

# Deconstructing linguistic binaries in Assia Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*: From 'mother tongue' to linguistic repertoire

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## Introduction

Some of the most influential scholars of colonialism agree that unequal power structures within colonial discourses promoted a multifaceted, but ultimately false, binary between the coloniser and the colonised (or the 'subaltern' [Spivak]). As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain, these discourses were fabricated to control and dominate (culturally as well as politically) colonised populations, elaborating that "the binary logic of imperialism is a development of that tendency of Western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance" (19).

The study of what has since been classified the 'postcolonial' would, then, imply some form of evolution from these binary oppositions. This has proven difficult, however, as research has often replicated the

colonial power structures of the “self versus other” (Ochoa 221) mentality. For some, the term itself feels inherently binary, with the prefix (‘post’) indexing a temporal boundary which is exclusive of the stem (‘colonial’), yet chronologically vague, and for many others, inaccurate. Graham Huggan critiques the “semantic vagueness” (1) of the term ‘postcolonial’, arguing that its basic denotation is insufficient for assuming the complex and often conflicting identities of those whose work would traditionally fall within the bracket. Peggy Ochoa disregards the temporal aspect of the postcolonial altogether, suggesting that:

If we are able to recognize the "post" of "postcolonialism" as not just moving beyond the historical conditions of coloniality, but also moving beyond the very structure of colonial thinking, we should be able to envision postcolonial writing as that space where new possibilities are presented for consideration (228).

This article takes up Ochoa’s call for a move “beyond the very structure of colonial thinking” (ibid.) by showcasing a different approach for deconstructing linguistic binaries in postcolonial texts written in the language of the former coloniser.

### **L'Amour, la fantasia**

The main focus for this article is the work of Algerian author, translator and filmmaker Assia Djebar - specifically, her semi-autobiographical text *L'Amour, la fantasia*, first published in 1985. Oscillating between first and third person narrators, *L'Amour, la fantasia* introduces a composite of historical events, personal anecdotes, and informal interviews, that all contribute to the author’s autobiography. Ranging from letters detailing first-hand accounts of the 1830 French conquest of Algeria, to transcriptions of oral testimonies from women who reveal their pivotal roles during the War for Independence (1954-62), Djebar plays with historiography in order to create an autobiographical narrative that makes the reader question the linearity of identity. Within this, the text covers themes such as colonialism, feminism, and the construction of the ‘self’, often showcasing multiple perspectives in a way that tackles and traverses colonial binaries.

Published in 1985, *L'Amour, la fantasia* arrived after the original

wave of postcolonial literature, where literary binaries (written-oral, coloniser-colonised, male-female, historiography-folklore, native tongue-mother tongue...) could be easily identified and analysed. Indeed, discussions around some of these binaries can still be found in Djebbar's autobiographical writing, particularly those linked to the writing of her postcolonial autobiography in the language of the former coloniser. Researchers and interviewers often pay excessive attention to this 'paradox', a phenomenon that Djebbar herself confronted in 1999, in the 'Avant-propos' ('Foreword') of *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, assuring that questions along the lines of "pourquoi écrivez-vous en français?" ("why do you write in French?" [my translation]) are fundamentally posed "pour rappeler que vous venez d'ailleurs" ("as a reminder that you come from elsewhere" [my translation]) (Djebbar, 'Ces Voix' 7):

La francophonie a un territoire multiple certes; mouvant et complexe, certainement. Elle est en outre censée avoir un centre fixe, d'où parlent, écrivent et discutent des Français dits « de souche (ibid.)

(*Francophonie* has a diverse territory, certainly; it is changing and complex, certainly. It is also supposed to have a fixed centre, from which the so-called 'native French' speak, write and discuss [my translation]).

In contrast, Djebbar situates her writing as both "en marge" (ibid.) ("on the margins" [my translation]), and "en marche" (ibid.) ("on the move" [my translation]), actively transcending the mother tongue-foreign tongue binary of writing her postcolonial autobiography in the language of the former coloniser. For example, in the opening chapter, she describes the image of her father taking her to the colonial school as "un fez sur la tête, la silhouette haute et droite dans son costume européen" (11) ("a tall erect figure in a fez and European suit" [Translation by: Blair 3<sup>1</sup>]), mimicking the combination of French and Algerian aspects of Djebbar's upbringing with her father's dress.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point on, unless stated otherwise, all translations from the text are taken from Dorothy Blair's 1993 translation *Fantasia: an Algerian Cavalcade*, and page numbers for the translated extracts are given in italics.

