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From the Other Shore: Exploring Home and Spatial Duality in Leïla Sebbar's *Le silence des rives* (*Silence on the Shores*)

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Abstract. The duality of *here* and *there* is a recurring motif in Maghrebian exile literature, which revolves around the experiences of North African immigrants who reside in Europe. This dualistic framework underscores the sense of displacement and cultural alienation that many immigrants experience in their new homes, as they find themselves straddling two cultures and struggling to find a sense of belonging in either of them. Leïla Sebbar's novel *Le silence des rives* portrays the last day in the life of a Maghrebian immigrant in France, whose life is fraught with unfulfilled promises and shattered dreams. The present article examines how spatial duality and the *here-there* dichotomy serve as the main device for the exploration of the lives of the novel's characters. This article also highlights the argument that the notions of "home" and "belonging" are not merely physical, but also emotional and psychological. The concept of spatial duality, as developed by Gaston Bachelard, provides a valuable framework for understanding the intricate relationship between exiles' experiences of physical and psychological space. The postcolonial reading perspective also elucidates the complexity of (im)migrant subjectivity and the discourse of belonging.
Keywords: alienation, dislocation, exile, home, space duality.

Iš kito kranto: namų ir erdvinio dvilypumo samprata Leïlos Sebbar romane *Krantų tyla*

Santrauka. Erdvės dvilypumas yra pasikartojantis motyvas frankofoniškoje egzodo literatūroje, pasakojančioje apie Europoje gyvenančių Šiaurės Afrikos imigrantų patirtį. Ši dvilypė struktūra išskleidžia dislokacijos ir kultūrinio susvetimėjimo emocinę dinamiką, kurią daugelis imigrantų išgyvena atsidūrę tarp dviejų kultūrų. Leïlos Sebbar romane *Le silence des rives* (*Krantų tyla*) apmąstomas alžyriečio imigranto gyvenimas Prancūzijoje, jo prisiminimai ir neišsipildžiusios svajonės. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip per erdvinio dvilypumo topologiją ir *čia-ten* priešpriešą Sebbar konstruoja romano veikėjų gyvenimo pasakojimą. Atsiremiant į Gastono Bachelardo samprotavimus apie erdvės poetiką, iškeliama mintis, jog romane permąstomos „namų" ir „priklausymo" sąvokos yra ne tik fizinės, bet ir emocinės bei psichologinės. Pokolonijinė skaitymo perspektyva taip pat išryškina (i)migrantų subjektyvumo ir tapatybės diskurso sudėtingumą.
Reikšminiai žodžiai: susvetimėjimas, dislokacija, egzilis, namai, erdvinis dvilypumas.

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Introduction

The contrast between "here" and "there" is a common motif in the writing of Maghrebian exiles. It captures the complex experiences of North African immigrants in Europe. In the dualistic paradigm, European houses are "here", while North African homelands are "there". Dislocation, cultural estrangement, and a deep yearning for belonging are interweaved in literary works of this kind. The present article centers on Leïla Sebbar's novel *Le silence des rives* (*Silence on the Shores*), a vivid description of a Maghrebian immigrant's last day in France. The novel presents a world of unfulfilled promises and dreams.

By exploring the psychological dimension of the immigrant experience that Sebbar's fiction represents, this article aims to illuminate the complex and long-lasting implications of living in two different spaces. Since it is necessary to examine the intricacies of this story, the article commences with an analysis of the underlying concepts of exile and home. The primary objective of this initial investigation is to lay a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis, and to shed light on the psychological and emotional terrains that influence the experiences of Maghrebian immigrants. Once this scaffolding is in place, the exposition turns to a comprehensive exploration of *Le silence des rives*. Gaston Bachelard's concept of *spatial duality* is employed as a theoretical framework.

