

**Assia Djebar: a search for identity grounded *in-between* Franco-Arab literature<sup>1</sup> / *Assia Djebar: uma busca identitária alicerçada no entrelugar literário franco-árabe***

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**ABSTRACT:**

In postcolonial literature, the Algerian people sought in literary writing a way to resist the forms of subordination to which they were subjected, through the agency of the scars and ruptures caused by the colonialist regime. Some Algerian writers began to write literary texts in French in order to be heard across borders. Fatima Zohra Imalayène was one of them. Best known by the pseudonym Assia Djebar, the Algerian writer became widely known by denouncing the situation of subalternation experienced by Algerian women in her works, as well as the massacre that Algerian people experienced under the impositions of French colonizers. This bibliographic research (GIL, 2008) intends to discuss elements that ratify the literary *in-between* in the work of Assia Djebar. To do so, we used Bhabha's (2005) concepts *in-between* and *cultural hybridism*, as well as the reflections of Deleuze and Guattari (2000) on the perspective of the *becoming-revolutionary* as our theoretical framework. In the context of diaspora, the author experienced the colonialist regime installed in her native country and sought, in literature, a way of overcoming the ruptures left by colonialism and the patriarchal impositions present in her cultural identity. We can find a type of discomfort regarding her identity in her writings. Because she sees herself as being neither totally Algerian nor totally French, she expresses in her works an anguish that leads her to write "to tell herself" (DJEBAR, 1985, p. 91) and to give voice to her people, especially to Arab women, who remain invisible. This voice is given through her literary writing in French. Thus, Assia Djebar's Franco-Arab *in-between* literature causes her an ambivalent feeling of freedom and aphasia. This identity breakup manifested itself throughout her work and led her to live among the French and Arab worlds.

**KEYWORDS:** Assia Djebar; Literary *in-between*; Algerian writer; identity construction.

**RESUMO**

No âmbito da literatura pós-colonial, o povo argelino buscou na escrita literária, uma forma resistir às formas de subordinação às quais foram submetidos, no contexto de agenciamento das marcas e rupturas causadas pelo regime colonialista. Alguns escritores argelinos passaram a escrever textos literários em língua francesa com o intuito de serem ouvidos para além-fronteiras. A escritora argelina Fatima Zohra Imalayène, conhecida pelo pseudônimo Assia Djebar, obteve grande destaque por denunciar, em suas obras, a situação de subalternização vivenciada pelas mulheres argelinas, bem como o massacre pelo qual passou o povo argelino, submetido às imposições dos colonizadores franceses. Essa pesquisa bibliográfica (GIL, 2008) tem como objetivo discutir elementos que ratificam o entrelugar literário na obra da referida escritora argelina. Para tanto, temos como base teórica os estudos de Bhabha (2005) a respeito do entrelugar e do hibridismo cultural, bem como as reflexões de Deleuze e Guattari (2000) sobre a perspectiva do *devir revolucionário*. Inserida no contexto diaspórico, a autora vivenciou o regime colonialista instalado em seu país de origem e buscou, na literatura, uma forma de superação das rupturas deixadas pelo colonialismo e pelas imposições patriarcalistas presentes em sua identidade cultural. Encontramos, em suas obras, uma espécie de desconforto com relação à sua identidade. Por não se enxergar totalmente argelina e nem totalmente francesa, ela expressa em suas obras uma angústia que a leva a escrever para "dizer-se" (DJEBAR, 1985, p. 91) e para dar voz ao seu povo, especialmente às mulheres árabes, que permanecem na invisibilidade. Esta voz é dada através da escrita literária em língua francesa. Assim,

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*o entrelugar literário franco-árabe de Assia Djébar lhe causa o sentimento dúbio de liberdade e de afasia. Essa cisão identitária manifestou-se em toda a sua obra e a levou a viver entre os universos francês e árabe.*  
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Assia Djébar; entrelugar literário; escritora argelina; construção identitária.