Despite this early affirmation of a nuanced and somewhat liminal narrative perspective, it is possible to find striking examples in the secondary literature of *L'Amour, la fantasia* that still focus on literary binaries, or at least incorporate them into the researcher's argument(s). Nancy von Rosk relates the male-female (or masculine-feminine) binary in the text to the linguistic binary of Arabic-French (or mother tongue-foreign tongue), considering Arabic as the female opposition to the 'French' patriarchy (and seemingly ignoring Berber). Monica Garoiu extends the importance of the male-female binary, referring to "l'opposition binaire du masculin et du féminin sur laquelle repose l'ouvrage tout entière" (12) ("the binary opposition of masculine and feminine on which the whole book is based" [my translation]), although it is worth noting that both von Rosk and Garoiu consider the potential hybridity that the text opens up.

Other critics infer that the binary oppositions in the text revolve around violence and/or confrontation. In the small section of his book *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* that is dedicated to *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Peter Hallward argues that the postcolonial perspective of Djébar's autobiography creates binary oppositions that become "rivals within the field of interested, competitive alternatives" (332), as she "pits one gaze against another in a series of staged confrontations" (ibid.). In a similar line of argument, Beth Gale posits that the binary oppositions in the text, particularly those that she infers from Djébar's writing of her postcolonial autobiography in the language of the former coloniser, represent "[les] paradoxes de l'autobiographie postcoloniale" (title) ("[The] Paradoxes of a Postcolonial Autobiography" [my translation]). Indeed, as the secondary literature would suggest, Djébar explicitly and emotively confronts questions of language in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. This article, however, argues that a more fluid approach to language would help researchers and students alike to better grasp Djébar's complex relationship with language.

Such an approach to *L'Amour, la fantasia* was hinted at by Rachel Rothendler, who views language in the text as a "temporal, physical and imagined space" (296), and concludes with the hypothesis that Djébar's use of language allows "an opportunity for expression that need not be

restricted to our constructed categories of French, English, Arabic, and so forth” (299-300).

### **Mother Tongue Ideologies**

Rothendler’s concluding suggestion mirrors an approach to language that has been gaining ground in sociolinguistics since the early John Gumperz studies of the 1960s - evaluating and critiquing the supposed *mother tongue ideologies* that have become naturalised in European discourses of geographical borders and the nation state. As Kristine Horner and Jean-Jacques Weber elaborate:

In combination with the one nation-one language ideology, the belief that speakers have one and only one ‘mother tongue’ leads to such generalizations as (for instance) ‘The mother tongue of the Luxembourgers is Luxembourgish’, with all Luxembourgers being (erroneously) perceived as having only one mother tongue, which is or should be Luxembourgish (23).

Deconstructing these mother tongue ideologies is particularly relevant to this article (and to postcolonial studies in general) as they have falsely informed beliefs about language ownership and ‘nativism’ in communities whose linguistic heritage is (at least in part) tied to European colonialism. Adrian Holliday, writing from an anglophone perspective with a focus on ‘Global English’, explores the inherent “us-them” (6) (or native-foreign) binaries tied to this ideology of nativism, elaborating that this mentality undervalues the language practices of so-called non-native speakers, whilst simultaneously implying an inaccurate norm of standardised monolingualism.

Marilyn Martin-Jones, Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese go further that Holliday by exposing the historical links between the linguistic categorisations that make mother tongue ideologies possible and European colonial missions:

The practices of standardizing, codifying and setting boundaries to languages were closely bound up with the development of discourses about states, nations and empire, and with the definition and discursive regulation of citizenship [...] the practices

of mapping, codifying and labelling languages were exported to other regions of the world by missionaries, colonial administrators and anthropologists (2).

In this way, deconstructing mother tongue ideologies takes on a further importance in postcolonial studies - it can prompt researchers to distance their work from the frameworks established by the leading imperial powers. This is true of France perhaps more than anywhere else, where even regional languages of the metropole were suppressed under the 'one nation, one language' movement (Le Roy Ladurie), and the *Alliance française [pour la propagation de la langue nationale dans les colonies et à l'étranger]* [for the propagation of the national language in the colonies and abroad] became intent on using language as a way of anchoring long-term influence abroad (Horne).

Unfortunately, these ideologies still exist in some circles of power (particularly in France), and the supposition that we are all born with one inherent, 'native' language has formed the basis of thinking and research in other countries, where it is even less applicable. In literary studies, this has materialised in the automatic incorporation of mother tongue ideologies to literary and linguistic analysis, hence the prevalence of questions such as "pourquoi écrivez-vous [dans la langue de l'ancien colonisateur]?" (Djebar, 'Ces voix' 7) ("why do you write [in the language of the former coloniser]?" [my translation]). This mentality not only reiterates any 'us-them' binaries between different speakers of a given language but enforces beliefs of language ownership in the former colonial power, despite the fact that there are more French speakers outside of France than within France itself.