1. Understanding the Complexities of Exile

Exile, that is, the problem of defining "home" in the context of physical and mental encounters with a "new land", is a recurrent theme in the writings of authors from settler colonies. This literature often examines the dialectical relation between an "old world" and a "new world". A chasm separates the two, and the new world signifies "something different, something nobody anticipated" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin,1989, p.136). This chasm also allows liminal positions to be considered and conduces to negotiations between the dominant culture and the settler culture. The liminality of the exiled subject has been emphasized by critics. Homi K. Bhabha, one of the most influential postcolonial critics, has written extensively on diaspora and exile, among other topics. In the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, he asserts that it is typical of our time "to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond" (Bhabha, 2007, p. 1). Those who dwell on the border between nations encounter conditions that are marked by thresholds, borders, and barriers. Borders are ambivalent and contradictory, and they serve as intermediate locations where subjects can cross barriers. According to Bhabha (*ibid*., p. 2), "[...] the "beyond" is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past [...], we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion".

In the context of exile literature, Bhabha's concept of "beyond" offers a nuanced and complex perspective on the experience of cultural displacement. Exiled writers often find themselves in a state of cultural in-betweenness, navigating the tension between their native and adopted cultures, as well as the loss and trauma of displacement. Through their

writing, these writers explore the complexities of cultural hybridity and the creation of new identities that exist "beyond" the boundaries of traditional cultural categories. John McLeod stresses that these categories might seem like binary oppositions. In Bhabha's view, they represent a crossing. In other words, they function as categories which commingle as well as conflict, and this negotiation entails transitioning from one state to the other. Bhabha's reflection on the word "beyond" emphasizes transitoriness, as do the terms "liminal", "interstitial" and "hybrid" (McLeod, 2000, p. 217).

1.2. Homeland and Land of Exile

Migration is defined as a voyage away from home, in the sense that it places the individual in a new environment, away from "the home's mundane realities" (Peters, 1990, p. 19). Svetlana Boym wrote that home is only a concern if it is lost; one only feels the need to question home if it is no longer present. When one begins to consider the definitions of "home", "home nation", and "homeland", one "experiences the first failure of homecoming" (Boym, 2001, p. 251). Boym emphasizes the transformative power of migration. It forces people to redefine "home" and to adapt to a new environment while retaining their cultural identity. The notion of "home" is based on past memories, present experiences, and future goals. The migrant's journey, which is distinguished by the absence of the familiar, becomes a profound investigation of both the concrete and abstract components of "home".

The experience of home is one of intimacy in that a person who is at home feels secure in their familiarity with the environment (*ibid*., p. 251). For this reason, individuals use memories of home as a compensatory strategy. Pierre Nora argued that the past is commemorated defensively if the surroundings of the memory are lacking (Nora, 1989, p. 12). Similarly, some migrants focus on the past because that past is not shared collectively in their new homes. Exiles find themselves in situations in which their collective experiences are no longer communal; the more this realization affects them, the more effort they exert to retain the memories in question (*ibid*., p.16).

The idea of "home*"* depends on time: over time, the gradual investment of a subject in a space alters their sense of that space, thus transforming a new location into a home. Repetition is crucial to a place becoming a home (Terkenli, 1995, p. 326). In the absence of time and familiarity, it is only natural that the migrant does not perceive their new environment as a home. Migrants who only have memories of home exhibit one of two tendencies: 1) they become familiar with the unknown and thus actively engage in the construction of a home in their new location; or 2) they become nostalgic (as in homesickness) and cling to the assumption that their permanent home is in the space that they left behind (*ibid*., p.329). However, for many individuals, home is not stable. Homelessness—the lack of a permanent, stable, and acceptable home and the need to live in temporary accommodations or shelters—can be caused by poverty, a lack of cheap housing, and social marginalization. Homelessness causes mental and psychological distress, displacement, and social estrangement. It is for this reason that S. L. Einbinder (2011), for example, views it as a form of coerced displacement which separates individuals from their communities. Thus,

homelessness represents a loss of the feeling of belonging, security, and steadiness that are typically associated with the concept of home.