## 1 Introduction

Literary art has been considered an experience of expression and reconstruction of social reality since antiquity. Studies of sociology of literature, once introduced by Georg Lukács (1963) with the book *The theory of the novel* assert that the literary work constitutes a form of representation and an extension of social reality. Before that, Madame de Staël (1980 apud ALMEIDA, 2010) sought to relate literature to social events by proposing three parameters of analysis for the literary text. The first one depicts a diachronic reading of the literary text, considering that it is transformed insofar changes take place in societies. The second one presents a spatial reading, considering the national space where the literary text is embedded, and the third one proposes the observation of a contradiction between the *necessary* literature and the literature that is actually published (NETO, 2007).

Thus, it is possible to affirm that literature constitutes a place where several important aspects can be discussed for postmodern contemporary society, in which the human being perceives himself in a multifaceted reality whose certainties once considered absolute truths are being rethought and reformulated at all times (ALMEIDA, 2010).

In contemporary times, post-colonial literatures consist of ways of overcoming the domination and subordination by which culturally hybrid peoples have experienced (PEREIRA; SOUZA, 2016). They narrate stories different from those told by the imperialist rule in order to resist, preserve, and safeguard the traditional cultural values, without losing the space conquered in the territory of the old metropolis, to tell and to rebuild themselves.

It is common to find narratives in French post-colonial literatures whose characters bring cultural characteristics of duplicity and ambiguity, which reveal the identity hybridism that Homi Bhabha (2005) addresses in his studies. The "contact zones" between the diasporic subjects and the new cultural environment in which they live become visible in postcolonial literatures, thus emerging as a means of overcoming the subalternation to which subjects were conditioned.

Changes and identity reconstruction of postcolonial individuals living in diasporic realities (such as exiled people, immigrants or refugees) are themes that need to be further

investigated in view of their emergence in the mentioned literature. Such people leave for various reasons: globalization and its consequences, search for academic or technical education in other countries, or the economic organization of their native country (PEREIRA, SOUZA, 2016).

In the context of the colonization of African countries, we highlight Algeria, whose people were massacred and exploited by France. These people, who had been defeated by their colonizer, found, in literary expression, a way of speaking up against the subordination to which they were submitted. This was done by Algerian writers who wrote texts in French – language that was considered the language of connection with the rest of the world (COMBE, 2010). Such fact meant a cry for help and a way to denounce and express outrage in the period of the conflictive colonization of this people.

In the Maghrebi literary context, we have studied the work of Algerian writer Fatima Zohra Imalayène (1936-2015) who, having adopted the pseudonym of Assia Djébar, became the author of a vast production ranging from novels, novellas, poems, essays, and even plays and cinematographic works. Her production adopted the feminine emancipation and the conflictive situation of Algeria at the time of the colonization as central themes of her writings. Assia Djébar lived until she was 17 years old in her native country. After that, she was exiled in Paris, living later in the United States and remaining in transit between Algeria, France and the United States until 2015.

As a bibliographic study (GIL, 2008), this research discusses elements that confirm the literary *in-between* in the work of the aforementioned Algerian writer. That is, despite having lived in a diasporic context and gone through the colonialist regime installed in Algeria, Djébar is a woman who sought in literature a way for overcoming the scars left by colonialism and the patriarchal and sexist impositions present in her cultural identity.

Assia Djébar demonstrates to be in this *in-between* when, on the one hand, her writing evokes situations experienced in Algeria, within her family, whether they are tender or painful memories. On the other hand, she is immersed in French language and culture brought by the colonizer since her childhood. Thus, she manifests some discomfort regarding her identity in her works. Because she sees herself neither as totally Algerian nor totally French, Assia Djébar reveals an anguish that leads her to write so that she can "tell herself" (DJEBAR 1985, 91) and find answers to her questions.

Considered one of the most influential personalities in Maghrebi feminine literature, Djébar is seen in some academies as the spokesperson for Arab women through literature. Most

of her novels emerge from autobiographical projects (SOARES, 1990). Exiled in France for a few years, and subsequently wandering between France and Algeria, through literary writing, she narrates herself and her nation in a dichotomous way. When she cannot express her most affectionate memories in French, as this is the language of the colonizer, Djébar uses it to tell her story and that of her country, disentangling both Arab women and Algeria of the place of silencing to which both were conditioned (SILVA, 2017).