However, as work in sociolinguistics began to incorporate movements in the social sciences (notably 'social constructivism'), some scholars, particularly those writing in this century, have been interrogating the supposed ontologies of language, highlighting the inaccuracy of concepts such as 'mother tongue' outside of official state documents and policies. In a similar line to Huggan's questioning of the 'postcolonial', sociolinguist Ana Deumert examines the "semantic vagueness" of the term 'mother tongue', asking:

Is your mother tongue the language(s) you learned first, the

language(s) you know best or the language(s) you use most? Or does the concept of mother tongue transcend all these definitions based on origin, function and competence? (395).

Indeed, even this basic interrogation correlates with the complexities of Djebbar's own relationship with language; Berber was the language that she associated with her maternal heritage (Djebbar, 'Territoire des langues' 74), whereas Arabic was the main language of her home (Mortimer 301). French, although the language that she learned chronologically last, was the language in which she was predominantly educated, and so became the language of her career, both academically and authorially (Djebbar, 'Territoire des langues' 78).

Djebbar's biography provides an ideal example of multilingual language-in-practice, the like of which has led sociolinguists to develop different ways of thinking about language that reflect the global norm of multilingualism, and which allow researchers to transcend the Eurocentric entities of defined and prescribed 'languages' and mother tongue ideologies. This article follows an interdisciplinary approach, combining language analysis in *L'Amour, la fantasia* with the idea of a *linguistic repertoire* – an inherently individual combination of all the linguistic tools that any one speaker (or in this case, writer) has at their disposal.

The foundations for repertoire approaches to language were laid by Gumperz as early as 1964, who declared that:

[The Linguistic repertoire] contains all the accepted ways of formulating messages. It provides the weapons of everyday communication. Speakers choose among this arsenal in accordance with the meanings they wish to convey (138).

Since then, various scholars have had an input into the evolution of the term, often focusing their research on individual language practices. Brigitta Busch (340) expands the linguistic repertoire to incorporate people's "lived experience of language," and Horner and Weber reiterate that linguistic repertoires are "biographically assembled" (118), shaped by an individual's experiences and perceptions of the world. This conceptualisation is significant in postcolonial studies as it goes beyond

official state language policies (such as in somewhere like Benin, where French is the sole official language) to focus on how individuals use language in the real world.

To demonstrate this, the following quotation is Djébar's own acknowledgement of linguistic diversity in Algeria in *L'Amour, la fantasia*:

[Il y a] le dialecte de nos montagnes d'enfance. Les vocables de tendresse, les diminutifs spécifiques au parler de notre tribu d'origine - à mi-chemin du berbère des crêtes et de l'arabe de la cité proche (116).

([There is] the local dialect of the mountains where we spent our childhood. The expressions of endearment, the diminutives particular to the speech of our tribe - half-way between the Berber language of the highlands and the Arabic of the nearby city" [80]).

At this point in the text, Djébar associates languages with particular spaces (see also: Mortimer, and Salem), and recognises the interplay between various languages in her repertoire. Later in the text she adapts this to a somewhat playful explanation of the different roles of languages in her multilingual context:

Nous [les jeunes filles] disposons de quatre langues pour exprimer notre désir, avant d'ahner : le français pour l'écriture secrète, l'arabe pour nos soupirs vers Dieu étouffés, le libyco-berbère quand nous imaginons retrouver les plus anciennes de nos idoles mères. La quatrième langue, pour toutes... demeure celle du corps (254).

(We [the young girls] have at our command four languages to express desire before all that is left for us is sighs and moans: French for secret missives; Arabic for our stifled aspirations towards God-the-Father, God of the religions of the Book; Lybico-Berber which takes us back to the pagan idols - mother-gods - of pre-Islamic Mecca. The fourth language, for all females... remains that of the body [180]).

Djébar's use of the verb "disposons" here is particularly powerful, perhaps even more so in Dorothy Blair's translation "have at our command," as it implies that Algerian women have control over their language practices,



using different parts of their repertoire to navigate different settings. It is also interesting to note that Djebbar uses this description of female multilingualism to introduce some of the key themes of the text: feminism, religion, and tradition, underlining the central role of language in the construction of her autobiography.

