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Identity and Displacement in Leïla Sebbar's Silence on the Shore: A Postcolonial Study of Space, Language, and Narrative

Assia Ghazi [1], Tedj Ghomri [2]

1 Assia Ghazi, (PhD student) Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar

assia.ghazi@univ-bechar.dz

2 Dr. Tedj Ghomri, Tahri Mohamed University of Bechar

ghomri.tedj@univ-bechar.dz

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Abstract:

This paper will examine Leila Sebbar's creative writing by shedding more light on the inconsistent cultural duality that exiled individuals encounter when enquiring about their true identity. Therefore, this article will analyze the novel Silence on the Shore, through the perspectives of postcolonial theory, memory studies, and feminist critique to reveal the novel's controversial quest for identity. Thus, we argue that Sebbar consciously employed fragmentation, linguistic, and spatial narrative to effectively portray her protagonist's fractured identity along with the postcolonial subject. Moreover, this study will also explain how the reconstruction of national identities in exile might be very disadvantageous due to various historical and cultural factors. Nevertheless, our investigation will revolve around the doubly exiled identity located at the crossroads of two distinct shores and cultures, besides the conflicting feelings of hybridity and otherness.

Keywords: silence, Sebbar, identity, exile, hybridity, displacement.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Memory is the thread that weaves together the fragments of our identity, but memory itself is a land of shadows." (Sebbar, 1993) Leïla Sebbar's exceptional poetic novel, entitled Le silence des rives (Silence on the Shore), is an influential work in Franco-Maghrebian literature. It offers a deep and straightforward glance at the fractured quest for identity. The novel, set against the violent backdrop of Franco-Algerian colonial history and its resentful aftermath, chronicles the last moment in the life of an unnamed Algerian immigrant in France. Throughout his gradual loss of awareness, Sebbar examines the subtle ways in which identity is formed, fragmented, and constantly renegotiated at the crossroads of cultural dislocation, intergenerational trauma, and language rupture. The protagonist's marginal life, suspended between the coasts of his Algerian past and his French present, serves as a strong allegory for the Maghrebian diaspora in exile.

The prominent writer Leila Sebbar was born in Algeria to a French mother and an Algerian father, symbolizing the cultural "croisée" (crossroads) that she explicitly describes. Her work reflects the experience of existing between two distinct shores, cultures, languages, and histories. Silence on the Shore turns this personal positionality into an artistic and political commitment. The novel is caught in a multifaceted silence: the silence of a traumatized father, the silence of a forgotten home tongue, the silence of an uncaring host country, and ultimately, the approaching silence of his demise. However, Sebbar perfectly illustrates that this silence is more than just an absence; it is a voiceless communication, a personal burden that can be turned into a subversive instrument of resistance and reclaiming. the encroaching silence of death. Yet, Sebbar masterfully demonstrates that this silence is not merely an absence; it is a dense, communicative void, a burden that can be transformed into a subversive tool of resistance and confiscation.

As a matter of fact, Identity emerged as a controversial issue in literature, more restrictively a social phenomenon of colonial influence; in the words of Hall (1989), "Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses" (p. 10). Accordingly, his arguments elucidate the atrocious impact of colonization imposed on the creation of the identity of colonized people; that is to say, the fact of independence is not fairly sufficient to eradicate the cultural impact of colonialism and retrieve a sense of one's identity. Eventually, the crisis of identity emerged as a result of the critical post-colonial circumstances that the newly independent countries and cultures encountered in their quest for self-identity.

In postcolonial terminology, the concept 'Other' describes how one feels alienated and displaced from one's true self. Consequently, the most crucial theme explored in that postcolonial literature is that of identity formation and its complexities, especially in exile; therefore, it is hard to disregard its importance, which has become a prominent characteristic of postcolonial fiction. Definitely, it is worth examining works like Leila Sebbar's Silence on the Shore in order to shed more light on issues of identity crisis, the impact of immigration, and cultural displacement. Additionally, the novel portrays the way the host land contributes to shaping the cultural trauma that directly affects the protagonist's identity formation. For instance, Stuart Hall (1990), notably in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", discusses identity development among diasporic individuals who engage with people from various cultures. Even after independence, the influence of colonization continued. People moving between colonies form hybrid identities and new cultures that conflict culturally. The subject of identity is one of the most contentious aspects of post-colonialism.

