's remark in a 2005 interview that she writes in French literature, conceiving it simultaneously her mother's language and her mother-tongue, while integrating Arabic accents as her father's language. This study relies on an analytical methodology based on three fundamental types of analysis that are central to stylistics: lexical, semantic, and pragmatic analysis, along with the theoretical foundations of deconstruction theories. Indeed, the analysis follows a chronological exploration of Sebbar's exposure to different languages, including classical Arabic, dialectal Arabic, and French, and their impact on her identity through the analysis of language changes in Shérazade, 17 Ans, Brune, Frisée, Les Yeux Verts (1982), Parle Mon Fils Parle à Ta Mère (1984), Le Fou de Shérazade (1991), La Robe Interdite in La Jeune Fille au Balcon (1996), La Fille en Prison in Sept filles (2003), Je ne Parle pas la Langue de Mon Père (2003), L'Arabe Comme un Chant Secret (2007) . In conclusion, the discussion reveals Sebbar's adept use of neutral French writing as a platform to intertwine diverse voices, allowing her to freely navigate and express multiple facets of her identity, encompassing both her father's Arabic and mother's French languages.

Keywords: North African writers, language strategies, identity, Leila Sebbar, multilingualism.

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1. Introduction

This article examines the linguistic techniques and strategies used by Francophone writers of North African origin whose objective is to intentionally break and then rebuild the French language, which serves as the vehicle for their literary creation. The intentional act of "breaking" their chosen language serves as a means to confirm and revitalize their original linguistic legacy, which includes the diverse range of Classical Arabic, regional Arabic dialects, and the linguistic traditions linked to Berbers.

Their effort is not just a superficial act of changing language, but rather a deep exploration to implant their writings with the lasting influence of their cultural and linguistic roots. They aim to express the "otherness" that exists within the French language, as noted by Régine Robin in "Deuil de l'Origine" (2003).

Moreover, by intentionally breaking apart and then rebuilding the French language, these authors aim to create a distinct literary style that reflects the influence of their ancestral languages. In doing so, they challenge the dominant power of the colonial linguistic heritage and assert their inherent right to express themselves linguistically and preserve their culture.

This linguistic reclamation and hybridization go beyond mere stylistic embellishments. It is a powerful expression of identity, a bold assertion of cultural agency, and a tribute to the strength of underrepresented voices in claiming their proper position within the literary canon.

This article relies on the texts of Sebbar, a proficient novelist and short story writer, who was born in Algeria to an Algerian father and a French mother. The decision to select this writer as the focal point of this study was based on her own words, which were obtained during an interview conducted on May 16, 2005. In this honest and open debate, she proudly stated that her literary endeavors were solidly rooted in the realm of French literature, a linguistic sphere that acknowledges both her native language and maternal heritage. However, her literary works go beyond the boundaries of a particular linguistic heritage, as she adeptly integrates the emotional tones of Algerian Arabic, a linguistic framework that pays tribute to the paternal lineage that has permanently shaped her identity (Interview with Leïla Sebbar, 2005).

This study will exploit a systematic framework that traces a chronological sequence, analyzing the origins and influence of the various linguistic components that have contributed to the intricate composition of her identity. this investigation, will begin by elucidating the importance of Classical Arabic and the regional linguistic differences that have had a significant impact on Sebbar’s literary perceptions, and ends with an analysis

of the deep influence of the French language on the construction of the writer's literary identity. The methodology used in this study is based on three fundamental types of analysis that are central to stylistics: lexical, semantic, and pragmatic analysis (Leech & Short, 2007; Verdonk, 2002). In addition, this study relies on the theoretical foundations of deconstruction, a critical methodology that examines the inherent instability and multiplicity of meaning inside texts (Derrida, 1976; Norris, 1987). Using a comprehensive analytical approach, the article examines the linguistic changes present in the following works by Sebbar : Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts (1982), Parle mon fils parle à ta mère (1984), Le Fou de Shérazade (1991), La robe interdite, La Jeune fille au balcon (1996), La fille en prison, Sept filles (2003), Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père (2003), and L'arabe comme un chant secret (2007).

The aim of this article is to uncover the complex connection between language, artistic expression, and personal identity by carefully examining the linguistic factors that have shaped Sebbar's literary persona. This will offer a deeper understanding of the various linguistic settings that have fostered and enriched her artistic endeavors.

Furthermore, It is the Maghrebin feminine writing that is at the center of this article, even if it is true that the North African French speaking writers work on the content and the form of their writing language in order to inscribe "the other" (the other languages, the other voices) in the body of their French language, given the taboos that are embedded in the traditional Arabo-Muslim culture, over the feminine body, voice, and gaze.

In the sphere of women writings, writing is more than just literary expression; it is a reflective and faithful linguistic act, a conscious use of words in action because the solitary endeavor of writing turns into a solidarity battle for freedom. the written word acts as a guiding beacon, illuminating the route to freedom for younger generations of women who have just begun their scholastic journeys.