Maghrebian literature contrasts the homeland to the country of exile in order to show the conflict between the longing for a lost or idealized past and the effort to adjust to a new and often difficult present. Many Francophone Maghrebi writers romanticize their home country as a lost paradise. In their fiction, the homeland is associated with cultural and linguistic purity and a desire for a simpler and more real life. Writers such as Albert Memmi and Tahar Ben Jelloun, for example, portray the homeland as a personal and cultural treasure. However, the place of exile is generally depicted as a site of struggle and suffering, where immigrants must adjust to a new culture and to new social and economic realities. Exile also induces feelings of alienation and loneliness because immigrants are separated from their families and communities because they speak languages and observe customs that are different from those of the host country.

The theme of exile occupies a prominent position in Francophone Algerian literature. Indeed, numerous authors employ the motif of exile as a means of delving into the intricacies of their individual experiences and of the broader collective experience of Algerians. In their works, the writers examine the subjects of nationality, identity, and cultural legacy and contemplate the profound influence of their cultural origins on the formation of their personal identities. According to Jacques Noiray's (1996, p.122) analysis, as presented in his book *Littératures francophones*, the literature of French-speaking Maghreb, despite its deep connection to the native land of the writers, can be characterized as a literature of exile.

Kateb Yacine, for instance, was compelled to leave his country amidst the Revolutionary War and divided his time between Algeria and France. The same is true of other notable authors, such as Assia Djebar, Albert Memmi, Mohammed Khair-Eddine, and Tahar Ben Jelloun. These authors explore the complex relationship between their personal experiences and the historical period of colonialism. This literary approach enables individuals to establish a connection between their cultural legacy and the international discourse. In doing so, they serve both as cultural representatives of their lands and as narrators, even when they reside abroad.

Mouloud Feraoun showed interest in the multifaceted dimensions of the phenomenon of exile. In his work *Le fils du pauvre* (1950), commonly translated as *The Poor Man's Son*, the protagonist's paternal figure, Ramdane, embarks on a journey to France with the intention of accumulating sufficient funds to settle his financial liabilities. However, throughout his extended absence, Ramdane is persistently preoccupied with the notion of returning to his native land. In *La terre et le sang* (1953), the main character, Amer, is a miner who lives in northern France during the World War I. Amer marries a French woman, and harbours a profound longing to accompany her back to Kabylia.

Leila Sebbar occupies an important position in francophone Maghrebian literature. She writes about Maghrebian immigrant society in France, identifying herself as a "croisée", a cultural hybrid at the intersection between the Western and the Eastern traditions. She is the daughter of a French mother and an Algerian father. The novelist, who grew up in

Algeria and now resides in France, reproduces the marginalized immigrant experience through her writing in order to alleviate her own sense of exile. In a letter to Nancy Huston, she wrote:

> *I am there at the crossroads, serene at last, finally in my place; for I am a croisée seeking a connection; writing within a lineage, one that is always the same. It is tied to history, to memory, to identity, to tradition, and to transmission, by which I mean the search for ascendants and descendants, seeking a place in the history of a family, a community, a people with regard to History and the universe. It is in fiction that I feel that I am a free subject (free of father, mother, clan, dogma) and strengthened by the burden of exile. Only there do I muster body and soul to span the two banks, both upstream and downstream* (Sebbar, 1986, cited in Mortimer, 1999, p. vi).

The letter describes Sebbar's identity journey and her narrative transformation. The crossroads mark the turning point of her life, at which she discovers peace and belonging. As a "croisée", she connects with her predecessors and descendants in order to ground herself in history, memory, and tradition. Writing reconnects her to her roots spiritually, enabling her to circumvent familial and cultural duties. In exile, fiction helps her to acquire freedom from the authority of the family, from cultural norms and from various beliefs. A free-spirited figure, Sebbar navigates time and heritage to connect past and future, showing how literature can comfort, empower, and unite despite challenging identity and memory.

Algerian literature changed in the 1990s, when its focus turned toward the Black Decade. Sebbar subverted the tradition that had reduced most Algerian writing to war stories. Her writing explores women, exile, language, and memory. The literary style of her novel, which is reminiscent of Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma*, is memorable because the focus is not on plot or characters. Elliptic writing is used to break the rules of language and narration. In order to connect with historical and future communities, Sebbar is careful to place herself and her protagonists in the physical and cultural framework of the Mediterranean.