The perception of a Franco-Arab identity dichotomy in the literary production of Assia Djébar led us to situate her as a writer who remains in this *in-between* space because of the ruptures caused by the colonization process, which fragmented the cultural identity of the writer. In this article, therefore, we have as theoretical foundations the studies of Bhabha (2005) regarding in-between and cultural hybridism, as well as the reflections of Deleuze and Guattari (2000) on the perspective of the becoming-revolutionary. We also situate the Algerian writer Assia Djébar as someone who remains in the *in-between* Franco-Arab literature, using French to narrate herself and her nation.

## **2 Literature as a place of identity reconstruction in the Maghreb**

One of the most important discussions in the field of cultural studies deals with the constitution of cultural identities, whose reflections by Homi Bhabha (2005) on this theme are commonly visited. This scholar problematizes the understanding of the singularly composed cultural identities from pre-defined categories, such as class and gender. He asserts that identities are borders of different realities. One who inhabits these social and subjective interstices is situated *in-between*.

The interstices formed in the borders create multiple compartments in the constitution of the cultural identity of subjects. This compartmentalized space may be called *in-between*; it is within such space that subordinate groups have the possibility to move from one border to another in a way to be empowered and hybridize their subjectivity (BHABHA, 2005), as it does with the colonized peoples. Once they encountered the culture of the colonizer, cultural spaces crossed. This is an imposition contact howsoever, a *going towards the other* in a movement of *arrows* so as to leave one point to *conquer* the other (GLISSANT, 1995).

The notion of *in-between* spaces allows us to overcome the rooting of a tree - an analogy by Deleuze and Guattari (2000) – to make room for the idea of a rhizome, of the

intertwining of cultural differences thought by Glissant (1995) through the notions of creolization of horizons that cross, of substitution from oneness to multiplicity, and from exclusion to relation. From this perspective, we see the literary production of Maghrebi peoples, whose history runs through colonization and overcoming of this chapter of history. This overcoming and resumption do not happen through a return to the cultural origins of such peoples, but rather from hybrid, creolized identities from diverse horizons that intersect.

For decades, the African continent has undergone brutal invasions, occupations, and establishment of a colonial system in several countries. From then on, Africa came under the domination of the British, Spanish, Portuguese, and French power and was subdivided into colonies which were subject to imperialist domination (UZOIGWE, 2010). In this context, the Maghreb, located to the north of the Sahara Desert, became the hunting ground for a number of countries, including the French empire that, in a cruel and violent manner, colonized the peoples of that region, imposing French as the official language of the place. Hence, the language of the colonizer became the symbol of cultural depersonalization of the Maghrebi people (SOARES, 1990).

In Algeria, between 1954 and 1962, several nationalist organizations joined the FLN (National Liberation Front). This revolutionary movement led to the War for Algerian Independence, and, as a result, the country was set free from the yoke of European power (BOAHEN, 2010). However, despite the independence, the impacts caused by European colonialism caused brutal identity ruptures in Algerian culture. The main one was the diasporic impulse that led the Algerian people into exile and migration to the old metropolis in search of overcoming social exclusion, reaching economic stability by means of a better professional education or overcoming the ideological and / or religious ties of the native culture (PEREIRA, SOUZA, 2016).

In the 1930s and 1940s, Africa came to be recognized by scholars as a cultural environment, divided into different nations and possessing social and moral values. Therefore, it overcame the misleading discourses of the nineteenth century disseminated by scientism, evolutionism, social Darwinism, historical materialism, racial theories, and the discriminatory reflections of Hegel and Pittard (1953). Therefore, during this time, studies on the effects of diaspora on the cultures of African peoples began to emerge (ALMEIDA, 2010), seeing it as a movement of rupture and recreation of their cultural identities from the needs imposed on these peoples in the daily life of a new cultural environment.

According to Mintz and Prince (2003), the main effect of diaspora was the fragmentation of identity of the dispersed peoples, as well as the absorption of new models and cultural values. Thus, the reconstruction of identity and the elaboration of strategies of organization of groups of a certain culture that have dispersed remains grounded between two worlds: the cultural universe of the place of origin and the new cultural universe found in the place of arrival (ALMEIDA, 2010).

Thus, the permanence of African culture in the cultural identity of the subjects in the context of diaspora does not imply the complete transposition of their cultural practices, but rather that Africa is present in the way of organizing and expressing social life (MINTZ, PRINCE, 2003). According to these authors, to see the formation of a new culture of African peoples in a place other than their native continent means neither to defend their Europeanization, nor to find, innocently, that they have left all their cultural baggage behind to rebuild social and cultural values in the new inhabited territory.