Undeniably, it is through the written word that these women authors free the voices of their illiterate sisters, whose experiences are faithfully and humbly captured in their narratives, listening intently to the "other" (in feminist studies, the "other "refers to the masculine world) through a fractured and imperfectly spelt French language. Through this intricate interplay of language, identity, and agency, women writers create a one-of-a-kind literary landscape that not only bears witness to the lived experiences of their marginalized sisters, but also charts a course towards linguistic and cultural self-determination, challenging the colonial tongue's hegemonic dominance and asserting the inalienable right to linguistic expression and cultural preservation.

Indeed, the writer under study manifests a "plurilinguisme du desequilibre" (Gysse,2006, p. 143), a multilingualism marked by an inherent uncertainty, a linguistic imbalance that paradoxically fuels the creative and emancipatory potential of her literary endeavors. It is noticeable that the concept of "desequilibre" explicates not only the extraordinary circumstances of Sebbar's existence, poised betwixt two linguistic realms that insistently haunted her, a phenomenon upon which she remained noticeably discreet, but also accounts for the undeniable reality that a perfectly equilibrated multilingualism is an inherent impossibility.

Multilingualism, in its quintessence, constitutes a vast selection, a compilation of potentialities, wherein it is entirely conceivable for an individual to possess a high degree of competence in two or more languages, thereby rendering them extremely capable of translation, and yet be arbitrarily separated from a linguistic domain they have yet to acquire or articulate. Consequently, they embark upon a quest for "les sonorités qu'il inscrit dans sa seule langue devenant ainsi une contre langue" (Robin, 2003. p.21). Robin, further explains that a pursuit of resonances inscribed within the individuals' solitary tongue, transforming it into a contra-lingual phenomenon, will create and invent what this individual has not known, what s/he has lost whether polyglots or not, it is hence mandatory that the other's language(s) cross the languages of the written text. Furthermore, Philippe Blanchet speaks about "poles" (Blanchet, 2008, n.d) that exist in the interior linguistic tissue of the human being. What interest us, in this article, are not the poles as such but the vast fertile terrain that is located between the poles or "l'entre deux langues…l'entre langues" (Djebar, 1999, p.30)

All the multilinguistic writers put themselves between languages; a fertile zone between the different voices where an act of writing is born enabling the reconciliation of different languages as well as different systems of values which are carried by language, the souvenirs that these languages can wake, and notably the contradictory feelings that they can evoke. It is at that fertile zone that a balance is set up, though fragile, leading to the stabilization of the multilinguistic identity of the writer for a duration more or less very long.

2. Sebbar between "French" upbringing and "Algerian" culture

Sebbar grew up in the house of her school, tenderly protected by her French mother and Algerian father, both teachers of French, well educated, who encouraged their children to read and who aimed to show them "l'Algerie profonde" already discovered by Isabelle Eberhardt. (interview with Leila Sebbar, n.d).This Algeria rich in cultural traditions that succumb under the general colonial atmosphere, because of war. It is in this milieu that Sebbar inherited the geographic exile of the mother and the linguistic exile of

the father (who taught the language of the colonizer and who brought up his children in this language).

The French school, the western instructions, books, "la langue de Voltaire ", all would have helped the father to protect his children from the ravages of the war. Meanwhile, the father could not prevent, his daughter Leila (and without doubt her two sisters and her brother) from feeling that the separation from Arabic is a lack, a loss. To prevent this loss from becoming absolute, she imitated her father when speaking Arabic to his pupils' parents or, more exactly, to his countrymen who valued a lot the French teacher who is a language "brother" who talks the language of the "other" known for them as "la langue du pain" (Gysse,2006, p.142)

Leila, the young girl, listened attentively to the disputes of Algerian neighboring women, in "balcons et terraces" in the evening, and to the shouting of the Arab cavaliers in the fantasia (The fantasia is an ancient ancestral art consisting of beautifully caparisoned horse race, ridden by skilled riders armed with rifles. Their challenge is to successfully go faster by controlling their horses while pulling "baroud" "gun powder", in the air of course. The fantasia is made known thanks to Djebar's novel Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade (1993). The girl became haunted by this language, she did not, and will never, acquire, for that reason Arabic turned to be a sacred language for the young Leila.

Pertaining to the French language, an additional linguistic domain, the paternal figure deliberately disconnected the link between Leila, the young girl, and Sebbar, the author, through the Arabic language, with the intention of protecting her from the atrocities of war. In a contradictory turn of events, her father also conferred upon her the French language, thereby depriving her of one linguistic domain while concurrently immersing her in an entirely new realm via the medium of literature and books.