To frame this within the wider sociolinguistic context of post-independence Algeria, this idea of language, space and role is also explored by Algerian historian Rabeh Sebaa, who elaborates: “Les rôles et les fonctions de chaque langue dans ce continuum ne sont ni définies ni données une fois pour toutes” (57) (“The roles and functions of each language in this continuum are neither defined nor given definitively” [my translation]). Sebaa’s use of the word “continuum” is particularly consonant with modern approaches to linguistic repertoire, as theorists seek to blur the boundaries between defined language entities and instead place them along a linguistic continuum, which, as Sebaa also suggests, is neither defined nor finite.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, Djebbar’s own linguistic repertoire transcends the boundaries of mother tongue ideologies and combines all of her personal experiences with language, including the tensions and anxieties inflicted by the legacy and lasting effects of French colonialism. The remainder of this article uses the concept of a linguistic repertoire, as outlined earlier, to analyse and deconstruct linguistic binaries in *L’Amour, la fantasia*, before demonstrating the fluidity of language in the text by focusing on representations of Djebbar’s own linguistic repertoire. In general, it invites an interdisciplinary approach to understanding language in postcolonial literature that can work to distance the researcher from European classifications of language(s).

### **Deconstructing Linguistic Binaries**

Amongst the most prominent and emotive consequences of linguistic binaries in the text are Djebbar’s personal linguistic anxieties. Interestingly, Djebbar’s anxieties in *L’Amour, la fantasia* are a reversal of what researchers of this century sometimes refer to as ‘foreign language anxiety’ (Oxford), or *xenoglossophobia* – she does not react to Eurocentric discourses around so-called ‘foreign’ accents and is not concerned about

how French people will react to her use of ‘their’ language. Instead, Djébar’s linguistic anxieties stem from internal debates of language and identity, and from how her French-language education has alienated her from her contemporaries. However, just as notions regarding language ownership are being deconstructed by developments in sociolinguistics, linguistic binaries can also be delegitimised in postcolonial literature.

The first binary to interrogate is the supposed opposition between French and Arabic in Djébar’s autobiography. The story Djébar wants to tell, that of her own personal life interwoven with testimonies of Algerian history, is so intricately layered within the fabrics of French colonialism that one language cannot suffice to reach all corners of her autobiographical tapestry. Even though the dominant language of the narrative is French, Djébar makes the reader aware that she feels unable to express feelings of love in it:

Cette impossibilité en amour, la mémoire de la conquête la renforça. Lorsque enfant, je fréquentais l’école, les mots français commençaient à peine à attaquer ce rempart. J’héritais de cette étanchéité ; dès mon adolescence, j’expérimentai une sorte d’aphasie amoureuse (183).

(The impossibility of this love was reinforced by memory of the conquest. When, as a child, I went to school, the French words scarcely made any impact on this stronghold. I had inherited this imperviousness; from the time of my adolescence I experienced a kind of aphasia in matters of love [128]).

In this extract, Djébar discloses to the reader that the connotations of the French language remain too inherently entrenched in the colonial conquest of Algeria for her to be able to express or receive any words of affection in it. This complex between love and war, or love and occupation, is introduced in the possible interpretations of the wordplay in the subtitle of the “Première Partie” (Part One): “La Prise de la Ville [Alger] ou L’amour s’écrit” (“The Capture of the city [Algiers] or Love Letters” [1]). In the original French, the potential homophonous reading (particularly when reading aloud) of the word “ou” (meaning ‘or’, with ‘où’, pronounced the same, meaning ‘where’) hints at the eroticisation of the colonised land by the French colonisers (*The Capture of the City where*

*Love Is Written*), with the passive reflexive construction “s’écrit” (“is written”) implying a non-consensual and unrequited defilement. Moreover, the conjunctive interpretation of ‘ou’ (meaning ‘or’ as opposed to the other common conjunction, ‘et’, meaning ‘and’) supposes a mutual exclusivity between love and war (*The Capture of the City or Love Is Written*) that reiterates the “aphasie amoureuse” (183) (“aphasia in matters of love” [128]) that Djébar experiences in French. Later, in an interview with Lise Gauvin, Djébar elaborates on this metaphor, stating:

Le français devenait un désert. Je ne pouvais pas dire le moindre mot de tendresse ou d’amour dans cette langue [...] ce désert est investi des scènes de violence et de la guerre des ancêtres, de la chute des cavaliers qui sont tombés dans le combat. (Djébar, ‘Territoire des langues’ 79).

(French became a desert. I could not say a single word of tenderness or love in this language [...] this desert is invested with scenes of violence and the war of the ancestors, with the fall of the horsemen who fell in battle [my translation]).