Thus, this article will conduct a multifaceted analysis of Silence on the Shore, using postcolonial theory, memory studies, and feminist critique to reveal the novel's intricate quest for identity. We will argue that Sebbar intentionally uses fragmentation—spatial, linguistic, and narrative—to effectively mimic her protagonist's fractured identity and,

subsequently, the postcolonial subject. The fact of neglecting the chronological unified narrative, she deliberately questions the monolithic identities fostered by colonial and nationalist discourses. The analysis will be divided into four parts. First of all, we will investigate the issue of exile and spatial dual existence, focusing on the work of Gaston Bachelard and Edward Said to better comprehend how the protagonist's living between the two shores, "here" of France and "there" of homeland, causes a devastating psychological rupture. Second, we will enquire about the novel's handling of cultural hybridity and linguistic dislocation, examining how language repression and reclamation serve as fundamental strategies of colonial control and postcolonial resistance, respectively. Third, this study will explore deeper into the dissemination of generational trauma and the gendered dynamics of memory and silence, emphasizing the juxtaposition between patriarchal silence and maternal resistance. Last but not least, we will analyze Sebbar's narrative structure, claiming that the novel's fragmented; stream of consciousness frame, which is purposefully created in order to portray the flow of the main character's thoughts and emotions as they truly occur, often in an unstructured random way which represents the postcolonial identity. Finally, this article will demonstrate that in Silence on the Shore, Sebbar recasts belonging not as a celebration of homecoming, but rather as a challenging act of living on the borderline zone between two incompatible worlds.

2. Exile and Spatial Duality: The Unhealable Rift of the "Here-There" Dichotomy

The focal psychological stress of Silence on the Shore stems from the protagonist's deep feelings of spatial dislocation. He is an Algerian, physically present in France but emotionally attached to his homeland; basically, this hints at a paradoxical dilemma that defines his entire existence in exile. This is beyond just a physical dislocation, but an existential split that defines his memory, his relationships, and his eventual death. Hence, according to Leïla Sebbar, this cultural intersection is the pivotal experience of the first-

generation Maghrebian immigrant, generating a state of perpetual interruption that can be strongly highlighted through the theoretical lenses of Edward Said's concept of exile and Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology of space. Likewise, Edward Said (2000), in his seminal essay "Reflections on Exile," describes exile as an "unhealed rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home." For Said, the exiled individual is permanently contrapuntal, seeing the world through a double perspective that brings both insight and sorrow. He further points out that:"Exile is strangely compelling to think about, but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted." (Said, 2000, p. 173) Furthermore, Said emphasizes that exile is not an aspect that one can easily recover from. It drastically affects the exiled person's perception of the world, constantly alienating them from both their country and their current location in exile. As portrayed in Sebbar's protagonist, who embodies the manifestation of Edward Said's exiled figure. His migration to France was based on a promise to his mother that he would one day go back to Algeria. This broken promise becomes the novel's major metaphor of disintegration and irreversible loss. It symbolizes the deep contrast between the immigrant's objective in the journey of exile seeking economic advancement and the harsh reality of a life spent in an everlasting journey of displacement. The unfulfilled vow means that he can never truly embrace his French present, which is constantly overshadowed by the moral and emotional burden of his postponed return. According to Said (2000), he will always be out of place.

This awkward feeling of being "out of place" is intensified by the protagonist's anonymity. Sebbar's conscious decision not to name the "man" is a powerful literary device that transforms his inner self's struggle into a universal one. He is not just one man passing away on a strange shore; he represents every Maghreban exile who suffered from the bitterness of displacement, the aching nostalgia, and the loss of cultural identity. The

unnamed protagonist gives him a collective, archetypal importance, making his life story a testament to the shared trauma of a generation (Zimra, 2002). His silence becomes the echo of an immense communal silence imposed by the hard conditions of exile. As the unnamed protagonist states: "I will not say my name, they will have nothing of me, you will not be warned... So what do you want to propose to me for my death, you my wife who did not know how to give me some of your life here... Tell me — In my father's vault, there are still two seats, one for me, one for you, if you will — He's laughing again. (Sebbar, 1993, p. 120)

This alienation extends beyond social boundaries and into the spiritual sphere, which eventually culminates his fears about death. His anxiety of dying alone on the other shore, without a fellow Muslim to recite burial rites, draws attention to the ultimate spiritual exile caused by cultural dislocation. He is more concerned that his body will not be cleaned and covered according to the Islamic tradition. This fear is not only about religious observance, but also about the terror of a final, irreversible disconnection from his cultural and ancestral roots (Orlando, 1998). Admittedly, dying in a foreign country is a threatening experience that serves to dissociate the last string connecting him to his origins; his physical demise offers a clear confirmation of his lifelong spiritual homelessness and despair. Notwithstanding, his ultimate desire for a burial at sea is a genuine rejection of both shores, that is to say, a final surrender to the place he has spent his whole life in. He will belong to neither France nor Algeria, which means he falls into an indifferent river that divides them.

To properly grasp the psychological significance of this spatial dualism, Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space (1994) renders a crucial context. Bachelard (1994) contends that space is not a neutral storage container for human experience, but rather is actively changed by memory, emotion, and imagination. He notably discerns "felicitous spaces," places of security, closeness, and cherished memories, such as the childhood home, and inhospitable places, which alienate and constrain. Likewise, the protagonist's

consciousness fluctuates between these two shores. Correspondingly, the Algerian motherland, or the "other shore," serves as the ultimate Bachelardian "felicitous space." It is recalled not as a precise geographical location, but as a collection of emotional imprints: the affection of his mother's home, the scent of the ground, the noises of the town square.