Certainly, she unintentionally found herself intertwined in the boundaries imposed by the French linguistic structure, an entrapment that hindered her complete development and prevented her from achieving the pinnacle of her artistic and expressive capabilities. The linguistic limitation, which was primarily put into effect as a defensive and protective measure by the father, eventually developed into a paradoxical hindrance that delayed the child's complete development of her complex identity and linguistic proficiency. (Sebbar, 2003, p.39)

3. The development of "language construction

In faithfulness to the outlined demarcations of this study, it is necessary to follow a chronological exploration of Sebbar's literary oeuvre, sketching

the recounting of her writings as they encountered the diverse linguistic threads that have lastingly formed her artistic expressions. It is worth noting that, the diverse linguistic influences that have shaped her life have greatly influenced her literary voice, resulting in a varied and complex body of work that reflects the profound impact of multilingualism and cultural hybridity.

In this thorough analysis, the author's linguistic development is examined, which begins with her early experiences with the Arabic language, including both its classical form and its regional variations, investigating how they have deeply influenced her stories, filling them with a significance that reflects the cultural and historical impact of her family heritage.

Nevertheless, the analysis will not be limited to just one language; the complex relationship between Sebbar's Arabic background and her subsequent absorption in the French language are highlighted through viewing the creation of a distinct and diverse combination of languages that goes beyond the limitations of any one's language and instead creates a lively blend of linguistic diversity. By skillfully manipulating linguistic codes, the author's narratives serve as platforms for reclaiming language. In these narratives, the marginalized voices of her cultural heritage are given a voice, while the prevailing linguistic norms are challenged and recreated.

In this analysis, Sebbar's linguistic strategies will be scrutinized in detail, shedding light on the manners in which her language selections mirror wider sociocultural trends, historical influences, and the ongoing pursuit of cultural authenticity and self-expression. The analysis seeks to enhance comprehension of the complex relationship between language, literature, and identity by tracing the development of her linguistic sensibilities.

This study will investigate the ways in which linguistic decisions reflect broader societal and cultural patterns, historical impacts, and the continuous endeavors to express oneself and preserve culture. By examining the progression of linguistic preferences, one may deepen understanding of the complicated connection that exists between literature, language, and identity.

3.1. Classical Arabic

classical Arabic is both a sacred and a savior language. It is a sacred language because it is the language of Coran. It represents, in the works of Sebbar, the single possibility to run away from death. In her "La Fille au Prison (a piece from a Recueil des Sept Filles), classical Arabic is described differently in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, it plays the function of a cure which saves one from being haunted by demons. On the other hand the same Arabic language, a miraculous language, turns against the three girls who looked for refuge because by the end the three girls must understand that

the freedom, long dreamt of, was but a mere dangerous illusion. Suddenly, it is a devilish language that terminated the three girls (they suicide).

It is in a French prison that the three girls met: Marinette, a Christian French, and Nadia, a young Berber girl who migrated to France, and Aiché, a Turkish girl really practicing Islam. The three were obliged to share a small cell. Marinette is "insouciante et intrépide" girl who passed her free time exchanging letters with her fiancé, contrary to Nadia who hides behind a disappointing joy created by the world of consumption. Yet before her imprisonment, she went to stores and shops and even after being condemned to custodial sentence for stealing, she continues dreaming. In front of the open catalogues, she hopes finding a sort of joy that stuns her and which she cannot find elsewhere. This "elsewhere" is her family who migrated to France. In fact, she hates the letters sent by her father, the trader. The elder brother, under paternal dictation, wrote these letters. The words, in these letters, embody another prison, which is that of returning home (to the mother country) and marrying an unknown cousin who reflects the savior of the family's honor. However, the girl was looking for her freedom and she knows that she will find it only outside the out outmoded traditions and far from the circles of her family. The very idea of returning home to "her" mother country, or more precisely, the mother country of her parents, horrifies her because it is synonymous to total" submission", total dependence, while she dreams of living total freedom "meme si je vis pas dans la ville, je suis en cite pas loin en RER…pour moi c'est la liberté" (Sebbar, 2003, p.97)

Between Marinette, who hides, behind her unconcern, a great sensitivity whose tears testify, and Nadia, who cannot prevent herself from being aggressive, is located Aiché as a stable point who calms the interior upheavals which the two other girls undergo. Aiché "la vie", the young Turkish girl who had been sentenced for a long time and without the other two girls know for which crime, how she could find peace, how she could be so calm, merry and generous. (Sebbar, 2003, p 98)

Aiché explains this internal balance by the fact that she devotes her life to God. Her internal peace is the result of a spiritual advance shown through the respect of the rules of Islam and the language of the holy book which save her from despair and from madness.

Nevertheless, classical Arabic is not only the language of Islam for Aiché. It is also a language, which is closely associated with childhood and the memories with the character of the grandfather. She remembers that, when she a small girl in her native village, she sat down by the side of her grandfather who recited verses of the Coran in the evening, after a long day of work (Sebbar, 2003, p 101). The Coran serves as a relaxation for the grandfather. Hence, it is not only classical Arabic, which saves the girl from

death, but also the shade of the grandfather who is incarnated in the language. “et après le malheur, c’est la voix du livre qui l’a sauvée de la mort, et la voix du vieil homme qui l’aimait, elle, la petite fille sur le banc contre la porte de la maison verte” (Sebbar, 2003, p 102). One might figure out the symbolism of the grandfather, the color green and Coran.