Peoples who lived in the context of diaspora had to reconstruct their cultural identity - which encompasses culture, tradition and language (BONNICI, 2012 apud PEREIRA; SOUZA, 2016). Such reconstruction involved facing the new world in which they were and the demand for formation of a new culture that would not be totally assimilated to the European culture nor would it be distant from African culture (MINTZ, PRICE, 2003).

In addition, this type of cultural hybridity (BHABHA, 2005) provokes in the exiled subject a feeling of homelessness, whether he is outside his homeland or already reconciled with it. For the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti (1999 apud RAMALHO, 2013), exile leaves scars that are never completely erased. Even if one returns to their native place, the reality to be experienced will never be the same, for they will live the experience of dis-exile. When returning to their native country, one wishes to re-establish their own identity and their country's identity as well, as both a physical space and a set of values. To this search for personal and collective identity reparation, Benedetti (1999 apud RAMALHO, 2013) calls dis-exile.

In case of exiled African writers, their works are directly influenced by their refugee status since they remain restless in face of the new cultural identity they have had to build. In this perspective, Ashcroft et al. (1991) call 'postcolonial literature' all works created by the hands of peoples who underwent the experience of colonization under the rule of European powers between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, delimiting tensions established between these peoples and the imperialist monopoly. Thus, through postcolonial literary writing, the



Algerian people found a way to rebuild their cultural identity after the brutal imposition of dominant cultures (COMBE, 2010).

Faced with the linguistic impasse between the Maghreb literary text and the language that materializes it, we find a characteristic type of literature, i. e. productions that emerged before the independence of some countries in that region, whose main theme was acculturation and accusation of abuses committed by the colonialist regime. The work *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (1957) by Tunisian writer Albert Memmi, for instance, depicts all the suffering from loss of identity of the Maghrebi people. From the reading of *Anthologie des Écrivains Maghrebins d'Expression Française*, a collection organized by Memmi (1964), we find the main themes of literature of that time.

It is possible to identify the predominance of description of the rites of daily life in the Maghreb in authors such as Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, Ahmed Sefrioui, Mouloud Mammeri, among others. Addressing acculturation, we have Albert Memmi, Driss Chraïbi, and Yacine Kateb. In a third moment of Maghrebi French-written literature, the approach of themes centered on the Algerian War, the impasses between colonization and the process of decolonization, as well as the discrimination against women in the Maghrebi societies can be found in the literature of Mourad Bourboune, Assia Djebar, Malek Haddad, Mouloud Mammeri, Mohammed Dib, Marguérite Taos Amrouche and, later on, Yamina Mechakra, Leïla Sebbar, Leïla Aouchal, Hawa Djebali and Nadia Ghalem, Salima Ghezali, Hélé Béji, Maïssa Bey, Fatima Mernissi, Samira Negrouche, Héléne Cixous, and others.

As examples of French-speaking Maghrebi literary works that discuss issues related to search for identity of the Maghreb, we can cite the trilogy of Mohammed Dib, composed by *La grande Maison*, *L'Incendie* e *Le Métier à tisser*. In these works, a character called Omar presents to his reader the life in the city Tlemcen in the context of a war. There, famine and misery prevail. In light of this situation, peasants become aware of the cultural rupture in which they are inserted and begin to exercise a spirit of solidarity, struggling to help each other.

We can also mention the novel *Nedjma*, by Yacine Kateb, in which the story of the main character is tied to that of Algeria and, looking for this character's essence, Nedjma finds her homeland occupied by foreigners. In *La rue des tambourins*, writer Marguérite Amrouche recounts her life and her problem of being a Christian in the midst of a Muslim society. We also highlight the work *L'amour, la Fantasia*, by Assia Djebar, in which the writer gives voice

to Algerian women who were long silenced and doubly colonized (SILVA, 2017).<sup>2</sup> Thus, Djébar emphasizes the role of women during the war, narrating the heroic deeds performed by some of their female ancestors during the anti-colonial struggle.