Interestingly, this idea that Djébar cannot use French to talk about love appears somewhat paradoxical, considering the role of French in her “premières lettres d’amour” (86) (“first love-letters” [58]), where she explores the presumed freedom of writing romantically in French. However, by taking a more fluid approach to linguistic binaries in the text, it is possible to begin deconstructing the other so-called binaries that are explored here (modernity-tradition, male-female...): Djébar is telling the reader that even though she is fully aware of the sexually liberating potential of French, it is unattainable for her, as a (post)colonial subject, beyond the superficiality of sending secret letters to strangers. Soheila Ghaussy approaches this so-called paradox from a similar point of view, claiming that the French language generates discourses of empowerment in Algeria, but equally raises questions with regard to how appropriate it is for the colonised. To elaborate on this, the binary opposition between French and Arabic cannot be applied here, as French is not for Djébar that which it would be for women in France of a similar age. To use a well-known example of a French feminist who also worked on autobiographical literature, Djébar’s autobiography is not *French* in the

same way that Simone de Beauvoir's would be, and hence her use of language cannot be confined to the 'French' side of any linguistic binary in *L'Amour, la fantasia*.

Similarly, Isis Butôt argues that the French language cannot tell some stories of Algerian history in *L'Amour, la fantasia* as it is a "direct reminder of the violence committed [by France]" (77). However, Djébar's use of French in the *Voix (Voice)* chapters of the book allows the stories of local women, who had previously rebelled in silence, to be heard. Djébar acknowledges that:

Écrire en langue étrangère, hors de l'oralité des deux langues de ma région natale – le berbère des montagnes du Dahra et l'arabe de ma ville –, écrire m'a ramenée aux cris des femmes sourdement révoltées de mon enfance, à ma seule origine (285).

(Writing in a foreign language, not in either of the tongues of my native country – the Berber of the Dahra mountains or the Arabic of the town where I was born – writing has brought me to the crisis of the women silently rebelling in my youth, to my own true origins [204]).

In other words, Djébar transcends the binaries of written language and oral tradition and uses this hybridity to her advantage, exploiting her own multilingualism to incorporate stories that have been historically silenced into her autobiography. This 'power over language' recalls the earlier section of the text where Djébar states that women in Algeria "disposons [de]" (254) ("have at [their] command" [180]) different languages, implying that language can be a means of resistance against colonial and patriarchal structures.

That is not to say, however, that there is harmony within Djébar's linguistic repertoire. In fact, there are many points in the text where she resents her French-language education for alienating her from her female contemporaries, subduing her in a culture that disregards Berber traditions and criticises Islamic values. In the chapter *La Complainte d'Abraham* (239-245) (*The Ballad of Abraham* [169-173]), Djébar recalls the religious rituals Algerian women were expected to observe at weddings and funerals. In a more personal and geographically specific

extract, she explains a weekly ceremony at the tomb of her hometown's patron saint, confessing:

Sur ce seuil d'émotions criardes, je ne me sens pas saisie d'exaltation mystique ; de ces récriminations des fidèles voilées (...) je sentais l'âcreté des plaintes, l'air de victimes des chanteuses... Je les plains ou je les trouve étranges, ou effrayantes (240).

(As the women launch into their shrill vociferations I do not feel any mystical exaltation; the recriminations of these veiled worshippers (...), the bitterness of their lamentations, make the singers appear to me as victims... I pity them or find them strange, or frightening [170]).

Djebar feels she has been 'westernised' by language, alienating her from the traditions which she feels *should* form part of her autobiography, as a woman of that particular town. In this way, her education is represented as a form of linguistic colonialism, to which Mildred Mortimer infers "the day that Assia Djebar's father escorted her to school... he set her on a bilingual, bicultural, indeed an ambiguous journey that freed her from the female enclosure but sent her into a form of exile away from the majority of her sisters" (302).

Indeed, the scene to which Mortimer refers is a pivotal moment in the text that instigates the framework of binaries within which Djebar negotiates her autobiography – the conflict of being an Algerian woman who has grown up within a francophone system. Throughout the text, she expresses feelings of anxiety around her language practices, be it the inherent ties between French and her country's colonisation or the cultural alienation she feels because of her mastery of the language. Internally, she talks about her "cohabitation" with French, and alludes to a motif of marriage and family life that is used to mould her relationship with language:

Je cohabite avec la langue française: mes querelles, mes élans, mes soudains ou violents mutismes forment incidents d'une ordinaire vie de ménage. Si sciemment je provoque des éclats, c'est moins pour rompre la monotonie qui m'insupporte, que par conscience vague d'avoir fait trop tôt un mariage forcé, un peu

comme les fillettes de ma ville « promises » dès l'enfance (297-8).