Classical Arabic is not only closely associated with the character of the grandfather, but it is also miraculous language. Thus, Aiché, who did not learn classical Arabic, dreams to discover the Coran of her grandfather in a “coffer” in her native village. During all the night, she “feuillete” the holy book, so that in the morning, she understands the language. It is since this dream that she becomes able to decipher the Coran, which she can read now for the two other detainees. Through this reading, she pursues escaping from insanity and death to purity and life as she wants to redeem, expiate her sorrow. She rejects the idea of having a lawyer to ask for grace.

Without doubt, although Marinette, Nadia, and Aiché are very different girls, they share the tough desire to escape the narrowness of the cell by using their dreams. These dreams, for Marinette, are the letters that she exchanges with her fiancé, for Nadia, they are the catalogs that she divides into sheets and flicks and for Aiché it is the Coran and classical Arabic which make her dream of the grandfather and the childhood at the village. A point of emphasis must be noted here; only the dream of Aiche helped in making her relaxed while the two other dreams hastened the degradation of the girls.

The dreams, instead of saving the three girls from madness, prove to be finally, dangerous illusions which plunge them more in insanity without realizing it or feeling it. Thus, the dream passage of Aiché, who saw Nadia, in a wedding gown, with her lawyer, launches a drama which reaches its outburst with the violent crisis of Nadia. The latter, loses the sense of reality and believes that she will marry with a lawyer.

The novella finishes with the determinism and will of the three girls to commit suicide. In cutting the white dress of Nadia, they deprive themselves from their dreams. Their passage from the universe of dreams and illusions into the real world is cruel, that is why they realize that they cannot live in reality and their only option is to commit suicide: “Leur seule issue est donc la mort” (Sebbar, 2003, p 103). In this passage, the author appears to assert that individuals who violate or corrupt a sacred language subject themselves to terrible penalties. The author employs words such as "seule issue" (sole way out) and "donc" to portray an undeniable sense of inevitability.

The religious aspect of classical Arabic makes it a restricted language, which is one of its secondary qualities. This part will look at this feature of Classical Arabic that will be addressed through the perspective of the piece

"La Robe Interdite". In it, Sebbar tells the circumstances which are at the origin of the creation of “la robe” and which became, towards the end of the novella, significant for its destruction. The dressmaker is obsessed by the desire of creating the most beautiful dress of the year and the most beautiful dress ever created. He travels all over the world in order to find a new source of inspiration. At the time of his vagrancies, he pays visit to some Arabic speaking countries. He walks in the “bazaar”, when his eyes are attracted to some dirty pages, which are insignificant themselves, but they are of primordial importance to him because they contain “arabesque” letters and drawings. This stranger, to the country, to the customs, and to the language, is at once enchanted by this unknown writing whose glare and purity “lui font même oublier les feuilles maculées” (Sebbar, 1996, p.86)

Arabic, then, presents itself, to the dressmaker, through the way it is written; it is a beautiful language, and although he does not manage to decipher the “arabesque”, he feels instinctively, that this language hides a secret and a power that is incomparable to anything in the world except to the power of holiness. This explains his reiterated wonderings” devine! Je la veux divine” (Sebbar, 1996, p.87). Moreover, this dress will be trimmed of these arabesques embroidered with the golden wire of these magic and miraculous letters. “La robe noire brille d’arabesque, savants, inconnues, estrangement belles, and comme ensorcellées” (Sebbar, 2003, p 93). But by trimming a dress (therefore creating a work of art by man) with a sacred writing (divine language), the dressmaker” laicize” this language created by God. Since he uses it for a profane object. Noting that he does not do it unconsciously as he destroys the mystical force of the language signs. The supernatural quality of these arabesques is symbolized by the number seven. Yet, the dressmaker finds seven torn and dirty pages in the bazaar which became for him an unlimited source of inspiration” qui lui donne des ailes” (Sebbar, 2003, p. 91). The magic of the number seven manifests at the time of the fashion-show when the audience is filled with enthusiasm and admiration for the dress and “(la) reclame sept fois” (Sebbar, 2003, p.93). Additionally, number seven plays a central role in religious mythology as well as popular culture (c.f fairy tales) and is regarded as a good omen, a symbol which is, thus, able to make people happy and make those who believe in its power filled with its benefits.