In light of the aforementioned works, literature can be seen as constituting a space of subterfuge for the Algerian writers who faced the process of cultural depersonalization. In the cultural context of hybrid experience, they needed to (re) create a new identity situated between the culture of the old metropolis and their native country, that is, an *in-between* Franco-Arab identity. In the following section, we will reflect on the life and work of the Algerian writer Assia Djébar, also located in this *in-between* identity.

### **3 Assia Djébar: a search for identity grounded in two worlds**

If we compare the postcolonial critique and the feminist movement, it is possible to see women as a colonization metaphor: a woman in the colony is a metaphor for the woman as a colony (BONNICI, 2009). That being said, we argue that Algerian women were doubly colonized. Firstly, by integrating a people that was colonized and, secondly, by being marginalized and treated as inferior than men. Thus, one of the most effective strategies of female decolonization was the route of language and linguistic experimentation (ASHCROFT et al., 1991 apud BONNICI, 1998). Women of the post-emancipation period have found in literature a way to fight the scars left to this day by colonization.

Many French-speaking Maghrebi female writers expressed their outrage upon the context of struggles against the vestiges of colonization and the affirmation of their own cultural identities within the context of postcolonial literature. Amongst them, we mention: Malika Mokedden, who, in 1985, left medicine to dedicate her life to literature; Leïla Sebbar, whose work focuses on the female world, in a position of denouncement, reflection, and constant exercise on their positioning in the Algerian world; and Salima Ghezali, who shares the same ideals. In addition to the aforementioned writers, we cite Ghezali, Hélé Béji, Maïssa

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<sup>2</sup> Besides studying the work by Assia Djébar, we also took her to an undergraduate classroom and developed a research that resulted in the Master's thesis entitled *L'amour, la Fantasia*, by Assia Djébar: literature in FFL class as a space of feminine resistance, defended in 2017. The research aimed to reflect on how the novel *L'amour, la Fantasia* (DJEBAR, 1985) becomes a path of resistance for Algerian women. The results demonstrated how this work can favor the deconstruction of stereotypes in the classroom and optimize the teaching / learning of French as a Foreign Language.



Bey, Fatima Mernissi, Samira Negrouche, H el ene Cixous, Assia Djebbar and many others who make the voice of Maghrebi women echo beyond African lands (HOYET, 2013).

In this article, we highlight Maghrebi writer Fatima-Zohra Imalay ene (1936-2015), known as Assia Djebbar, born in Cherchel, Algeria. She was a descendant of a traditional Algerian bourgeois family, daughter of Tahar, a teacher at a French primary school in the countryside of Algeria, and Bahia Sahraoui, both Arabs.

Djebbar's life took a different turn from that of other Arab women when her father enrolled her in a French school at age five (SOARES, 1990). She was one of the rare women who had access to schooling, spending her childhood in Algeria, moving to Paris at age 18 after getting a scholarship (Lyc ee F enelon). In the following year, she entered * cole Normale Sup erieure de jeunes filles de S evres*, France, where she chose to study History. In 1956, she decided to join the strike of the General Union of the Algerian Muslim Students. Because of this, she was expelled from the school of S evres. At this occasion, she wrote her first novel, *La soif* (1957), married the writer Walid Carn, and left France, going to Northern Africa.

In 1959, Assia Djebbar began teaching Modern and Contemporary History of the Maghreb at the College of Arts of Rabat, Morocco. In 1962, she returned to Algeria and began teaching History at the University of Alger until 1965, when the teaching of History became mandatory in the Arabic language. Then, from 1966 to 1975, she moved to Paris and stayed between comings and goings to Algeria.

Djebbar then divorced her first husband and married Malek Alloula. In 1999, she defended her doctoral dissertation at Paul-Val ery Montpellier University and, in the same year, she was elected a member of the Royal Academy of French Language and Literature of Belgium. In 2001, she became a professor in the French studies Department at New York University. From 1995 to 2001, she was the director of the Center for French and French-speaking studies in Louisiana, USA. In 2005, she was elected a member of the French Academy.