Relatively speaking, this portrayed space has a maternal warmth, cultural roots, and a sense of belonging. The "house" of his roots is a mental foundation that gives peace, yet its inaccessibility causes enormous pain (Woodhull, 1993). For the protagonist, nostalgia is a delicate, never-ending misery that reminds him of the home he has lost and can never completely reclaim. The memory of the other shore is what enables him to survive the immense destruction of his French reality, yet it also contributes to deepening his psychological disintegration, as the perfect "there" makes the real "here" all the more miserable.

In extreme contrast, the environments he inhabits in France are dramatically hostile. His flat, which he occupies with his French wife, is a source of emotional despair and existential paranoia. It is not a house, but a prison, a place of marital silence, neglect, and temporal depression due to his illness. The physical decline of his weakened body mirrors the emotional deterioration of those surrounding him (Clifton, 2009). This house provides neither protection nor intimacy. Instead, it is here that he is most aware of his alienation and imminent premature death. It is a predicament place that represents his failed integration and the worthlessness of his existence in exile.

Nonetheless, there is one major exception to France's inhospitality, which is the cafeteria. The café is an ephemeral public setting that, paradoxically, serves as a "home" for the protagonist and his fellow exiles. It is a crucial node of the community where Arabic is freely spoken, political news from the homeland is discussed, and cross-generational ties are formed between elder immigrants and the younger "Beur" generation (Clifton, 2009). Inside the walls of the café, a semblance of the lost fellow migrants is reconstructed. It is a marginal

space that is neither entirely French nor completely Algerian, but a hybrid territory where a collective identity can be temporarily manifested and asserted. The café represents a precarious form of belonging created from the lack of a true home, demonstrating diasporic groups' resilience in carving out places of solidarity within an otherwise alienating space.

Ultimately, the protagonist's journey in exile is a tragic one. He is caught between the idealized memory of his homeland and the indifferent reality of a host land. Even the reciprocal collaboration is fading away. His ultimate wish, to remain dedicated to the sea, is a powerful symbol of his unsettled quest for identity. Unlike the migratory swallows he recalls, which "never lose their way," the protagonist wanders without clear direction, suspended in the unhealable rift between two shores (Clifton, 2009). His identity is inherently fragmented, determined not by where he is, but by the devastating place in between.

Another concept of the "croisée," or crossroads, is crucial not just to Sebbar's personal biography but also to the overall structure of Silence on the Shore. The protagonist's existence is a continuous journey through this crossroads, a place of junction where conflicting forces—past and present, memory and reality, belonging and alienation—collide without resolution. This spatial duality is the crucible in which his fractured identity is reformed. The "here-there" dichotomy is thus not a simple binary, but rather a dynamic field of tension that results in a condition of persistent liminality.

The aforementioned state is characterized by profound psychological ambivalence. The protagonist longs for Algeria while also realizing that it is impossible to return. Time and distance have changed the motherland into an illusion, a "topography of memory" that may no longer reflect reality. A return would risk breaking this beloved mental environment, replacing the warmth of remembrance with the dull disappointment of transition. As Thomas Wolfe famously wrote, "You can't go home again," not because home has vanished, but because you have changed, and the home you carry within you is a construct of memory,

forever sealed in the past. The protagonist's broken vow, then, is perhaps also an unconscious act of self-preservation, a way to protect the idealized "there" from the corrupting influence of the present.

Furthermore, his presence "here" in France is distinguished by a great extent of invisibility. He is a laborer who devoted his life to the French economy, yet he stays on the periphery, unnoticed and unheard by the dominant culture. His invisibility in the tale mirrors his social anonymity. He is one of numerous "shadow men" who helped build postwar France but were never completely accepted or integrated into its national narrative. This social elimination increases his geographical estrangement, making his physical presence in France seem ghostly and minimal.

To conclude, the spatial dynamics of Silence on the Shore serve as the framework for its investigation of postcolonial identities. Moreover, Sebbar employs the "here-there" duality to depict a compelling picture of exile as a perpetual condition of being. Conducting our analysis based on Said's (2000) notion of the "unhealable rift" and Bachelard's (1994) phenomenology of space makes us recognize how the protagonist's identity is pushed to its limits between a recalled, idealized home and a real, alienating present. His body may be in France, but his soul is adrift in the Mediterranean, seeking the other shore that he will never reach. This deep spatial dislocation paves the way for the various forms of fragmentation, such; linguistic, historical, and narrative, that define his dreadful quest for self-identification.