It is interesting that the arabesques of the dress give a new direction to the life of the young “manquein” who, after a first period of international celebrity and fame, fell into “l’oublie” (Sebbar, 2003, p.91). Now, the dressmaker rediscovers this young lady and decides to make her benefit of this dress” il la couvrira d’arabesques brodés au fil d’or” (Sebbar, 2003, p.91). She was the only one to have a vague idea of the significance of the arabesques « elle reconnaît le mot qui revient le plus souvent, les traits verticaux au début, la lettre sinueuse à la fin” (Sebbar, 2003, p.92)

The magic power of the arabesques does not only transform this woman into a beauty, but also into an immortal being "elle est debout, au milieu de la scene. Seule. Divine" (Sebbar, 2003, p.93.). It is worth noting that, in connection with the magic power of Arabic, one can trace a parallel between this fictional text and the personal life of the author. Yet, Sebbar describes the Arabic language, which she cannot speak, not only like a foreign language but also as a beautiful one which has this" force de langue sacrée"(interview with Leila Sebbar) Even though, as in the novella, where the understanding of the language makes some spectators able to decipher the arabesques, this deprives it from its supernatural qualities, it remains certainly a sacred language but it is not miraculous. Rather it becomes diabolic.

Sebbar is persuaded that, at the time, when she decided to learn this language, it will lose its miraculous power and became a communication tool. (interview). As stated before, Arabic will be transformed into an almost diabolic language simply because at the end of fashion show, some men shouting "d'une seule voix noire, diabolique" (Sebbar, 1996, p.93), jumping on the woman and surround the dress and thus The girl realizes she is naked. This incident may be seen as a metaphor for representing the Arabic language as transferring from a language of civilization to one coupled with barbarism and agony. In short, it becomes a diabolic language. The destruction of the dress is a direct consequence of laicization (The language of Coran became laicised when it is put on a dress that should be worn by a "woman; a naked woman") of the sacred arabesques by the dressmaker who dared decorate a profane work of art by sacred letters.

3.2. Dialectal Arabic or the mother language

Another instance of the relation between language and identity can be seen through the relationship between Sebbar and "her" mother tongue in Parle Mon Fils, Parle à ta Mère (1984).

In her novel Parle Mon Fils, Sebbar describes a discussion between the mother and her son, who, after being abroad for a long time, returns home, in Parisian suburbs. This conversation continues only with the mother speaking while the son is saying almost nothing. She speaks about the house, the father, the girls, and about him and his childhood (more precisely, about his blue eyes, religion, and about the radio and TV), about his so far voyages, about French girls and the best wife, about the cousin with blue eyes, about the walk of the beurs for equality, and finally, about his soul. She speaks, to him, in Arabic. Nevertheless, in her speech some French words would slip. This feminine language is characterized by a given stylistic specificity. First, we can note that the mother never pronounces (says) the name of the son, but she addresses him saying "mon fils". Moreover, one can note that she often makes use of the imperative when she asks him about a given thing" "dis-moi,

montre moi…etc.):

- Je vais mourir ici, sans bouger, mais toi, mon fils, d'où tu viens ?
- Tu es allé loin, jusqu'en chine ? C'est loin la chine ? Dis-moi.
- C'est ou le plus loin ? Montre-moi sur une carte partout où tu es passé, et dis-moi les noms. (Sebbar,1984, p.17).

She tackles many subjects and there is no coherence and unity in her speech because she moves quickly from one subject to another as the following passage illustrates: "Je sais qu'on a mis des filles comme ça en foyer, ou en prison, parce qu'elles ont vendu de la drogue. Dis-moi. Mon fils, Samira ta sœur, tu crois q'elle fait ça ? Tu crois ? et moi je ne sais rien. Je ne sais rien". (Sebbar,1984, p.31)

The language of the mother is insidious; she rejects any kind of "contredit" by her son. As Sebbar demonstrates through the reaction of the son who smiled again. The mother stops, abruptly – " Tu ne me crois pas, mon fils ? Tu ne vas pas me dire que je ne dis pas la vérité ? Parle, mon fils, parle." The son leans toward his mother asserting that "You are right Imma (mother in Algerian accent), you are right. You speak the truth. I believe you, Imma." (Sebbar,1984, p.46.)

The language of the mother is, also, warm and generous. When she learns that the Beurs and Beurettes want to cross France to fight for more respect, her first reaction is a typical reaction for a mother: she cares about young people because she knows that winter is coming and that they will be on the road, homeless, and without protection. She fears the violence of the French. Her anxiety is reflected in her language: she begins harassing her son with difficult issues came to her mind at once.

> Comment ils mangent ? Comment ils dorment ? Ils partent à pied et c'est bientôt l'hiver, ils sont fous ces Arabes... Pourquoi ils ne pensent pas à ces choses de la vie le froid, l'hiver, la pluie. Ils n'ont pas une mère ? La mère, qu'est-ce qu'elle a dit ? Ils marchent avec une valise, un sac ? Ils ont des habits pour avoir chaud et pour la nuit ? Ils sont fous. (Sebbar,1984, p.23.)