2. Leila Sebbar's *Le silence des rives* (*Silence on the Shores*)

Sebbar devotes most of her work to the "second generation" of Algerians who were born in France or to Algerians who have lived in France for a long time. Her characters seem to be integrated in the French culture while conveying their unique identities, which defy assimilation. She addresses questions of immigrant cultural identity from the vantage point of two separate generations. In earlier works, such as *Fatima ou les Algériennes au square* (1981); *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (1984); and the *Shérazade* trilogy, she focuses on the experiences of young Beurs, that is the children of Maghrebi immigrants to France, and on the second and third generations of North Africans for whom the Maghreb is typically a vague recollection or a place that they have come to know second hand, through stories, images, and family visits. In *Le silence des rives,* Sebbar examines the experiences of an older, middle-aged immigrant who is stranded between Algeria and France, and only finds serenity in the company of other urban nomads.

Examining the vision of a society of immigrants enables Sebbar to challenge the very concept of French cultural identity. According to Françoise Lionnet (1992, p.113), the concept of "francité prompts Sebbar's readers to reconsider the linguistic and ideological distinctions between the terms "French" and "francophone". The critic finds that Sebbar, whose texts do not belong to any obvious cultural categories and instead transcend the borders between them, actually belongs to both "French" and "francophone" categories.

Le silence des rives concerns the current and past recollections of a man whose life is filled with unfulfilled promises and dashed hopes. After crossing the Mediterranean as a young man and marrying a French woman, he betrays his pledge to his mother to return home and remains in France. He is aware that his death is imminent, and he dreads dying alone, with no other Muslim to whisper the traditional prayer to him during his final hours. Through a series of monologues that are connected by associative memory, the narrative reveals the fragmentation and sense of disruption that the immigrant encounters in his daily life, as well as the various characteristics of exile and the role of memory in alleviating pain. The characters in the novel are not identified. The protagonist is referred to as "l' homme" or "the man"; the other characters are referred to as "the child", "the mother", and "the three sisters". Sebbar's protagonist is both typical and atypical. He is atypical because of his anonymity: he lacks a name, an address, an age, and the physical characteristics of a conventional character. But the protagonist is also typical because his actions and the circumstances of his exile are such that he represents Maghrebian emigrants.

Anonymity can be used in onomastics to achieve a variety of aims, such as creating mystery or suspense as readers try to figure out who a character is. It can also be used to emphasize specific concepts, such as the notion that actions define people more than names. It has a generalizing impact when used by Sebbar. In reality, no information about the man's identity, location, or time period is provided. The setting is likely to be one of France's major cities, such as Paris, Marseilles, or Lyon, which are the main hubs in the country. Furthermore, because there is no precise location for the man's nation of origin, the author is able to target all ex-colonies of the French colonial empire and show the shared experience of all exiles.

2.1. Spatial Duality in Sebbar's *Le silence des rives*

Numerous immigrants grapple with the challenge of harmonizing their innate sense of belonging with the starkness of their newfound reality. Conventional literature frequently portrays this internal struggle as an intricate interplay between two divergent worlds, marked by an enduring yearning for familial ties and the warmth of home. This dichotomous portrayal vividly captures the pervasive sentiment of cultural displacement that many immigrants experience in their adopted homelands. It is not uncommon for them to grapple with the sensation of being perpetual outsiders. At times, this emotional schism is exacerbated by an acute sense of nostalgia for their countries of origin.