After her first publication, she wrote a number of other works, namely: *Les impatientes* (1958), *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* (1962), *Les alouettes na ives* (1967), *Po emes pour l'Alg erie heureuse* (1969), *Rouge l'aube* (1969), *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980), *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (1985), *Ombre sultane* (1987), *Loin de M edine* (1991), *Vaste est la prison* (1995), *Le Blanc de l'Alg erie* (1996), *Oran, langue morte* (1997), *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (1997), *Ces voix qui m'assi egent: En marge de ma francophonie* (1999), *La Femme sans s epulture* (2002), *La Disparition de la langue fran aise* (2003), and *Nulle part dans la*

*maison de mon père* (2007). Assia Djébar directed two films, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (1978) and *La Zerda or les chants de l'oubli* (1982). They were structured as documentaries that recorded testimonies of women who had witnessed various struggles waged by Algerian women, both in the context of the struggle for the liberation of French colonialism and in the context of resistance against the subalternation imposed on Algerian women.

In the postwar period, when Djébar taught History at the University of Algiers, she found herself in a dilemma: being an Arab historian and knowing all the oppression experienced by the Algerian people, her language of writing was the same as that of the colonizer. As a response, she opted to leave literature for more than 10 years, thus resorting to the cinema as a way to get back in touch with the Arabic dialect language, which was the variant of her mother tongue. Cinema worked as a mediator between the writer herself and her own culture, since she felt she owed something to the culture of her people because she was a French-speaking writer and not an Arabic-speaking writer. Her anguish was always in this *in-between* Franco-Arab: although she had lived for a long time in France and had assimilated French culture, her cultural roots were Arab. Thus, we see Djébar's attempt to reconcile with her Arab identity by means of the cinematographic production (SOARES, 1990).

Both in her literary expression and in her cinematographic production, Assia Djébar dealt with questions about the female world (including physical, linguistic, social, and mental aspects) in a thorough way from her intimate experiences and subjective reflections. The main theme found in her work involves female emancipation during the War of Independence (1954-1962).

Therefore, we see Assia Djébar as an Algerian writer who, as a child, had her life marked by a cultural dichotomy that divided her identity into two parts. This identity breakup manifested itself throughout her work and led her to live between the French and Arab worlds.

### **3.1 The *in-between* in four works of Assia Djébar**

The first novel Djébar wrote, *La soïf* (DJEBAR, 1957), was published at a time when Algeria was still a colony. Also in this period, Djébar returned from exile in France to Morocco. In this work considered by Orlando (2015) as an experimental novel influenced by

the style and literary forms of the *Nouveau roman*<sup>3</sup>, Djébar depicts a contradiction that afflicts Nadia, a French-like bourgeois young woman. The character is portrayed as narcissistic by the fact of engaging freely with others, walking by herself in the city, wearing pants, thus transgressing the cultural limits imposed on Algerian women. She acts as a body without organs (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2000), being driven by her desires and subjectivities, without being limited by social impositions.

The plot depicts Nadia's actions, who seems to be always concerned about her image and her ability to get the attention of the men she knows. At one point, she decides to seduce Ali, husband of her friend, Jedla, who feels guilty that she cannot have children. Jedla encourages this relationship between Nadia and Ali, so that he has a pretext to file for divorce. However, Jedla becomes pregnant and her doubts about Ali's fidelity lead her to abort. During the surgery, she dies.

When walking on the margins of Algerian society and thus indulging in her passions, Nadia proves the feeling of freedom. Yet, by the end of the novel, Nadia has a startle that leads her to realize that her individual reality is, in fact, a false freedom. Looking at the cultural boundaries that imprison her, Nadia finds herself confronted with the various Algerian judgments of the 1950s and, therefore, realizes that she is indeed very far from what she searches, feeling imprisoned and home(land)less. At this moment, Nadia decides to leave Ali and marries Hassen to deny her passions and to be reconciled with the demands of the Algerian society.

When publishing this novel, Djébar constructs a character whose identity is fragmented and seeks to create situations that lead her to flee from the social reality in which she is inserted, describing Algeria as a peaceful environment and with a harmonious coexistence among citizens. By the time the novel was written, however, this environment was experiencing one of the most violent moments of the war for Algeria's independence. It is possible to notice how the author felt through the conflictive situation of her native country, seeking to face the existence of the conflict and to overcome it through writing.

In *La soif* (DJEJAR, 1957), we observe the creation of a new socio-cultural environment, with different socio-political and cultural conditions. By transgressing pre-established norms to women of that time, Nadia experienced a becoming-revolutionary

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<sup>3</sup> *Nouveau Roman* refers to a French literary movement of the 1950s that diverges from the classical literary genres. Alain Robbe-Grillet was the main representative, having published a series of essays on the nature of the new novel that was later reunited in the work *Pour un nouveau roman*, in 1963 (ORLANDO, 2015).

(DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2000). She achieved that by subjecting herself, living the freedom of which she was thirsty, and seeking to overcome the painful history of the colonization experienced by her country with the creation of a bilingual (French and Arabic) newspaper, in which one talks about other things besides colonization, as showed in the excerpt below:

- (...) Yes, he said, our press is rotten. Yet, that does not discourage me; there is a lot to be done in our country. I am glad to return to Algiers; the newspaper I am going to edit will be bilingual: French and Arabic. It will be difficult, I do not delude myself. Still, if only at the beginning I win all the young people, I will be able to continue. (...) The worst thing is lethargy, deep sleep! We are still talking about colonizers and colonialism. Evil, you see, is our mentality of colonized, of colonizable people. That's what we have to succor, that's what we have to say in our language. (DJEBAR, 1957, 44). (Our translation, our emphasis.)<sup>4</sup>.

When Nadia claims it is necessary to say that *evil* would be the *mentality of colonized peoples* in Arabic (and also in French), one can clearly observe the way in which this character seeks to overcome colonialism and the desire for a new generation to do something for their country, setting it free from the subordination as a colony. This is what the young writer intends to do in writing such a novel: to revolutionize Algeria at the time of the War for national independence. Then the becoming-revolutionary is concretized (DELEUZE, GUATTARI, 2000) in-between a war and a national liberation.

In writing such a novel at the time of the colonial regime, Djebbar disrupted the moral prohibitions imposed on Algerian women. Located *in-between* the Franco-Arab space with her cultural identity fragmented after living in France for so long, Djebbar expresses, through her novel *La soif*, the thirst for independence, freedom and change for her country.

In *L'amour, la Fantasia* (DJEBAR, 1985), the first novel that includes her autobiographical project, Djebbar situates women as a metaphor for colonized Algeria. In this novel, the narrative focuses on heroic actions performed by Algerian women during the anti-colonial struggle, reporting how these women fought and resisted the massacres in Algerian territories. Through her "wounded writing" (REGAIEG, 1999, p. 2), Djebbar interweaves chapters devoted to the history of the Algerian anti-colonial struggle with chapters devoted to her own story. In this novel, we observe that a type of molecular agency is delineated

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<sup>4</sup> “- (...) Oui, disait-il, notre presse est pourrie. Mais cela ne me décourage pas; il y a énormément à faire dans notre pays. Je suis content de revenir à Alger; le journal que je vais monter sera bilingue: français et arabe. Ce sera difficile, je ne me fais pas d'illusion. Mais si seulement au début je gagne à moi tous les jeunes, je pourrai tenir. (...) Le pire, c'est la léthargie, le sommeil! On ne parle toujours que des colons, du colonialisme. Le mal, voyez-vous, c'est notre mentalité de colonisés, de colonisables. C'est cela qu'il faut secouer, c'est ce qu'il faut leur dire dans notre langue.” (DJEBAR, 1957, p. 44.)

(DELEUZE, GUATTARI, 2000), in which literary writing works as a line of flight for the expression of subjectivities and desires of female characters, who live a becoming-revolutionary, fighting for their nation and for the ideals they believed in.

In addition, we understand the way in which the social war in Djébar's homeland triggered an identity struggle. Some chapters of the novel reveal a narrator who writes to understand herself and to understand her story. This understanding comes only when she revisits the past of her country and the past of Algerian women whose stories are told throughout the novel. The conflict of identities lived by Djébar and narrated in *L'amour, la Fantasia* (1985) is revealed when episodes of the author's personal life are brought to light, which point to linguistic and cultural contradictions as ambivalent and problematic factors.

In the first chapter, since the very beginning of the novel, the image of Tahar – father of a girl, both Algerians –, signals the problem of a dual territorial and cultural belonging to both Europe and Africa. As Tahar was a teacher working at a French colonial school, he takes his daughter to this school. Their clothing and their language were European, but their cultural origin was not. Very similar to the dilemma expressed by Assia Djébar in her other writings, the life of the character who narrates the novel is permeated by paths marked by cultural ambivalence and by this situation of interstice, an *in-between* (BHABHA, 2005): a French-speaking writer who finds herself in the midst of two territories and two languages, like the narrator herself.

*Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (DJEBAR, 1999) consists of a compilation of poetic texts, short narratives and self-analyzes in which Assia Djébar intends to affirm her identity as a Franco-Arab writer through appraisals of some of her own works written until then. The main character, Fatima-Zohra, appears as a reader of the Francophone writer Assia Djébar. Thus, Fatima's reception to Djébar's texts is reflected and developed through the voices of several women who speak in French, in Arabic, or in Berber.

Thus, this work concentrates an identity reflection on Djébar as a French-speaking writer who uses French (language that was imposed, not chosen) to talk about her origins and to give voice to the ancestral women who did not have space to speak and to write their own stories. The discomfort caused by the Franco-Arab *in-between* encourages Assia Djébar to analyze herself through her own work, for this is how she could (re)construct herself – through literary writing.

In *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (DJEBAR, 2007), last novel written by Assia Djébar, we find a narrative character called Fatima-Zohra (same civil name of Assia Djébar)

that recalls her personal memories of childhood and adolescence. In this literary path for a search for identity, she tells Fatima's story, whose intellectual and authoritarian father initiates her daughter into the colonizer's 'world'. Hence, some daily habits reinforce the Franco-Arab *in-between* inside the girl's house: her father reads newspapers in French and her mother listens to Arabic radio on a daily basis.

In an interview given to the *Jeune Afrique* newspaper, Djébar explains that she wrote *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (DJEBAR, 2007) to narrate a grave turbulent moment in her teenage years that led her to attempt suicide after being humiliated by her fiancé in 1953. She explains that this novel is for her a kind of self-analysis, in which she brings together elements of her childhood and adolescence in order to understand herself (BARRADA, 2008). Thus, the conflicts developed in the novel reflect the author's questions and personal searches, revealing that Assia Djébar seeks to understand the *in-between* Franco-Arab space in which she has always been through literature.

## **Conclusion**

Since Assia Djébar joined the French Academy in 2005, her literary production has become one of the most studied in American universities. Not only in the Maghreb, but also in France and in several other countries, including Brazil, her literary works have drawn the attention of literary scholars and critics. Djébar developed an autobiographical project that closely articulates with narratives that tell the story of her country. By doing this, Djébar's individual stories evoke the stories of Algerian women, which denounce the subalternation imposed on them.

Therefore, her thorough work of multiple narratives that communicate herself and her nation, conveyed in French, has, since her earliest publications, encouraged many scholars to develop reflections on her writing. At the international level, several studies, be they dissertations, theses, essays, or articles published in journals, have been conducted to explore Assia Djébar's writing.

Most of these studies explore the autobiographical character of her works, as well as the plurality of voices that narrate her novels, such as developed by Najiba (1995), Chih (2004), Hacib (2010), Benalil (2004), Regaieg (1999), to cite some. Some other studies propose to compare her works and those of other Maghrebi writers. An example is Lameirinha (2013),



who compares *La disparition de la langue française* (DJEBAR, 2003) with Albert Camus's *Le premier homme* (1994).

However, there has been little discussion on the Franco-Arab *in-between* in which the writer has been situated since her childhood. Some works mention Djebbar's identity struggle, but none of them analyze the *in-between* expressed in her literary work. Also, this author is still little known and studied in Brazil. In her novels, the cultural hybridity of Homi Bhabha (2005) and the *becoming-revolutionary* and *becoming-female* of Deleuze and Guattari (2000) are noticeable in the female characters.

Thus, throughout this article, we proposed to discuss elements that reaffirmed the literary *in-between* in the work of Assia Djebbar and to situate her as an author who suffered the impacts of the colonial regime installed in her country. Among many other consequences, the identity rupture reached Djebbar's subjectivity and fragmented her identity in two parts, placing her in the Franco-Arab *in-between* and causing several marks of fragmentation, which are expressed by the feelings of aphasias of affection, melancholy and search for self-understanding and understanding of the cultures that pervade and constitute her. The literary *in-between* in which Djebbar situates herself makes room for the evocation of her native culture and some questions allowed by the freedom that the French culture granted her.

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