Another aspect of the "mother's" language is that it is very religious. The mother lists the tasks that Islam requires such as being faithful to prayers five times a day and fasting during Ramadan. The piety of the mother is reflected in hre mother tongue, not in French or any other language. Towards the end of the novel, the son leaves again his mother. She cannot convince him to stay home, but she still wants him to go with the blessing of God, the mother voices words of blessing in Arabic, kisses her son on the forehead. He leaves. "Va, mon fils, va... souviens-toi toujours que tu as une âme (Sebbar,1984, p.84.)

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the mother and the son do not speak the same language: she speaks Arabic (an Arabic with female characteristics in which slip the occasional French words), and that she likes his son uses when speaking with her, because ultimately, it is his mother tongue, the language of his childhood. Yet, the son insists on speaking French with his mother, who does not speak well the language of the host country. However, the son remains silent, almost through all the novel, His mother persists, she requests him to give her an answer to all her questions, she wants him to finally tell her which countries he has visited, how he lives... but he remains silent « Elle ne sait pas s'il écoute. Elle ne sait pas ce qu'il pense ; c'est elle qui parle et lui ne dit rien. (Sebbar,1984, p.58.)

3.3. The unknown language or colloquial Arabic

Along with dialectal Arabic that is reflected through the language of the mother, denoting the mother language, Sebbar makes use of another language that is the mixture of the two rival languages; Arabic and French. This combination resulted in creating a language that is unknown. This unknown language can be traced in the trilogy of Shérazade which comprises Shérazade, 17 Ans, Brune, Frisée, Les Yeux Verts (1982), Les Carnets de Shérazade(1985), and Le Fou de Shérazade(1991) .

Shérazade, is haunted by the obstinate want to build an identity that takes into account both membership; Algeria, the country of her parents, and France, the country where she grew up, attended school, and where his parents decided to emigrate. Her wanderings in Paris, her trip with the March of Beurs, and her trip to the Middle East demonstrate her refusal of being rooted, and identified, with a given group. She believes in the idea of an uncomfortable veritable no-man's-land area, but a fertile area.

In this context, it is surprising that Shérazade, like Sebbar, could never make it to Algeria: First, she still has the goal to go, and when she leaves Paris with Pierrot, towards the end of the first novel, she seems quite decided to visit the country of her family, "her" country. Nevertheless, early in the second novel, we learn that she left the boat to Algiers. The decision may seem paradoxical, but in fact, it reflects her inner turmoil, which does not allow her to "belong" to a country, or the other, but which shows that the only place she likes and needs to conquer is that «in-between", vague, and insecure. Within this dilemma of identifying herself with her "mother" language or her father's, Arabic emerged as a dialect that plays an ambivalent role in her quest for identity.

On the one hand, it is true that her family speaks Algerian Arabic dialect; Shérazade speaks, therefore, this language. Therefore, when she goes to the Middle East, she speaks this Arabic, her Algerian Arabic with its peculiarities due to immigration to France, with the Arab companion who

leads her to the fields of olive trees. Once there, he told her about her language, “Vous parlez l’arabe des Arabes de France"(Sebbar, 1991, p.16) In Beirut, Shérazade is stopped by three armed men in civilian suits and a soldier with a machine gun. They looked her, immediately, as a stranger: her dress, her untamed freedom, her fearlessness, and her decision to go wherever she wants, make her appear to those fanatics as an "alien": " Elle arrive d’une autre planète... Une extraterrestre... On va voir à quoi ça ressemble, une fille de cette race-là”(Sebbar, 1991, p.18).

In, Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts, all through her time in Paris, Shérazade picks out intelligent conversation partners with whom she exchanges Arabic. Thus, she refuses to speak, in Arabic, with Krim, one of her friends with whom she squats the dilapidated building in Paris: j’ai pas envie de te parler en arabe c’est tout. "(Sebbar, 1982, p.139) Yet, she reacts in a much less aggressive way to Julien’s attempts to initiate a conversation with her in Arabic. Thus, “il leur arrivait de parler en arabe depuis que Shahrazade avait vu des livres écrits en lettres arabes sur la table de travail et que Julien lui avait dit qu’il connaissait cette langue” (Sebbar, 1982, p.146). Their dialogues in Arabic are characterized by spontaneity, lightness, and even a recklessness that drives them to play with the language, so they amused themselves with their accents and sometimes recorded themselves to listen back and chuckle at their awkwardness. Julien was learning words of literary Arabic from Shérazade, and she was making him repeat phrases in Algerian colloquial Arabic, the language she spoke with her mother and that her grandfather had begun teaching her to read and write in Algeria with her sister Mériem. (Sebbar, 1982, p.146)

This relaxed lightness, which characterizes their dialogues in Arabic, is opposite to the difficulties Shérazade experience when writing in Arabic and trying to decipher the arabesques. For her, Colloquial Arabic has two strong occurrences in the text: the first, as a spoken language when her dialogues with Julien makes her relaxed and feeling the richness of the conversation. The second, as a written language, that is hard for her to understand, but that attracts her and thus becomes a central element of her wanderings in the metro; the arabesques guide her from one place to another:

