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THE COLONIAL VIOLENCE: A READING OF LEILA SEBBAR'S LA SEINE ÉTAIT ROUGE

Akudo Ogechi Ugwumba

Nigeria French Language Village Ajara-Badagry, Lagos State Nigeria

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*Corresponding author: Akudo Ogechi Ugwumba

Abstract

This article explores Leila Sebbar's La Seine Était Rouge through the lens of the subaltern framework within postcolonial theory. The novel examines the enduring impacts of colonial violence on Algerian identities, particularly through the lens of the 1961 Paris Massacre. Set against a backdrop of personal narratives intertwined with historical context, the novel explores themes of displacement, cultural memory, and the trauma of colonial oppression. Through characters such as Amel and Omer, Sebbar illustrates the complexities of navigating post-colonial identities marked by alienation and a yearning for belonging. The narrative employs a fragmented style, reflecting both individual and collective trauma, as characters confront their shared history and the violence that has shaped their lives. Sebbar's portrayal of women highlights their resilience amidst suffering, suggesting that storytelling becomes a powerful form of resistance against erasure. By amplifying marginalized voices and emphasizing the psychological ramifications of colonialism, La Seine était rouge invites readers to critically engage with the legacies of violence and the necessity of reclaiming identity. Ultimately, the novel advocates for understanding and healing through the acknowledgment of painful histories, positioning Sebbar as a vital voice in post-colonial discourse. Sebbar not only recounts a significant historical event but also fosters a collective journey toward reconciliation and recognition of those impacted by colonial violence.

Keywords: Algerian war of independence, Maghreb, October 1961 massacre, Subaltern, Trauma.

1. Introduction

Leila Sebbar, an author of Maghrebian origin, often considered as a Francophone writer, is renowned for her poignant exploration of identity, cultural displacement, and the legacy of colonialism in her works. Born in 1941 in Algeria, she moved to France during the Algerian War of Independence. Her father was jailed for a few months during the war and he had to struggle hard to protect his

family. These experiences significantly inform Sebbar's writing. Her literary significance lies in her ability to blend personal narratives with historical context, giving voice to the voices often marginalized in mainstream discourses. She has written so many novels and short stories such as *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (1981), *Le silence des rives* (1993), *Mon cher fils* (2012),

La Jeune fille au balcon (1996), *La Seine était rouge* (1999). Through novels such as *La Seine était rouge*, Sebbar crafts narratives that challenge readers to confront uncomfortable truths about history and its lingering effects. Her unique perspective as a woman of Algerian descent navigating between cultures and identities enriches the literary landscape, making her an essential figure in contemporary literature and a vital voice in discussions of colonial violence and trauma.

Many literary critics such as Jean Déjeux and Christiane Achour have studied and worked on Leïla Sebbar's books. These critics dwelt on different aspects of her works especially her view on the relationship between France and Algeria and how she juxtaposes the background of both countries to show the difference in cultures between them. Jagne and Parekh (1998) refer to her as a writer of novels and essays on immigration while some others mention her in articles on "Beur" literature. However, we discovered that not much has been said about her writings concerning the colonial violence and its effect on the Algerians, especially the Paris massacre of 1961.

Therefore, this study is based on Sebbar's passionate narration of the violence recorded in Paris on October 17 1961 where many Algerians were killed for peacefully protesting for their rights. The objective of this study is to re-iterate the importance of Sebbar's works in the post-colonial Maghrebian society through the depiction of the colonial violence experienced by Algerians in her work, *La Seine était rouge*. Set against the backdrop of the 1961 Paris Massacre, *La Seine était rouge* follows the lives of Algerian characters who confront the brutal realities of colonial oppression. The title, meaning "The Seine Was Red," evokes the bloodshed that took place during the massacre, symbolizing both physical violence and the emotional trauma experienced by the characters. Sebbar employs a fragmented narrative style, weaving together various perspectives that highlight the interconnectedness of individual and historical trauma. The characters grapple with feelings of displacement, identity loss, and a longing for their homeland, all while navigating the hostility and prejudice of French society. This study showcases how Sebbar uses her craft to rewrite an Algerian history that was partially erased by French colonialism. The focus of the study is to encourage more critical studies of the colonial violence and its impact on the post-colonial Africa.