(I cohabit with the French language: I may quarrel with it, I may have bursts of affection, I may subside into sudden or angry silences – these are the normal occurrences in the life of any couple. If I deliberately provoke an outburst, it is less to break the unbearable monotony, than because I am vaguely aware of having been forced into a 'marriage' too young, rather like the little girls of my town who are 'bespoke' in their earliest childhood [213]).

Indeed, the image here is that of a somewhat reluctant family setup, within which there is an obvious power-struggle between the two sides.<sup>2</sup> This metaphor is then extended when she refers to French as her “langue marâtre” (298) (“stepmother tongue” [my translation]):

Le français m'est langue marâtre. Quelle est ma langue mère disparue, qui m'a abandonnée sur le trottoir et s'est enfuie ?...  
Langue mère idéalisée ou mal-aimée, livrée aux hérauts de foire ou aux seuls geôliers! (298).

(French is my 'stepmother' tongue. Which is my long-lost mother tongue, that left me standing and disappeared?... Mother tongue, either idealised or unloved, neglected and left to fairground barkers and jailers! [214]).

This mother/stepmother analogy that Djébar adopts at various points in *L'Amour, la fantasia* to describe the relationship between Arabic and French in her linguistic repertoire embodies her internal quarrels with language. Indeed, it seems that her father is something of a catalyst in this relationship, as it is his position as “instituteur à l'école française” (11) (“a teacher at the French primary school” [3]) that foreshadows Djébar's affiliation with French, and it is his chaperoning of her to the colonial school that opens the text. Being Algerian himself, the “langue marâtre” (“stepmother tongue”) analogy implies that French is the language he ‘met’ later in life, the language that he supposedly ‘left’ Arabic for, to extend the matrimonial metaphor. Here, Djébar's lexical choices are interesting – she does not refer to French as her father's

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<sup>2</sup> In France, ‘*Cohabitation*’ can also refer to a system of divided government whereby the *Président* represents a different political party to the majority of the *député(e)s*.

*maîtresse* (mistress), nor does she refer to a polygamous family set up, with French as a *co-épouse* (co-spouse) – she maintains that French is her “*langue marâtre*” (“stepmother tongue”). This not only implies a degree of officiality to the relationship, but her specific word choice (‘*marâtre*’ as opposed to ‘*belle-mère*’, both meaning ‘stepmother’) carries negative and potentially pejorative connotations in the French language much as it does in English, calling on references in fairy-tales and children’s stories to *la méchante marâtre* (the wicked stepmother), illuminating the feelings of victimization that Djébar feels as a result of her relationship with French.

Although this conflict remains unsettled in the text, this power struggle between languages could be seen as a reflection of the so-called ‘postcolonial world’ into which *L’Amour, la fantasia* was released in 1985 – it is not surprising that Djébar debates the language of her autobiography when her own relationship with language is the product of a complex, abusive history. In other words, to confine the story that Djébar wants to tell to the practicalities of mother tongue ideologies would be inherently artificial. Instead, Djébar’s story transcends the binary of French versus Arabic to mirror the cultural struggles of her biography. In line with Adlai Murdoch’s assumption, neither French nor Arabic would suffice to tell all of Djébar’s story – just as she herself is not monolingual, her autobiography cannot be told in just one language.

### Linguistic Repertoire

With this in mind, the final part of this article attempts to piece together Djébar’s linguistic repertoire within her use of language in the text, exploring how her own appropriation of French combines all of her linguistic capabilities to create a language that is instinctively her own. This hypothesis also takes into account Mark Sebba, Shahrzad Mahootian and Carla Jonsson’s work on multilingual discourses in written texts, inferring that multilingualism in literature is not essentially intended to be an exact replica of how an author/narrator/character would speak, but is instead reflective of the norm of multilingualism and symbolic of a particular perspective. As its springboard, this section uses Dominique Ranaivoson’s *étude de l’œuvre*

(study guide [my translation]) for *L'Amour, la fantasia*, in which she lists examples of the so-called “situation linguistique” (22) (“linguistic situation” [my translation]) and “imaginaire des langues” (78) (“imaginary of language” [my translation]), so as to “faire découvrir et étudier les œuvres des grands auteurs francophones du Sud” (“encourage the discovery and study of the works of the great *francophone* authors of the South” [my translation]), as outlined in the blurb. However, the close analysis of the extracts from *L'Amour, la fantasia* in this article highlights the limitations of such a deductive approach to language in the text, instead framing examples from Ranaivoson within a repertoire approach to language.