> Shahrazade prit le métro, sans bien savoir où elle irait. Chaque fois qu’elle voyait une inscription sur une affiche, écrite en caractères arabes, elle sortait un carnet chinois réservé à cet usage, et notait avec application les mots, les phrases, elle ne savait pas très bien, vérifiait après la copie, si elle n’avait pas commis d’erreur, oublié un signe ou une boucle. Elle précisait la station, l’affiche publicitaire ou cinématographique, l’endroit sur le quai. Elle voyait de plus en plus de graffiti en lettres arabes, si elle voulait tout relever… Une fois elle recopiait soigneusement plusieurs lignes en

> arabe et c'est à la dernière qu'elle vit, écrit en lettres latines majuscules au-dessous du texte arabe – Slogan ? Poème? Chanson? Injures – LANGE INCONNUE (Sebbar, 1982, p.207)

Her journey, underground, thus, ends with a slogan that could be considered indicative for the whole trilogy: "LANGE INCONNUE". Therefore, in the three novels, Shérazade learns not only Arabic, but also succeeds to conquer this nebulous land between the two countries, which are her own, without one of them being completely hers. Yet, the quest for identity continues in a vortex where Shérazade speaks the two languages without having one of them as a true "mother" language. The girl is split between the two cultures in which she grew up, but she cannot tell precisely which culture has forged her identity the most; It is an identity that is complicated, miscellaneous, rich, and contradictory as Amine Maalouf put it : what makes one different from the other is that one finds oneself on the border of two countries, two or three languages, several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines one's identity. Would one be more authentic if one amputated a part of oneself? (Maalouf, 1998, p.9)

In fact, colloquial Arabic is not described only as an unknown language, but as a language of beauty and sensuality too. She listened to the father speaking with his mother and sisters who pay the family regular visits in the old ancestral house Ténès. She hears him, also, chatting with friends and speaking to the parent (s) of the pupils. She is fascinated by the sound (not the the voice) of Arab women chatting merrily while she listened attentively, in the evening when they gathered on balconies and terraces when washing clothes in the clear water river.

Shérazade listens to the soft sound of the Arabic language when her father was talking with his friends (his brothers). Through their laughter and the comfortable way of speaking that language, she realizes that her father is trying to show, to her, that she should not be afraid of that strange "language". She describes him to be calm, as he spoke with the parents of his pupils, neighbors, in his language, near his family members. The words were not words of anger, they could be joyful. She asserts that she sensed it because the father laughed gently while speaking, with complicity, as with a brother. "Je ne comprenais pas la langue de mon père, je l'entendais, dépourvue de sens, et je savais, à la voix, que mon père n'avait rien à craindre (Sebbar, 2003, pp.18-19)

Colloquial Arabic is not always a language of beauty and sensation; it is a language of brutality, as well. In fact, contrary to the beautiful language, used by a so-gentle father who speaks with parents of his pupils, who come from afar to his house, near the school, in order to sign some papers, is the other Arabic, the language of brutality. In fact, Arab boys never get tired of

insulting the daughters of their French "master (teacher). These boys speak a language that is brutal, violent, and which hurts girls, mentally and physically. Sebbar compares the insults of boys to stones ces mots étrangers et familiers, je les entends encore, violents comme des pierres jetées, visant l'oeil ou la tempe, et séducteurs (Sebbar, 2003, p.37). It is very interesting that Sebbar describes these words not only as "violent", but also as "seducing"words ". Despite her anguish, the girl is very attentive to the gestures and words of Arab boys. She understands that this is the seeming difference between her and the Algerian girls that caused the anger of the boys. However, despite her agony and anxiety, mixed with fascination, she never mentions the insults of Arab boys before her father; it is surprising as there is nothing more natural than a distressed child, even terrified, who trusts his parents to protect him. Nevertheless, neither Leila Sebbar nor her two sisters have never broken this silence even in France;

> "Je ne dis rien à mon père de ces blessures quotidiennes dès que je franchis le portail qui nous sépare du chemin hurlant. Longtemps après, très longtemps, mon père, en exil dans le pays de ma mère et de la langue qu'il aime, lira ce que j'écris de sa langue qui nous insulte, il ne dira rien. Comme il n'a rien dit de la maison de sa mère, de son peuple, de sa langue, ni du pays, de son histoire, de ses histoires. Rien. C'est le silence, obstinément, du côté du père, de l'arabe, de l'Algérie ancestrale."(Sebbar, 2007, p.47)

Colloquial Arabic took her many books to concretize the pain through language, so that the wound heals, finally. Sebbar could not believe that the language of the boys in the street is the same language of her father; this laughing sweet tongue cannot be compared to this brutal and violent language.