We will adopt the French "explication de texte" (textual analysis) in examining the colonial violence in Sebbar's *La seine était rouge*. The use of this methodology permits an in-depth textual analysis of literary works. Combined with the post-colonial framework of subalternity, the French "explication de texte" unveils dynamics of violence, trauma and its after effect in Sebbar's historical writings. In her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak challenges the dominant narratives that often eclipse marginalized voices in the discourse of colonialism. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding the complexities of colonial violence as depicted in Leila Sebbar's novel *La Seine était rouge*. The novel reveals the ways in which colonial powers seek to silence those they oppress. By employing the concept of the subaltern, this paper will argue that Sebbar, acting as the voice of those historically relegated to the margins, illuminates the traumatic legacy of colonialism. Furthermore, that she explores how individuals navigate their identities in a landscape scarred by violence and displacement. We will delve into Sebbar's portrayal of colonial violence by

examining how her characters embody the struggles and resilience of those silenced by history. Through this lens, we can better understand the intricate weave of personal and collective trauma that shapes their experiences and the broader implications for post-colonial identity.

1.1 Historical Context

This part discusses the historical overview of the Francophone Maghrebian society and its literature, colonialism in Algeria and the impact of historical events such as colonialism on identity and society.

1.2 The Francophone Maghrebian Society and its literature

According to Sadiqi (2008), the Francophone Maghrebian society consists of the three north African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. He continues by saying that these three countries have a common historical and socio-cultural background due to the fact that they all passed through the French colonisation. Sadiqi's comment is in line with Ennaji (2005) who opines that the major similarities found among the three countries of the Maghreb reside in their history and geo-political characteristics, being that they were colonised by France. This French colonisation makes them similar because they share more or less the same experiences with the so-called civilisation, which includes their literature.

Francophone Maghrebian literature dates back to the French invasion of Algeria in 1930, a period of French colonial occupation that gave birth to this literature, which is also a part of African literature. Sellin and Abel-Jaouad (1998) confirms that Maghrebian writers are products of extreme colonisation while Atilade (2014) concludes that French colonial strategy of assimilation helped in producing a class of Maghrebian elites well informed in the language of the colonisers. According to Déjeux and Mitsch (1992), the francophone Maghrebian literature is neither indigenous nor national and that for this reason, it poses a serious problem for Arabic language critics as well as foreign observers. They also posit that since 1950s when francophone literature was first written by Maghrebians (as Maghrebians not as French), many terms have been coined to define it; "literature of French expression" and "French language literature" are the most commonly used ones. Déjeux and Mitsch also confirm that Kacem Bufaso talks about "Moroccan literature of French language", Ahmed Lansari discusses "Algerian literature of Arab expression in French language", while Jean Sénac proposes "Literature of French writing" or "Literature of French letters", but none of these terms has been successful. Schöpfel (2000) explains that even if for a long-time people have been pessimistic about Francophone Maghrebian Literature, it has gained international recognition and it is being studied in universities around the world. Some of the Maghrebian writers such as Kateb Yacine, Ben Jelloun and Leïla Sebbar have also been given international recognition in the francophone world. Schöpfel (2000) also argues that Francophone Maghrebian Literature is different from Colonial Literature. He affirms that Francophone Maghrebian literature represents sufferings, wars, quest for identity, problem of emigration and exile, the literature of the second generation of the Maghrebians and culture. He refers to the writers as "écrivains observateurs et très attaché au réel" (Schöpfel, 2000 :40). This means that these writers write about the history of the Maghreb linked to the French colonisation.