3. Cultural Hybridity and Linguistic Dislocation: The Tongue of the "Croisée"

If spatial dualism defines the protagonist's fractured identity on a territorial level, language dislocation serves as its psychological basis. In the postcolonial world, language is never a neutral medium of communication; it is a fundamental source of power, a weapon of colonial dominance, and a powerful vehicle for cultural resistance. Leïla Sebbar, herself a "croisée" who expresses her commitment in the language of the colonizer (French) while her emotional and historical roots belong to the Arabic-speaking world of Algeria, still, the

colonial language is the heart of her novel. Silence on the Shore thoroughly examines how linguistic suppression impacts generational connections and how the subversive act of multilingual restitution may be used to reassemble a fractured self.

As a matter of fact, the protagonist's father's silence is the major symbol of linguistic violence throughout the narrative. Having previously been an Arabic speaker, the father makes a conscious decision to forget his native tongue while settling in France. Not only that, he refuses to render it to his children, essentially suppressing a vital aspect of their cultural heritage. This latter is a profound metaphor for the psychological violence of colonialism and the pressures of assimilation (Hughes, 2002). The father's intentional silence is a consequence of his own trauma; a trauma associated with the Algerian War and the subjugation of his culture, and his muteness is an attempt, however inappropriate, to protect his children from the perceived disgrace of their original heritage. He believes that by assimilating the language and culture of the dominant country, he would increase their chances of survival, success, and, most importantly, their integration in France. Nevertheless, this linguistic self-erasure has a horrible cost. It results in what can be regarded as a "linguistic orphanage," leaving his children culturally disconnected (Mortimer, 1999). Children will substantially deny their mother language because of their father, who cuts off their most direct link to their ancestral history, cultural customs, and extended relatives in Algeria. Language is the bearer of culture, and its absence leaves a hole that cannot be replaced.

The protagonist becomes unable to completely interact with his own history is a direct outcome of his father's decision. The father's silence is not a passive absence, but an active generational severance, leaving a legacy of estrangement for future generations. This linguistic amnesia reinforces the colonial system, with French positioned as the language of modernity and power, and Arabic condemned to a silent, humiliating past. This theme

resonates deeply with the work of postcolonial theorists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, he believed that in order to decolonize one's mind, one must first decolonize the language. The father in Silence on the Shore portrays the colonized mind that has internalized the oppressor's value system, forsaking its mother tongue for the sake of integration. His silence is a personal tragedy that echoes a larger historical trauma.

In sharp contrast to this patriarchal and colonial suppression, Sebbar's authorial voice and the deeds of her female characters reflect a potent kind of linguistic resistance. Sebbar doesn't write in "pure," conventional French. Instead, she deconstructs the colonizer's language from inside, introducing Arabic and Berber phonetics, rhythms, and lexicon (Donadey, 1999). This conscious stylistic choice is regarded as a political act. She confronts the French language's cultural hegemony by forcing it to incorporate Maghreb sounds and sensitivities, resulting in a symbolic recovery. The "creolisation" of French alters it from an oppressive instrument to a powerful testament for hybrid production, reconstructing fractured fragments of a "croisée" identity (Geesey, 1996). Her text encompasses elements of the repressed mother tongues, making the language itself a symbol of survival and resilience.

This deliberate act of language subversion has a thematic echo in the figure of the "Beur," a concept created to describe second-generation North African immigrants in France. These migrants navigate the space between their parents' silenced past and the demands of the French present. Their speech is often a hybrid mix of French, Arabic, and Verlan (French slang), a linguistic bricolage that perfectly mirrors their composite identities. For the "Beur" generation, this hybrid language is not a sign of deficiency but a source of cultural identity and solidarity (Orlando, 1998). It is a new tongue forged in the crucible of exile, one that both acknowledges their French reality and glorifies their Maghrebian heritage. They constitute a future where the rigid binaries of colonizer/colonized and French/Arabic begin to collapse, replaced by a more fluid, dualistic form of being.

The protagonist, belonging to an earlier generation, is trapped between the father's preferring silence and the "Beurs'" assertive hybridity. He retains bits of Arabic words, phrases, and prayers, but lacks fluency. His linguistic state of confusion reflects his entire identity. He is a man confined between languages and shorelines, unable to fully claim either. At the same time, Sebbar brings an important gendered component to these linguistic conflicts. While the male characters, especially the father, are connected with silence and language erasure, the feminine characters emerge as the guardians of traditional storytelling and cultural memory. The mother's tale in the village square reveals linguistic resilience that counteracts the father's textual and verbal alienation, which will be further addressed in the following chapter. Her Arabic-speaking voice acts as a medium for cultural heritage, a maternal knot of constant resistance.