3.4. The language of the father:

This relation with the father brings us to the last part of discussion about the role of language in constructing the identity. In her writings, Sebbar demonstrates that a very important function of the father is the representation of the past, traditions and history of his land providing an opportunity for his children to be brought up in a strong tradition. (Seggara, 1997, p.97). However, Sebbar's father is not playing this role; He refused throughout his life that his three daughters and son learn his "mother" language, spoken Arabic. He had never talked, with his children, about his culture, traditions, and history of his country. But despite his good intentions, he threw his daughter Leila in deep despair, because he forced her to grow up in a world tightly closed in on itself. She notes:

> Mais les enfants, ses enfants, nés sur sa terre à lui, de son corps infidèle, il a rompu la lignée, ses enfants nés dans la langue de

> leur mère, il les aime, la mère de ses enfants et sa langue (…). Dans sa langue, il aurait dit ce qu'il ne dit pas dans la langue étrangère, il aurait parlé à ses enfants de ce qu'il était, il aurait raconté ce qu'il n'a pas raconté"(Sebbar, 2003, p.20)

These sentences reflect Sebbar's sadness at not having had the chance to grow up in the language of her father. Sebbar speaks of a " genealogic break "(Larguet, n.d) that is mixed with tenderness, because the three sisters and the boy had a happy childhood, which serves as a starting point for her writing. She claims that she will continue to write, as long as she has not exhausted this question: how to bring together what has been separated in a crucial manner by history and politics? (Larguet, 2005, n.d). These words also reflect the love she feels for this "foreign beloved" (Sebbar,2003,48), above all she keeps tender memories, and that some are contradictory as it may seem, because of her father's hard silence.

Sebbar's 2003 work, Je ne Parle pas la Langue de Mon Père explores the father's motivations for relating stories about their familial history to his children. The author undoubtedly expresses her doubt on whether the father considered the particular stories or aspects of their background that his children wanted to learn about. Sebbar explicitly states that she lacks knowledge and will never possess a concrete answer regarding whether her father considered his children's wishes when selecting the narratives to share about their family's historical background. The forbidden truths of the colony, her father took as his own burden to bear, that his children would remain free of worry, spared from torment over the coming war of earth, blood, and tongue. His silence stood as their fortification.

Six years after the death of her father (died in 1997), Sebbar tries in Je ne Parle pas la Langue de Mon Père to know his subsequent personality. She admits that he always found excuses not to mention his culture home with his daughter. Yet he was not discrete as he discusses with his children social, cultural, and even political issues of importance. One would therefore emphasize that when talking about hard silence of the father, one thinks only of his refusal to talk with his children about his country and its Culture. He thinks that with his silence, he would not only protect his family from the horrors of war, but also protects himself. His memories about the war of independence were terrible. In 1957, he was imprisoned in the same Orléans Ville, but he never talks about this tragic period with his daughter who evokes his silence by saying that her father refuses to reply to her questions regarding his involvement in that war, the threats, the prison in Orléans Ville, the blacklist, his wife's solitary pursuit of friendships and support for visitation rights, and, later, the train and military interrogations.

4. Conclusion

In summary, this study relates to the notion of reconstructing one's identity through the subversion of language. An examination of the writings of Leila Sebbar unveils a stimulating investigation into the complicated relationship that exists between identity and language. The body of work by Sebbar demonstrates the impact of linguistic expression on an individual's sense of self, emphasizing the complex relationship between these two facets. Besides, Sebbar skillfully incorporated a wide range of linguistic and cultural components into her writing, resulting in a multifaceted composition that defied rigid categorizations and embraced the adaptability and variety of identities. By utilizing her language, she was able to transcend limitations, transcend barriers, and convey the complex intricacies of existence that are beyond simplification.

Three key findings emerged from this investigation, which are succinctly summarized in what follows. First, Sebbar's utilization of the French language in her writing could be interpreted as a deliberate effort to create an impartial environment conducive to dialogue, a literary terrain where diverse viewpoints can converge, interrelate, and receive recognition. This impartial domain transcends the constraints imposed by any particular language or cultural tradition, facilitating a vibrant fusion of varied identities and perspectives.

Second, Sebbar's unique societal standing was shaped by her personal experience of being compelled to abandon her father's native land and the language of their origin, Arabic (in its standard and colloquial forms), in contrast to her embrace of French, the language of her mother's cultural background. Sebbar's approach can be interpreted as a paradigm shift toward self-awareness and knowledge acquisition, supplied with the potential for profound contentment and fulfillment.

Finally, Sebbar discovered herself in a location where the French language holds significant prestige, despite being estranged from the linguistic and cultural milieu of her father. She adeptly navigated this complex circumstance, perceiving it not merely as a catalyst for discord or fragmentation, but also as a valuable opportunity to delve into and solidify her personal identity. The individual's strong reaction to the intricate circumstances prompted her to engage in writing, which served as a means of self-expression, the construction of a narrative, and the intentional development of her multifaceted identity.

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