1.3 Colonialism in the Maghreb

Colonisation in Africa has been a recurring topic for discussion by literary critics. According to Davidson (2002), towards the beginning of the 19th century, there was an industrial revolution in Europe which led them to come to Africa to source for raw materials for the emerging industries. The Berlin conference of 18 November, 1884 to 30 January, 1885 was dedicated to the partitioning of Africa by the Europeans in the name of “Regenerating Africa”. France, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Spain were among the countries that colonised Africa. According to Schöpfel (2000), the French penetration of the Maghreb started from 1830, where Algeria became a political department of France while Tunisia and Morocco were put into protectorates. They introduced some new ideas in the Maghrebian society and aroused some serious questions. France-Maghrebian relationship is seen by most Maghrebian literary critics as filled with injustice, war, oppression and above all, killings. Saïd (1978) buttresses this when he talks about the bossy executive approach of European colonialism. Homi K. Bhabha in the Foreword he wrote for Fanon (2004) confirms that being confronted with a world configured, the colonised subject is always presumed guilty.

2. Exploration of the representations of violence in the text.

Sebbar’s novel *La Seine était rouge* retells the story of the colonial violence through the memories of her protagonists. There are many key historical events that shape the collective trauma experienced by characters in her narrative, reflecting the broader impacts of colonialism. These points reference the representations of the violent acts and repercussions of colonialism, reflecting how colonial powers oppressed and marginalised both individuals and communities. These key events include:

2.1 The colonial rule in Algeria (1830-1962):

The exploitation and marginalisation of Algerians create a foundation for the trauma depicted in the novel: “En cette prison le 11 novembre 1940 furent incarcérés des lycéens et des étudiants... contre l’occupant” (In this prison on November 11, 1940, high school and university students were incarcerated ... for resisting the occupier) (p. 29). This shows how students were imprisoned just because they spoke up against the evil things perpetrated by the colonisers. It as well implies that Sebbar’s narrative is based on what happened during the colonial era.

2.2 The Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962):

This conflict was marked by extreme violence, including systematic torture, massacres, and atrocities committed by French forces against Algerian civilians. It significantly deepens the sense of collective trauma, as many characters bear witness to or experience this violence firsthand: “... 1954-1962 ... cette guerre coloniale” (... 1954-1962 ... this colonial war) (p. 26). Sebbar vividly mentions the date the Algerian war of independence took place.

2.3 The 1961 Paris Massacre:

On October 17, 1961, peaceful Algerian protesters demanding independence were violently repressed by French police, resulting in numerous deaths and disappearances. “Ils appelaient à la manifestation du 17 octobre 1961. Une manifestation pacifique pour protester contre le couvre-feu imposé aux seuls Algériens par le préfet de Paris, Papon ...” (They were recalling the demonstration of 17 October, 1961. A peaceful demonstration to

protest against the curfew imposed only on Algerians by the prefect of Paris, Papon ...) (p. 42). This event is emblematic of the brutal response to Algerian resistance and serves as a poignant reference point for the trauma experienced by characters in the novel.

2.4 Post-Colonial Disillusionment:

The aftermath of independence saw deep societal fractures. While Algeria gained formal independence, the legacies of colonial violence and trauma continued to affect the national psyche, leading to disillusionment and struggles with identity as seen in the text. Amel and Omar, two second generation Algerians struggle to find out what happened during the colonial era. The older generation who witnessed the colonial violence are not willing to tell the young ones the story.

2.5 Cultural Erasure:

The systematic attempts to erase Algerian culture and identity during colonial rule contribute to the characters' sense of loss. The struggle to reclaim identity amidst cultural suppression plays a crucial role in the collective trauma portrayed in the narrative. One of the women speaks: “L’Algérie, je connais pas. J’irai jamais. Ma vie c’est ici. Là bas, ils aiment pas les femmes comme moi ... les femmes du métier”. (Algeria, i do not know. I will never go. My life is here. That place, they do not like women like me ... women in profession) (p. 72). She believes that Algerians are too primitive to accept an educated woman meanwhile, in France, the educated Algerians do menial jobs.

2.6 Displacement and Immigration:

The migration of Algerians to France, often driven by colonial legacies and economic necessity, adds another layer of trauma. This experience involves navigating an alien society, embedding feelings of estrangement and identity crisis. Mina, a lawyer, who migrated to France had to work in a coffee shop because she is not able to get a job that befits her profession.