Djebar manipulates French lexicon and semantics in her autobiography, mixing French with other languages or applying (predominantly) Arabic definitions to French words. Ranaivoson explores this on a rather enumerative basis, categorising these linguistic tools as “le double lexique” (38) (“dual lexicon” [my translation]). Indeed, this term itself has semantic ties to binary thinking, assuming that there are just two linguistic codes at play in Djebar’s narrative. Moreover, this titling seems to ignore the etymology of the examples given by Ranaivoson, as some of the terms she categorises as “les mots arabes [qui] renvoient aux titres militaires ou administratifs” (39) (“Arabic words that refer to military or administrative titles” [my translation]) cannot easily be confined to the ‘Arabic’ side of a French-Arabic binary. For example, Ranaivoson (39) points out that Djebar uses the term “Agha” three times to refer to an army general or military officer, a word that is originally derived from Turkish (or Old Turkic). Likewise, she identifies Djebar’s use of “le bey” to refer to leaders of specific territories or districts, a word with similar origins in Old Turkic (39). This brief consideration of linguistic etymology not only delegitimises the binary logic of the so-called “double lexique,” but also correlates with developments in sociolinguistics, often incorporated into linguistic repertoire approaches, that seek to move beyond categorising ‘languages’ as bound, static entities.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Djebar’s incorporation of these supranational proper

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, Arabic itself is a very fluid and diverse language, with a classical form, a modern standardised form, and various spoken varieties which are not always mutually intelligible.



nouns (i.e., titles that can be found in more than one culture and language) in her autobiography may not be surprising on a purely lexical level, due to their recognisability in multiple (especially Islamic) cultures, and the difficulty in finding direct translations in other languages. However, along with Sebba, Mahootian and Jonsson's conclusions, these multilingual discourses reflect a part of her identity that standardised, 'European' French would struggle to accommodate.

This becomes more apparent in other lexical borrowings from Arabic that denote the local cultures and traditions amongst which the story is set. Again, Ranaivoson counts and lists such examples, including "le mufti hanéfite," "le nay," "la medina" and "la Casbah" (40), but overlooks the cultural significance of this beyond the possible comprehension difficulties. Whilst some of these words have become common neologisms in many European languages ("medina" and "Casbah" hardly need translations or footnotes in French nor in English), other examples, such as "le mufti hanéfite," refer to famous figures in the Muslim world that may be unknown to some readers. Similarly, "nay" refers to a North African wind instrument made from reeds, similar to a flute, but Djébar's lexical distinction reminds the reader of the setting of her autobiography. Whilst Ranaivoson's method can be useful for comprehension purposes, the format of her *étude* (study) could be said to promulgate the linguistic binaries, listing examples of Arabic (or 'non-French') words that 'litter' the French in the text. A linguistic repertoire approach, on the other hand, moves beyond the "double lexique" ("dual lexicon" [my translation]) to consider Djébar's multilingual narrative as a composite component of the story she wants to tell, and the identity she wants to depict.

Moving from lexicon into semantics, Ranaivoson extends her scope, noting that Djébar sometimes applies Arabic meanings to French words and expressions. For example, the nudity alluded to in the chapter *La mariée nue de Mazouna* (119-145) (*The Naked Bride of Mazouna* [83-101]) does not refer to nudity in the European sense of not wearing any clothes, but the Arabic sense of not having any jewellery on (Ranaivoson 42). To

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Moreover, it has borrowed considerably from other languages (including English and French in modern times), and has influenced the evolution of many European languages, particularly Spanish.

situate Ranaivoson's point here within the context of the chapter, when retelling the tale of the ambushed wedding of the tribal chief's daughter, Badra is reported as screaming "je suis nue!" (141) ("I am naked" [99]), but in the previous sentence, her figure had been described as "enveloppée de sa robe émeraude" (141) ("clothed [only] in her emerald gown" [99]). To incorporate Ranaivoson's analysis into a repertoire approach, these examples of mixed lexicon and semantics reflect the socio-cultural context of Djébar's autobiography – she uses her linguistic repertoire to index the various cultures that influence her life and identity.

This linguistic indexing also holds a more political dimension - Djébar employs the Algerian names for conflicts, translated into French, throughout the text. As Ranaivoson explains, "nommer les guerres revient aussi à afficher depuis quel camp on les regarde ou les célèbre" (43) ("naming wars is also a way of showing from which side they are being viewed or celebrated" [my translation]), and Djébar makes it clear in her use of language that she aligns herself with Algerian struggles. For example, what is called 'la conquête de l'Algérie' (1830) ('The Conquest of Algeria') in France is referred to as "la première guerre d'Algérie" (114) ("the first Algerian War" [78]) in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Similarly, 'La Guerre d'Algérie' ('The Algerian War') is described, more appropriately, as "la guerre qui aboutira à l'indépendance" (38) ("the war which was to bring us independence" [23]). These linguistic cues allow Djébar to reappropriate the language of the coloniser in order to position her autobiography as a political opposition to French colonialism.