Sebbar's novel uses two spatial deictics, "here" and "there", to denote the native country (Algeria) and the host country (France). These deictics depict the clash between

cultures as the characters move between them. Sebbar also uses spatial deictics to underscore the protagonist's estrangement from his Algerian heritage in France. The use of the two spatial deictics highlights his attempt to integrate his Algerian identity into French culture. Indeed, if one examines the spatial organization of the story, one notices that the narrative is structured around the dual spatiality *homeland/land of exile*, which is further transposed onto additional pairs, such as: *café/house*, *native village/metropolitan city*, and *open country area/closed suburban area*. This approach is often used to create a contrast between different realms or to underscore the relationship between physical and psychological space.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator contrasts the protagonist's native environment with his place of exile. There are sparse indications of the man's birthplace, such as, "the fountain tiled with ancient blue and green mosaics" (Sebbar, 1993, p. 21). The story also includes poetic images that evoke nostalgia for the protagonist's home village, thus transforming his native land into a lost paradise: "[…] the big happy house, when men had not yet deserted it" (*ibid.*, p.60). In contrast, only the bleak aspects of his life in exile are depicted: "they can throw his corpse into a common grave, where he will join his brothers of misfortune, his brothers in life and at the bar, his brothers in death" (*ibid*, p.28).

In *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard (1961) examines the manner in which imagination and emotion shape the perception of space. Bachelard claims that memories, dreams, and fantasies are strongly connected to material surroundings, which can provoke strong emotional responses. The nursery, attic, basement, and cellar are his four categories of domestic space, which he believes to be fundamental to human spatial experiences. These areas have distinct personalities and emotional resonances, and Bachelard claims that they can be both comforting and frightening.

In Sebbar's narrative, there are two dwellings: the house of the protagonist's mother in her native village and the house of the protagonist's wife in France. The word "home" appears frequently in the novel and has various connotations. Deprived of his first safe haven, the man feels alienated on the foreign shore. The house of the protagonist's French wife is contrasted with his home in his native country, where, as he never ceases reminiscing, he spent endless pleasant days. However, that home exists only in the exile's imagination because he has never returned to his homeland. Bachelard (1961, p.35) writes that whenever an individual dreams of his or her childhood home, he or she experiences the initial warmth and substance of a material paradise. That home is a place of joy and comfort, as well as a refuge from the outside world. Bachelard posits that home is the crucial site of one's intimate life. He refers to this intimate space as "espace heureux" (happy space) (*ibid.*, p.32). It is the place where memory and imagination are fused with real-life events. The Frenchwoman's home in Sebbar's novel offers the protagonist no respite from the distress and apprehension that he associates with the outside world: "[…] he will not go to his wife's house, [...] he does not think of it as his house as well as hers" (Sebbar, 1993, p. 31). The protagonist's wife declined to accompany him to his native land, exacerbating the gap between them over the years. Thus, deprived of intimacy, he is denied the nurturing space that would allow him to feel at home.

In his topoanalysis, Bachelard argues that one's psychological relationship with space is deeply rooted in one's childhood experiences and memories. He explains that impressions of subjective and objective reality are first created during childhood and then modified by the projection of present reality into the future. In the present, one tends to recall one's childhood home with fondness, but in the future, one can envision one's ideal home (Bachelard, 1961, p.7). In Sebbar's novel, the man's experiences of subjective and objective reality, like those of any uprooted individual, originate from a childhood home that is located "elsewhere". As pictures filter through the pane of memory, the sprawling Moorish-style mansion in a village on the Algerian coast emerges as a haven, but only by a reference to the past. The protagonist's house does not exist in the actual world, only in his imagination. Thus, he encounters the "unhomely" on a daily basis. Bhabha (1992, p.141) defines "the unhomely" as "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place", in other words, as the feeling of alienation that is experienced by uprooted and marginalized individuals such as residents of African *bidonvilles* and French urban *cités*. The word "house" has two opposing meanings in this context: the protagonist's house in his homeland and his French wife's house. The house in the protagonist's homeland refers to the contexts of tenderness, love, and maternal warmth; the French wife's house, conversely, is associated with the neglect of his wife and with the weight of time that engulfs him and emphasizes his inability to return to his native country.