3. Theme of Colonial Violence and Spivak's concept of the subaltern

In Leïla Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge*, the theme of colonial violence is intricately woven throughout the narrative, reflecting the complexities of identity, history, and trauma. She carefully examines the representations of historical atrocities, personal and collective trauma and also employs storytelling as an act of resistance, where characters narrate their experiences of violence and oppression. Spivak’s concept of the subaltern refers to groups that are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hegemonic power structures. The subaltern is often rendered voiceless and marginalized in historical narratives such as Sebbar’s *La Seine était rouge*. Our discussion on the exploration of the representations of violence in the text using Spivak’s subaltern theory will centre on how subaltern voices are silenced, gender and the subaltern, critique of the intellectual and intersectionality. The concluding part will be the examination of how Sebbar’s narrative serves as a means of empowerment for the subaltern.

3.1 Silencing of subaltern voices through collective trauma

The broader historical backdrop of the Algerian War of Independence serves as a critical lens through which collective violence is understood. Sebbar depicts the collective suffering of

the Algerian population, illustrating how systemic violence leads to silence. At the beginning of the narrative, we see Amel, the main character who lives in France with her mother and grandmother rebuking both women for keeping a secret from her. They always speak the Arabic language whenever they want to discuss the violent past they lived through. They promise to tell her the secret one day, a secret that will make her sad and she wonders why the truth concerning her history should make her sad. Amel says: "Pourquoi la vérité c'est le Malheur?" (p. 13). She then tells them that she knows they are talking about the war that happened in Algeria and in France too; "c'était la guerre... en Algérie, ici aussi" (p. 14). The aforementioned shows how the older generation who witnessed the colonial violence keeps quiet because they do not want to hurt the younger generation who obviously live in the colonial masters' land.

Sebbar vividly depicts the violence perpetrated against Algerians in Paris, the October 17, 1961 event. She marks this historical event as a form of state-sanctioned brutality that reveals the darker aspects of colonial rule. The narrator says: "C'était le 17 octobre 1961" (it was the 17 October, 1961) (p. 63). Here, Sebbar narrates the event that happened in Paris on October 17, 1961 where many Algerians living in France were killed because of a peaceful protest they embarked on to express their displeasure of oppressive policies of the French: "Le couvre-feu impose aux seuls Algériens" (p. 42). A curfew was imposed on only the Algerians, the French could go about at any time they want but the Algerians, being seen as subalterns, could not. On this particular day, many Algerians lost their lives because they were supposed to be silent to everything the colonial masters do to them and they spoke up. There were promises of oneness after the Brazzaville conference, the narrator says: "Ils nous disaient: En France, vous aurez du travail, un salaire, pas comme ici ... vous êtes jeunes, vous aurez un avenir" (They were telling us: "In France, you will have a job, a salary, not like here ... you are young, you will have a future") (p. 45). These were promises, the ones that were not kept.

Despite the violence, the novel showcases moments of collective resistance and solidarity among Algerians. The women sit down to discuss their life in prison where they were sent because they fought against the colonisers (p. 25). These women were silenced by being sent to prison because they cannot do much while in prison. Meanwhile, the younger generation, who did not witness this violence move together to unravel the truth about it. Louis, Omer and Amel discover a plaque where it is engraved: "1954-1962. Dans cette prison furent guillotines des résistants Algériens qui se dressèrent contre l'occupant français" (p. 30). Many people were imprisoned and beheaded just because they spoke up against the colonisers. Sebbar emphasises how groups remember and recount histories of violence, shaping communal identity and solidarity. The text also showcases resistance to violence, illustrating how communities come together to confront their shared history and foster a sense of identity beyond victimization. Community gatherings here become spaces for sharing experiences and fostering a common identity, demonstrating how shared suffering can cultivate resilience and a sense of belonging. Collective memory, as presented in the novel, is shaped by the shared experiences of colonisation. Characters engage in storytelling to preserve their histories, emphasizing the importance of cultural memory in resisting colonial narratives. This act of remembrance serves as both a reclaiming of identity and a refusal to be silenced by history.