In conclusion, Silence on the Shore portrays a detailed and intricate picture of how language shapes postcolonial identity. In addition to being a tool of colonial erasure, it also causes significant generational alienation and serves as a breeding ground for subversive resistance. Sebbar illustrates how the fight for identity is closely tied to the conflict for language through the father's mournful silence, the "Beur" generation's vivid hybridity, and her own "croisée" writings. Sebbar indicates that the quest for identity is intricately associated with the struggle over language. So, finding a voice requires finding a self, and for those exiled subjects, this frequently entails creating a new language out of the pieces of the old and the new one, a hybrid language that can express the painful and challenging reality of existing between worlds. The concept of cultural hybridity, as enunciated by theorists like Homi K. Bhabha (1994), is a key term to better understand Sebbar's works. Bhabha points out that the colonial confrontation creates a sort of "third space" of hybridity, where two distinct cultures meet and merge together to produce something new and frequently subversive. This is not a peaceful combination but a space of tension, mimicry, and

ambivalence. The "Beur" identity, along with Sebbar's linguistic style are perfect illustration of this "third space." In other words, this phenomenon is not simply a blending of French and Algerian cultures but a new cultural framework that emerges from the contradictions of the postcolonial condition. This hybridity is a form of resistance because it disrupts the clear-cut, hierarchical binaries upon which colonial power depends for instance civilized/savage, modern/traditional, French/Arab (Bhabha, 1994).

Tragically, the protagonist is unable to entirely fill this "third space." He came to France as a member of a generation that embraced assimilation rather than hybridity as the main paradigm. As his father tried to erase his origins, there was great pressure to neglect one's roots in order to be "French," yet this model turned out to be erroneous. Despite their attempts, the immigrants continued to be marginalized under the so called "other" and relegated to the back seats. Hence, assimilation was never an adequate option. the main character is left in a condition of cultural limbo and despair. He has never been completely French, but he is no longer an Algerian. He is currently detached from his linguistic and cultural wellspring, so he will often be defined by what he has lost.

This means that his linguistic and cultural alienation is therefore not just a personal fracture but a historical condition. It depicts a particular moment in the history of Maghrebian immigration, a moment right before the emergence of a more assertive, hybrid "Beur" identity politics in the 1980s. The novel is considered a bitter testament to this earlier generation, a generation that carried the heaviest burden of cultural displacement in silence.

The novel's title, Silence on the Shore, thus offers a deeper linguistic meaning. The "shore" is not only the physical coastline but also the edge of language itself. The protagonist stands on the shore of speech, able to hear the echoes of his mother tongue across the water but unable to interpret it fluently. The climax of his lifetime is that he is surrounded by the noise of a foreign language that has never truly become his own. His intentional silence, as he lies dying alone, is the culmination of a lifetime of linguistic alienation. Paradoxically,

Sebbar's book aims to express the terrible pain of an unnamed man who has lost the ability to express his own experience using the language that helped to mute him. Her writing becomes an act of bearing witness, providing a voice to those who lack it, and expressing the deep grief of the tongue-tied exile. The unnamed protagonist might also reflect the protagonist's silence. He is not only left in exile with no voice to speak about his malaise, but he is unable to find his voice in this new careless world. More crucially, His silence witnesses the colonial violence during the Algerian War of Independence and also witnesses the discrimination and the otherness he encounters in exile. "I will not say my name, they will have nothing of me, you will not be warned... So what do you want to propose to me for my death, you my wife who did not know how to give me some of your life here... Tell me — In my father's vault, there are still two seats, one for me, one for you, if you will — He's laughing again. Why are you laughing like that? 'You're asking me? You and I, united in death, after all these years each with its misfortune, unable to move, clinging to each other, for what life? Subject to a disastrous fate, separated and united, you want that in my death.." (Sebbar, 1993, p. 120)

4. Generational Trauma and Gendered Silences: The Inheritance of a Mute History

Leïla Sebbar's Silence on the Shore is a novel saturated with memory; however it is what remains unspoken—the silences, gaps—that carry the most profound weight. Throughout the different layers of individual, familial, and collective memory was gathered to reveal how identity is not only shaped by what is stuck in the memory, but more importantly, by what is violently repressed or forgotten. The novel provides a powerful case study in the transfer of intergenerational trauma, related to Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), frightening as the silent, primordial wound. Sebbar strongly discloses the way

historical trauma is referred to, creating a legacy of displacement, thereby revealing prominently a neutral dynamic in the protection of silent memory.

once again, the major figure in this transmission of trauma is definitely the protagonist's father. His identifying feature is his silence about his past, specifically his tough experience of being imprisoned by the French during the war. This silence is more than a personal idiosyncrasy; it is an aspect of post-traumatic stress, a psychological defense mechanism against memories too dreadful to express. Similarly, the theorist Cathy Caruth suggests that traumatic events are frequently not integrated into genuine memory but are sustained as unassimilated fragments, resulting in a "speechless terror." This condition is demonstrated in father's silence he cannot express freely his experience because he was unable to come out of it completely unharmed.

This silence is heightened and triggered by a larger, state-sponsored amnesia. After 1962, the French state officially described the Algerian War as "les événements" (the events), refusing to acknowledge it as a "war" until 1999 (Stora, 1991). This national policy of disregard generated a public emptiness where the memories of Algerian veterans could reach no official recognition or affirmation. Therefore, the French nation's silence reflects and reinforces the father's muteness, which is not implemented in a vacuum. A public denial is reflected in his private unwillingness to talk.