In its second phase, Sebbar's narrative shifts to a different opposition, namely, the *café/house* dichotomy. The narrator implies that the man, in order to compensate for the loss of his inaccessible home, seeks refuge in a café. Notably, in Sebbar's works, cafés, which have traditionally been regarded as spaces for socialization, are dynamic settings. The characters engage in conversations about politics, religion, and culture in the café. For the older characters, it is a haven of nostalgia and recollection, and a place where childhood stories are shared. Conversely, for the younger characters, the café serves as a portal into their country's history and culture. Against this backdrop, the café also reflects the political and social tumult that had gripped Algeria during the timeframe of the novel. The café becomes a focal point for open discussions about the government, civil conflicts, and the societal impact of religion, thus evolving into a political hub where the characters express their frustrations and organize protests. While cafés are conventionally cast as transient spaces, to Sebbar's protagonist, they become a symbol of permanence and tranquility. Paradoxically, the concept of home, which is typically associated with rest, morphs into a realm of rejection, anxiety, and, importantly, solitude.

Sebbar's protagonist seeks refuge in public spaces, such as the cafés that other Maghrebian workers frequent. However, relationships in cafés remain distant: "sometimes he leaves them without even asking their names" (Sebbar, 1993, p.60). He seldom sees the same faces twice and he does not inquire into the names of his interlocutors. Nonetheless, it is also in cafés that he discovers the solace of an imaginative and creative space. As a poet, he frequently writes in cafés, where he also shares his creative work with his fellow immigrant workers by reading to them: "Sometimes he reads poems aloud in both

languages. His friends listen, often for hours" (*ibid*, p.32). He has thus discovered an alternative or third space, one that is both public and private, friendly and anonymous. That space is a fluid environment that one may either enter with a clear aim or leave events to chance and spontaneous meetings.

2.2. Death: Here and There

In exile, Sebbar's protagonist is tormented by his own death and the absence of a person who could perform the ritual prayers: "who will come to whisper the prayer of the dead? And who will come to whisper in my ear in the language of my homeland, in the silence of the other shore?" (*ibid*., p. 27). This connection between death and exile is not coincidental. According to Edward Said, "like death but without death's ultimate mercy, [exile] has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (Said, 2001, p. 174). Said's statement underscores the profound suffering that accompanies exile. It is a state of being that can be likened to a living death—a protracted, painful separation from everything that provides a sense of identity, belonging, and meaning. The absence of the "ultimate mercy" of death means that exiles must endure this suffering indefinitely, making exile one of the most emotionally and psychologically challenging experiences that individuals and communities can face.

The concept of death is investigated in considerable depth throughout Sebbar's novel. Strings of sad events inevitably leave indelible marks on the individual's recollections when he or she endures excruciating pain while confined to a medical facility away from his or her usual environment. The protagonist recalls a situation in which a child died after being crushed by the hoof of a horse (Sebbar, 1993, p. 9). In addition, he recalls the tragic death of a fisherman's wife and her baby during childbirth, as well as the excruciating pain that his grandmother endured on the first day of summer. Both of these events are said to have occurred on the same day (*ibid*, p.19).

In the eyes of the protagonist, the incidence of death is far higher in France. For instance, the protagonist's sibling, who had also relocated to a different country, has tragically passed away as a result of an accident at work. Another tragic incident in the narrative sees a young man meet his untimely demise by gunshot while walking on a pavement in a suburban residential area (ibid, p.48). The protagonist also receives information about a juvenile fugitive from his country of origin who has drowned herself in a river, after experiencing substance abuse, sickness, and imprisonment. (*ibid*, pp. 70-71).

These incidents are highly violent. Nevertheless, in all these instances someone attends to the remains of the deceased, thus enabling the execution of traditional ceremonial practices. In the instance of the drowned juvenile female, the proprietor of the cabaret assumes responsibility for arranging for the transportation of the coffin to the bereaved family. The protagonist's younger sibling also "c[omes] back to the village in a sealed casket" (*ibid*., p.29). Significantly, while the prayers for the departed have been said in a foreign land, the ritual of interment must be completed in the homeland.