3.2 Personal Trauma

The protagonist often echoes feelings of helplessness and fear, encapsulating the psychological impact of violence on personal identity; She cries out: "Tu me punis parce que je ne connais pas la langue de ton pays ou si mal que tu te moques de moi?" (You punish me because I do not know your country's language or better still you are mocking me) (p. 14). Amel is traumatised because she knows that her history is filled with violence but she cannot access it because the elders who witnessed it are hiding it from her. Sebbar intricately weaves memories of violence with personal loss, portraying how trauma is passed down through generations. Amel's mother and grandmother refuse to tell her the story because they do not want to hurt her but they always remember and discuss this violent past. The act of remembering becomes a way to confront and process the violence experienced. Sebbar poignantly portrays how colonial violence impacts family relationships. The characters' parents often embody the weight of colonial history, affecting the ways they communicate and relate to their children. This generational tension underscores the pervasive impact of violence on intimate relationships. Amel decides to leave home so that she will no longer listen to her mother and grandmother talk in coded language. She feels they do not love her enough to tell her the truth.

The novel also explores themes of displacement, both geographic and cultural. Characters experience a deep sense of loss as they navigate between two worlds, one rooted in their colonial past and another in their present identity. This struggle reflects the internal conflict many individuals face in reconciling their heritage with their current realities.

3.3 Imagery and Symbolism

The title of the novel itself, translating to "The Seine was Red," symbolises blood and violence, suggesting both literal bloodshed and the emotional blood that stains memory and history. Sebbar clearly writes about this bloodshed, she writes: "sûrement la Seine était rouge ce jour-là" (surely, the Seine was red that day) (p. 63). Sebbar makes allusion to the killings of many Algerians during the Algerian war of independence and particularly on the night of 17 October, 1961 in Paris. She continues: "La Seine les a rejetés. Même la Seine, elle en voulait pas des Algériens. Combien? On saura peut-être un jour" (The Seine rejected them. Even the Seine, she did not want any Algerians. How many? Maybe we will know one day.) (p. 64). The Seine River represents both a boundary and a conduit. Its waters can signify the flow of life, but also the underlying currents of violence and suffering, an ever-present reminder of the past.

3.4 Gender and the subaltern in the face of the colonial violence

Spivak asserts that gender is an important category in understanding subalternity. In Africa, especially in Algeria where they are mainly Muslims, women are always under the male dominance. During the colonial era, women seem to have two masters, their husbands and the colonial masters. Sebbar often highlights the specific violence faced by women, reflecting on how gender and colonialism intersect. An example is given when Mina declares: « ...j'ai la nostalgie de la prison...De ces jours, de ces semaines passées ensemble en cellule ». (I miss prison. Those days, those weeks spent together in cell.) (p. 21). These women were imprisoned for protesting against the French army. Louis confirms the women's imprisonment to Amel by telling her that his

mother told him about the women's prison where she was put during the Algerian war (p. 25). Women embody the collective trauma of their communities. They participate in protests for the "libération de nos époux et nos enfants" (liberation of our husbands and children) (p. 128) while also facing unique challenges just like Mina, a lawyer who does not have a job in France because she is seen as underqualified being that she is an Algerian (p. 22). Noria, Lalla, Flora and Mina are women who participated in the protest against the French government in Paris on the 17 October 1961. They all witnessed the killings and the violence from the colonisers (p. 23). Despite women being seen as subalterns, Sebbar still depicts women who often express resilience and a struggle for agency, challenging traditional representations of victimhood. The voices heard in *La Seine était rouge* are mostly voices of women who decide to share their stories after a long period of silence. Those women, even in prison never gave up, they kept on helping one another get through the harsh life of imprisonment. Flora remarks: "Jamais, je n'ai retrouvé cette solidarité profonde, réelle, sincère. Je n'ai pas réussi à reconstituer ces réseaux de résistance et d'aide que j'ai connus" (p. 21). Flora here explains that never has she found the type of real and sincere solidarity as she had in prison. She also said that she has not been able to reconstitute that type of network of resistance and help that she knew in prison.