This convergence of political silence has drastic consequences for the next generation. Instead of inheriting a tale, the main character and his siblings inherit an absent voice. They are raised in the shadow of an unnamed trauma, feeling its impact but without being able to identify its features. This is exactly what Marianne Hirsch (1997) terms "post-memory": the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own lives are shaped by the traumas of their parents. The protagonist is haunted by his father's war, a history bequeathed to him not through stories but through silence, gestures, and moods (Hirsch, 1997). This "empty inheritance" leaves him disconnected from his own

history, unable to understand the roots of his family's sorrow and his own profound sense of dislocation (Woodhull, 1993). This traumatic heritage involves the father's unwillingness to teach him Arabic; suppressing the language is another tactic to suppress the terrible past that language bears.

In deliberate contrast to this atmosphere of patriarchal silence and trauma, Sebbar put forward a strong model of matrilineal oral tradition and resilience. While the mother's memory is oral, communal, and life-affirming, the father's memory is textual, linked to official documents and ultimately mute. One of the most cherished memories of Algeria that the protagonist often remembers is centered on his mother and the other women of the village. Actually, he recalls them in the village square or the courtyard of the house, telling stories, news, and histories in Arabic. These oral manifestations are considered acts of cultural preservation, a vivid archive that maintains the community's history alive in the face of colonial eradication and patriarchal control (Curry, 2001).

A crucial feminist contribution in the novel includes the gendered divide of memory. In this regard, Sebbar challenges the fact that history belongs only to men, war, and official documents. She contends that women's voices and the common storytelling traditions that unify a community constitute a more resilient, life-sustaining type of history. The mother's voice portrays not only continuity but also cultural rootedness and a connection to a pre-colonial past. It is the essence of potential healing, a contrast-narrative to the father's traumatic silence.However, the trauma of the protagonist is that he is geographically and culturally alienated from the essence of healing. His exile experience in France means he can solely recall his mother's voice through the fractured and fading perspective of memory. He holds on to these memories, but they are insufficient to fill the gap left by his own displacement and his father's silence. He finds himself caught in a powerful storm of memory deprivation, a quiet father, and a distant mother.

The feminist critique affects Sebbar's narrative structure throughout, focusing on the fragmented, associative memories of her protagonist; she firmly critiques male-dominated historical narratives that are generally objective, linear, and authoritative. Furthermore, one could suggest that Sebbar employs silence as a purposeful feminist tool. At first glance, one might assume that the voicelessness of certain female characters can be interpreted as a narrative strategy to highlight their marginalized position, thereby enhancing the political significance of their absence from the historical chronicle (Spivak, 1988). In Silence on the Shore, the most powerful voice of historical persistence belongs to the mother, yet it is a voice filtered through the losing consciousness of her son, a testimony of both its long-lasting power and its vulnerability in the context of exile.

In a nutshell, the history of the Algerian War and the gendered practices of memory preservation and silencing are closely intertwined with the theme of generational trauma in Silence on the Shore. A legacy of dislocation that drastically influences and shapes his son's identity construction due to the father's traumatic muteness, which is further exacerbated by French governmental amnesia. Consequently, the son becomes a bearer of a "postmemory," haunted by a past he cannot express. By way of contrast, Sebbar posits the strength of matrilineal oral tradition as a form of cultural resistance and a potential source of healing. The protagonist's tragedy is his position between these two shores, scarred by his father's silence and extremely distant from being preserved by his mother's voice. Thus, his quest for identity is an alert to make sense of a history determined by gaping holes and deafening silences.

The psychological impact of this inherited silence cannot be underestimated. It creates a sort of uncertainty at the core of the protagonist's inner self. Moreover, Identity, from different viewpoints, is a narrative we construct about ourselves, a personal story that links our past, present, and future. But when the past is an empty page, it becomes hard to create a cohesive self-narrative from a story that has omitted portions. The protagonist's internal

monologue is a frustrated attempt to put together the fragments, to find a pattern in the chaos of his memories, because the crucial piece, his father's story, is absent. This dynamic demonstrates how colonial trauma persists even after the end of hostilities; it reverberates over the next generations. The harshness of the war has obviously transmuted the psychological violence of silence, which in turn engenders alienation and fragmentation in the colonized children. Evidently, the main character is a victim of a war that ended before he reached adulthood. His struggle is proof of colonialism's extended and destructive eternal life.

Additionally, this disparity between the father's silence and the mother's storytelling reveals more general facts about how societies deal with trauma. So, Official, state-sanctioned history often tends to tone down and soften unpleasant truths, generating polished but erroneous narratives of national glory or unity. Conversely, in an unofficial, communal, and often female-centered frame of memory narrates stories, songs, and is frequently the repertoire of the painful truths that official history seeks relentlessly to hide and suppress. Sebbar elevates this "unofficial" archive, asserting that true history and, by all means, true identity are to be found not in monuments or books but in the resilient whispers of the marginalized. Eventually, "silence on the shore" is, therefore, the silence of the father, the silence of the state, and the silence of a history that has been systematically erased. The protagonist's tragic conclusion of a life spent struggling with these more significant, historical silences is the protagonist's ultimate decline into the silence of death. His incapacity to find a space and achieve serenity stems directly from the past that refuses to disclose its identity, leaving him in a meaningless and disconnected present for all time.