Zohra Bouchentouf Siagh astutely examines the choice of a burial site in various Maghrebi books, including *Le silence des rives*: "la mort, ce point de passage [...] est

introduite dans la fiction [...] comme nœud de cristallisation symbolique, qui permet à toute la communauté [...] de se retrouver, se reconnaitre, se ressouder, dans les gestes et le rituel qui accompagnent cet évènement" (Siagh, 1998, p. 149)[1]. For Siagh, death is a symbolic point in the narrative: it enables all of the members of the community to come together, to identify with one another, and to strengthen their bonds through the gestures and rituals that are associated with this event. In Maghrebian fiction, death, interpreted as a form of transition, often marks a symbolic moment of crystallization. In other words, death is employed not solely as a narrative device that supplies a sorrowful occurrence, but also as a multidimensional experience that possesses symbolic significance and cultivates community cohesion.

Most of the characters in Sebbar's novel are unable to fathom the prospect of being interred at a location that is far from their families. Even though the men give the impression that they are not engaged in the ceremonies, they are fully aware of the fact that there will always be a small space left for them: "at home, in the seaside village, his place is reserved, his mother has told him this many times" (Sebbar, 1993, p. 33). It is important to understand that being buried alongside one's own also means that one is buried "in their language" (*ibid*., p. 150). This shows how funerary practices and culture are interlinked. Burying an individual according to their customs honors their uniqueness because language, a key part of identity, reflects that individual's culture and history. Being buried in one's language preserves one's linguistic identity after death. In other words, whether one has been buried in one's community depends on more than the physical location of the remains: inscriptions, prayers, and epitaphs in the deceased's native tongue can preserve their language forever. Burial, when interpreted thus, comes to symbolize perpetuity and the permanent impact of language on self-identity.

As Sebbar's narrative progresses, there is a notable shift in the protagonist's initial apathy towards the return or safeguarding of his body in a familiar domestic environment. The protagonist's seemingly indifferent attitude towards the destiny of his physical remains assumes a more profound significance as he selects a venue for his after-death preparations by intentionally avoiding a burial site that would restrict him. He suggests that those who bury him should "grab his feet, drag him down to the jetty, and toss him into the sea" (*ibid*., p. 32). The protagonist's decision to select a resting place in the ocean is indicative of a disposition that corresponds to the themes of fluidity and detachment that pervade the novel. His physical remains will not be confined to a specific location in the ground, instead, they will be integrated into the perpetual and dynamic movements of the ocean, symbolizing the cyclical nature of existence.

While the ocean may serve as a site of various encounters, it cannot facilitate one's return to one's place of origin. In this particular setting, the comparison between the protagonist and the swallows that migrate from Africa to Europe over the vast ocean emphasizes the difference between the two. Whereas the swallows maintain a clear and

[1] *Death, this transitional point [...] is incorporated into fiction [...] as a symbolic crystallization point, enabling the entire community [...] to reunite, identify one another, and strengthen bonds through the gestures and rituals accompanying this event* (my translation).

consistent sense of direction and purpose, the protagonist does not know what his ideal place of residence may be. According to Sebbar, "these migrants never lose their way; they know where they are going, but he knows nothing about where he should live. He just follows chance and destiny" (*ibid*, pp. 37–38). The juxtaposition between the swallows and the protagonist reflects the main character's inner conflict and his quest for a sense of identity and meaning in his personal journey.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to investigate the dialectic of "here" and "there" in Leïla Sebbar's novel *Le silence des rives.* The narrative's juxtaposition of different spatial contexts highlights the complex tensions and conflicts experienced by individuals who navigate two different worlds, namely, their place of origin, Algeria, and their adopted host nation, France. These issues are strongly connected to the universal experience of (im)migration, which forces individuals to negotiate between their sense of selfhood and the established customs and traditions of their adopted countries.

Read in light of Bachelard's topoanalysis, the novel magnifies its concern for the emotional significance of home. By reimagining his ancestral home, the protagonist cultivates memory and seeks solace and refuge from the stresses of daily life. Conversely, his wife's French home deepens his sense of isolation, echoing Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely". The narrative also reappraises the idea of dying abroad. Unprepared and alone, the protagonist struggles to reconcile the death rituals of his culture with the traditions of the host country. Exile is shown to intensify this anguish, which is devoid of familial and cultural anchors, and thus complicate the search for comfort and understanding in an unfamiliar territory.

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