4. Critique of the intellectual via character Analysis

Spivak always critiques Western intellectuals who speak for the subaltern, this is why Sebbar's strategy in *La Seine était rouge* is to allow subaltern voices to emerge, thus resisting the urge to speak on their behalf. This part analyses the main characters in the text with the aim of showcasing how they respond to colonial violence. These main characters embody diverse responses to the colonial violence experienced during the Algerian War of Independence. Each character's journey reflects their personal struggles, relationships, and coping mechanisms in the face of historical trauma. Here are key characters and their responses to colonial violence:

4.1 Amel

Amel is the main protagonist, a young Algerian woman navigating her identity in post-colonial France. She represents the second generation of Algerians in France, those who did not witness the Algerian war of independence but are feeling the after effects of the war. She says: "C'était la guerre, en Algérie et ici ... Tu m'as dit que c'était des années difficiles et si je te pose des questions, tu ne réponds pas" (It was the war, in Algeria and here ... You told me that they were difficult years and if I ask questions, you do not answer) (p. 14). This here shows that Amel did not witness the war and that she is curious to understand what happened during that period. She often experiences feelings of alienation and displacement: "Tu me punis parce que je ne connais pas la langue de ton pays" (You are punishing me because I do not know the language of your country) (p. 14). Amel refers to the Algerian language as the language of "your" country, this shows a feeling of alienation and displacement. She feels that she is not part of Algeria because she cannot speak or understand the language. To make matters worse, her mother and grandmother always speak the language whenever they want to discuss about the Algerian sad past. They also refuse to discuss this past with her as if it is not her history too. Amel's response involves a quest for belonging, as she grapples with her dual cultural identity. Her parents are Algerian so she has the Algerian root and heritage, however she is born and

breed in France. Nevertheless, through storytelling, she seeks to reclaim her past and empower herself, recognising that understanding her roots is crucial for her personal growth: "On le voit tous les jours à la télé et on le lit" (We see it on television every day and we read about it) (p. 15). This is Amel explaining to her mother that she knows about the colonial violence because she sees it on television and she also reads about it.

Amel embodies the colonial violence by wrestling with feelings of alienation stemming from her hybrid identity and the fact that the older ones in her family refuse to tell her about it. She embodies trauma through her internal conflicts and external experiences as a young Algerian woman living in France. Her struggles with identity and belonging illustrate how colonial trauma manifests in psychological distress. Despite her struggles, Amel actively seeks to reclaim her identity. Through storytelling and embracing her heritage, she resists the erasure of her past. This act of reclaiming voice and agency demonstrates her resilience against the trauma that seeks to define her.

4.2 Omer

Omer is another central character who embodies the effects of colonial violence in his family life and personal experiences. He is also part of the second generation of Algerians living in France. His mother, Mina, an Algerian trained lawyer who could not get a job in France, Mina herself confirms: "Je ne travaille pas, une avocate algérienne à Paris" (I do not work, an Algerian lawyer in Paris) (pp. 21-22). Omer reflects on his family's traumatic history and the legacy of pain passed down through generations: "Son père à Alger, menacé, et il ne veut pas quitter son poste à l'hôpital" (His father is in Algiers, under threat, and he does not want to leave his job at the hospital) (p. 22). He lives with his mother, a lawyer who cannot find a good job but does menial jobs while his father, a medical doctor in Algeria doesn't want to leave his job even though he is under threat at all times. His coping mechanism involves introspection and a desire to understand his heritage. He continues reading and researching his history until he meets Amel and together they discover the truth about their root. He often deals with feelings of anger and despair, illustrating how colonial violence permeates familial relationships: "Tu vas pas commencer à me donner des leçons ... chacun son histoire, son regard" (You are not going to start giving me lessons ... to each their story, their concerns) (p. 29). Omer gets angry when Louis, his friend who is French, decides to tell him what and what he wants to add to the historical film he, Louis, is making about Algeria. Omer, even though he knows that Louis is doing the right thing, still gets angry with him because he is French and he sees him as one of the colonisers. To Omer, the story is not Louis' so he should allow him, whom the story belongs to, contribute.

Omer embodies the colonial violence by his reflections of the inherited trauma within his family. The weight of his mother's stories and experiences from the war lead to a sense of despair and confusion. Through his emotional turmoil, he exemplifies how the scars of colonisation affect personal relationships and self-perception. His desire to understand his family's history becomes a form of resistance. By engaging with his heritage and confronting uncomfortable truths, he asserts control over his narrative. His journey reflects the importance of knowledge and awareness in overcoming trauma.