5. Narrative Fragmentation as Identity Construction: The Form of a Fractured Self

In literature, form is never merely aesthetic; it is a key component of meaning. In Leïla Sebbar's Silence on the Shore, the fragmented, non-linear disjuncture narrative structure is not a stylistic implication but a powerful proclamation of the novel's fundamental themes. In the same fashion, the form of the novel reflects the fragmented consciousness of its protagonist, functioning as a formal representation of postcolonial identity; a self that is not fully unified, or progressive, but is instead an assemblage of disparate memories, impressions, and unresolved tensions. Thus, Sebbar's narrative technique is a radical quest for identity construction, one that counteracts colonial and Western literary conventions in favor of a structure that can accurately represent the experience of disintegration and fragmentation. As she asserts: "The subjects of my books are not my identity; they are the sign, the signs of my story of crossroads, of mixed race obsessed with its road and the side roads, obsessed with the surreal encounter of the other and the same, with the unnatural and lyrical crossing of earth and the city, of science and the flesh, of tradition and modernity, of East and West." (Huston & Sebbar, 1986, p. 126).Accordingly, Sebbar's physical distance from home was her source of inspiration and commitment to portray realistic journeys in exile. In this sense, it is less about creating meaning for cultural displacement than about developing a universal rhetorical philosophy of human perception about the issues related to re-constructing identity in exile. Accordingly, she refers to her own undefined identity as a positioning that is almost conscious and is denoted by terms like crossing, border zone, and exile in such vivid works of art. While Sebbar claims that she doesn't write to explore her own identity issue, it's clear that her novels trace the plight of exiled people who also find themselves at a cultural and political crossroads.

The principal narrative mode of the novel is a stream of consciousness, an internal monologue that uncovers in the protagonist's mind as he lies on his deathbed. This particular technique permits Sebbar to entirely collapse chronological time. The narrative flows freely and unpredictably between past and present, weaving together memories of his Algerian

childhood, visions of his parents, observations of his current miserable surroundings in France, and anxieties about his impending death (Curry, 2001). A single emotion trigger sounds, smells, tastes that can send his mind spinning back decades. This temporal flexibility breaks from the chronological development typical of the Western realist novel, which frequently indicates a harmonious, evolving self leading towards a clear resolution. In the case of Sebbar's protagonist, the self is not evolving; it is rather disintegrating, and memory is not a clear timeline but a chaotic, whirling climax. The past is intensely behind him, the present is painful, constantly interfering, and defining his final day (Zimra, 2002).

Another key element within this fragmented narrative is the theme of the "inhospitable reader" and the failure of writing. The protagonist is noticed attempting to write, to express his story on paper, but he is ultimately incapable of doing so in a reflective or cohesive way. This failure is deeply introspective. It underscores one of the central tragedies of exile: identity remains unrealized without a community to witness and validate it. As a story requires a listener, a text requires a hospitable reader. The protagonist's alienation in France means he lacks a receptive audience for his life story (Gontard, 2002). The French society around him is uncaring, and his own family is fractured by silence and distance. This absence of a "hospitable reader" means his narrative remains unnoticed, silenced, and uncommunicated. Even writing fails to offer consolation or establish meaning because it is a dialogue with no reaction. This highlights the inherently social scope of identity; It is not a simple matter you can develop in an empty or silent atmosphere. Indeed, this narrative solitude impacts heavily on his existential alienation.

By implementing a fractured and unresolved narrative, Sebbar engages in political and artistic resistance from others. Since the classic, coherent narrative structure stresses closure and unity, it may be understood as reflecting the ideological task of the nation-state, which attempts by all means to create a united, homogeneous national identity. Generally speaking,

colonial narratives depend on telling "complete" stories that justified colonial dominance and presented a "civilized," unified vision of the world. By refusing to provide an explicit solution or a "cured" protagonist. So, Sebbar criticizes the basic concepts of unity and coherence. She withstands her impulse to tell a straightforward story of successful integration or a triumphant return to the homeland. Neither is achievable, and claiming otherwise would be a betrayal of the experienced reality of exile. Above all, Sebbar privileges an assumption that identity is polyphonic, incomplete, and perpetually in transition (Lionnet, 1995). The protagonist's self is made up of several, often contradicting, voices: the voice of the kid in Algeria, the voice of the labourer in France, the voice of the son, the spouse, and the dying man. The novel's fragmented structure allows all of these voices to coexist without being enticed into a false harmony. Such embracing of fragmentation is a direct assertion that the "incomplete" self is not necessarily a failure, but rather a truthful portrayal of the postcolonial reality. The "croisée" identity is inherently a combination of pieces, and representing it accurately requires a fragmented aesthetic style. With this in mind, the narrative's technique correlates with the work of poststructuralist and postcolonial scholars who have attempted to deconstruct the concept of a stable, unified subject. Then, Sebbar believed that identity is not a pre-existing essence to be figured out, but a fluid, contentious field of construction. the protagonist's quest for identity is not merely about finding a single, true self, but about the struggle to put together the fractured pieces of his life. The narrative's lack of a final, identifying moment of self-realization is the focal point: for this man, at this historical crossroads, no such moment is achievable.