As a result of this linguistic reappropriation, the language Djébar uses in her autobiography becomes distinctively her own. To apply some linguistic repertoire concepts to this appropriation, language in the text has been plucked from Djébar's "biographically assembled" (Horner and Weber 118) repertoire, reflecting the individual nature of her use of language and implying its naturality. Indeed, unlike Ranaivoson in her *étude de l'œuvre*, Djébar offers few definitions of these lexical and semantic variations, supposing that they are a natural part of her language practices that are consonant with her autobiography.

There is, however, some amount of disagreement in the secondary

literature of *L'Amour, la fantasia* with regard to appropriation. Rothendler argues that Djébar appropriates the voice of both the colonised and the coloniser to create a hybrid language that is instinctively her own. Blair goes further in the introduction to her English translation of the book, supposing that Djébar “colonises the language of the coloniser” (xviii). Ghaussy, on the other hand, disagrees semantically with the term ‘appropriation’, instead viewing language in the text as “a means by which we are made aware of the existence of Arabic” (460). Whilst Blair’s statement errs on the side of (post)colonial sympathies, supposing some equality in the power relation between the colonised and the coloniser in order for reciprocal appropriation to be possible, a linguistic repertoire approach to language exceeds Ghaussy’s analysis. In this sense, Djébar’s use of language does more than just “[make the reader] aware of the existence of Arabic” (Ghaussy 460) – she integrates other languages into *her* French in a way that is natural for her, associating the language of her autobiography with her complex, composite identity. The result of this is a narrative voice that incorporates and reflects the composite, rhizomatic nature of her autobiography.

## Conclusion

As the analysis of extracts from the text in the previous two sections of this article has demonstrated, the concept of a linguistic repertoire can be applied to *L'Amour, la fantasia* in order to facilitate the deconstruction of linguistic binaries in a way that simultaneously gives space to the parts of Djébar’s identity that have been obscured by her personal experiences of colonialism. By moving away from the mother tongue ideologies that associate predefined languages with nation states and empires, it is possible to read *L'Amour, la fantasia* with a much more fluid approach to language. In terms of the postcolonial, this represents a further effort to “move beyond the very structure of colonial thinking” (Ochoa 228), allowing researchers to distance postcolonial literature from the language of the coloniser in which it is written. That is not to say that a linguistic repertoire approach heals any colonial wounds or overcomes the historic struggle for language rights, but instead that it enables analysis within the liminal spaces in which postcolonial identities are often negotiated.

In many ways, this concluding remark mirrors the rhizomatic model of identity alluded to by Édouard Glissant, through which he explores the various roots that interact and contribute to what he calls ‘creolized’ identities. Although Glissant was working in a Caribbean context, he advocates for his approach to be considered elsewhere, where linear, atavistic cultures have been delegitimised by the interactions between different cultures. Djebbar’s own autobiography, in which she details the long-term effects of being brought up in Algeria under a French colonial system, could easily be applied here. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the word “composite” has appeared five times in the main body of this article – Glissant positions *culture composite* (composite culture) as the creolised opposition to *culture atavique* (atavistic culture), a conceptualisation that dovetails with linguistic repertoire critiques of mother tongue ideologies as showcased in this article. In a similar framework to how Djebbar’s linguistic repertoire was analysed in the final section, Glissant advocates that researchers view identity not as a static and linear concept, but instead consider “l’identité comme rhizome... non plus comme racine unique mais comme racine allant à la rencontre d’autres racines” (23) (“identity as a rhizome... no longer as a single root but as a root going in search of other roots” [my translation]). Speaking of language specifically, Glissant elaborates that “on ne peut plus écrire une langue de manière monolingue” (112) (“one can no longer write a language in a monolingual manner” [my translation]), expanding this to declare that “on ne peut plus écrire son paysage ni décrire sa propre langue de manière monolingue” (113) (“one can no longer write one’s landscape nor describe one’s own language in a monolingual manner” [my translation]).

As a final intrigue, this article invites further study on linguistic repertoire approaches to language in postcolonial fiction, alongside Glissant’s rhizomatic model of identity, so as to enable and facilitate analysis that deconstructs European models of language, culture, and identity, whilst simultaneously delegitimising the colonial binaries these models have reinforced. Although this article has been tailored to a francophone context, further study could equally apply these concepts to anglophone or lusophone contexts in Africa, or to multilingual contexts in other parts of the world that might not necessarily have a colonial linguistic legacy.

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