4.3 The Mothers

The mothers here represent the older generation women who witnessed the colonial violence first hand. They are Noria (Amel's mother), Lalla (Amel's grandmother), Mina, (Omer's mother) and Flora (Louis' mother). Flora is French; however, she is part of the French who helped Algerians during the colonial period and she also suffered the same fate with them, even going to prison. Her son, Louis, is the one who made the film that helps Amel and Omer discover the truth about the colonial violence their people passed through. A collective figure representing the older generation, these women experienced the direct impacts of colonial violence.

The mothers' response is characterized by resilience and the preservation of memory. They share stories of their struggles and the suffering endured during the war. Their act of storytelling becomes a form of resistance against erasure, emphasising the strength found in community and shared experiences. These women embody the collective trauma of their community. Their shared memories and pain symbolise the enduring impact of colonial violence, showcasing how trauma can be passed down through generations, informing their children's lives and choices. The mothers use storytelling as a powerful resistance tool. By sharing their experiences, they preserve their history and assert their identities against the dominant narratives that seek to silence them, Lalla to her granddaughter Amel when she tells her that she reads about the story in books: "C'est pas pareil ce que je te dirai un jour" (It is not the same what I will tell you one day) (p. 15). The act of communal remembrance fosters solidarity and strength among women.

4.4 The Father Figures

Various male characters such as Omer's father and Amel's grandfather represent different perspectives on masculinity within the context of colonial violence. Some father figures display denial or anger, struggling to articulate their pain and experiences of violence. An example is Omer's father who refuses to leave Algerian even when he knows that his life is in danger. He rather stays there instead of coming to France and be treated like a subaltern just like his wife, Mina. Others are depicted as protective, attempting to shield their families from the brutality of their pasts. Amel's grandfather approves for her to leave home so that she will no longer listen to her grandmother and mother talk in a language she doesn't understand. Their responses often reflect societal expectations of masculinity and the difficulty of expressing vulnerability

4.5 The Narrator

The narrator serves as both a character within the story and an observer, providing insights into the lives of others. The narrator critically reflects on the colonial past, often grappling with guilt and grief associated with the collective suffering. Through her reflections, the narrator seeks to understand the complexities of identity, loss, and the need for reconciling history with the present. The narrator serves as an observer who critically engages with the trauma experienced by others. Her reflections on the past highlight the necessity of confronting and articulating pain, thus resisting the tendency to forget or deny colonial violence.

The characters in *La Seine était rouge* exemplify a spectrum of responses to colonial violence, ranging from denial and anger to resilience and introspection. Sebbar intricately weaves their

narratives, highlighting the profound impact of historical trauma on personal and collective identities. By exploring these varied responses, the novel underscores the necessity of confronting the past to forge a path toward healing and understanding.

Conclusion

Leila Sebbar's *La Seine était rouge* masterfully confronts the multifaceted violence of colonialism through the lens of personal and collective trauma, illuminating the profound scars left on Algerian identities during and after the struggle for independence. By employing the subaltern framework, Sebbar amplifies the silenced voices of those impacted by historical atrocities, particularly the October 1961 Paris Massacre. The novel's exploration of gendered experiences of violence reveals how women, representing resilience and communal strength, navigate the legacies of oppression, thus challenging dominant narratives.

Sebbar's characters embody the complexities of navigating their identities in a post-colonial landscape marked by displacement and alienation. Through Amel, Omer, and the matriarchs, the narrative artfully intertwines personal stories with broader historical contexts, showing how trauma is inherited and processed within communities. The imagery of the Seine, symbolising both beauty and bloodshed, serves as a poignant reminder of the intertwined fates of coloniser and colonised.

The act of storytelling emerges as a crucial means of resistance, as characters grapple with their shared history while seeking to reclaim their identities. In bringing forth these marginalized narratives, Sebbar challenges readers to engage with the past, fostering a deeper understanding of memory and healing in the face of colonial violence. Ultimately, *La Seine était rouge* stands as a vital text that not only recounts a painful history but also advocates for the recognition and empowerment of those who continue to bear its legacy, encouraging a collective journey towards reconciliation and identity formation.

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