All aspects considered, the novel's structure is inextricably associated with its subject matter major concerns. The stream of consciousness, temporal collapse, inability to write, and general denial of closure are not just literary tools; they constitute the fundamental essence of Sebbar's argument. She creates a peculiar structure that is as fragmented, liminal, and haunting like the identity it seeks to portray. By doing so, she contradicts the literary and

ideological standards that require unity and resolution, advocating instead for the political and existential truth of fragmentation. The novel's structure becomes an effective testament to the concept that for the exiled, displaced subject, the only real story is a fractured one.

6. CONCLUSION: Identity at the Crossroads

In Silence on the Shore, Leïla Sebbar presents an impressive and extremely touching meditation on the nature of postcolonial identity, arguing that it is a continual, harmful, and relentless struggle rather than a stable, permanent entity to be acquired. The novel's strength stems from its realistic depiction of the conflicts that define the immigrant experience, refusing to provide straightforward clarifications or relieving conclusions. Instead, Sebbar perceives identity as an emergent quality of the liminal areas between two shores, languages, memories, and silence. The concept of the "croisée," or crossroads, thus goes beyond a personal figure to become the key metaphor for modern postcolonial subjectivity itself: a condition of perpetual navigation between the disparities that distinguish seemingly incompatible distinct shores.

Throughout this analysis, we have examined how Sebbar uses a multi-layered fragmentation method to create this notion of identity. Spatially, the protagonist is caught in an "unhealable rift" (Said, 2000) between the idealized "there" of his Algerian past and the hostile "here" of his French present. Ultimately, the spatial and psychological dichotomy, analyzed via the theoretical lenses of Said (2000) and Bachelard (1994), posits exile as a permanent state of being, with home serving as a phantom limb, a missing presence that continuously hurts. His final request for a burial at sea is the ultimate embracing of liminality, rejecting a space in favor of the fluid area in between.

Linguistically, the text reveals the traumatic injuries left by colonial power. The father's mindful amnesia of his native Arabic results in a cultural orphanage legacy (Mortimer, 1999), whilst Sebbar's hybrid subversive work reveals how the colonizer's language may be

appropriated and converted into a source of resistance (Bhabha, 1994; Donadey, 1999). The discrepancy, on the one hand, between the father's silence and the mother's oral traditions, and, on the other hand, the "Beur" generation's hybrid speech, illustrates that the struggle for selfhood is, fundamentally, a struggle for a voice capable of articulating a composite reality. Historically speaking, Sebbar addresses the terrible effects of generational trauma in her seminal work, demonstrating how the unspoken Algerian War's atrocities and the consequent state-enforced forgetfulness produce a "post-memory" of silent suffering (Hirsch, 1997). So that, the protagonist's tragedy is portrayed as being dislocated from the identical maternal narrative that should have provided healing, highlighting the various ways history is transmitted and resisted through the gendered contrast between the mother's resilient story and the father's tragic muteness.

Last but not least, the narrative's structure masterfully implemented these conceptual problems. The protagonist's fractured self is reflected in the fragmented, non-linear stream of consciousness, which subverts Western and colonial expectations for a unified identity. Through the rejection of resolution, Sebbar affirms the imperfect, polyphonic self as a legitimate sort of postcolonial existence (Lionnet, 1995). The narrative's framework is not a mere depiction of a quest for identity, but most crucially, it is the quest itself, in all its chaotic, painful, and unresolved grace.

Eventually, Silence on the Shore reconstructs the real meaning of belonging. That being the case, not only for Sebbar's protagonist, but also for the countless exiled migrants, thus, belonging is not easily restored in a physical return to the homeland. Since both the individual and their surroundings have been permanently changed, such a return is not desirable. Sebbar contends that the determination to live in the "croisée"—the intense intersection of memory and forgetfulness, language and silence, past and present—is the key to a different, more challenging form of belonging. In the long run, identity is not the ultimate destination one can strive to reach, but a constant, exhausting process of

overcoming these differences. Thereby, Leïla Sebbar's book is a primordial and timeless illustration of this battle, giving voice to the silence on the shore and, definitely, articulating a fundamental truth of our postcolonial world: where home is not a space you aspire to return to, but a story you struggle to recount.

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