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I, ____________________________,
hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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The Library of the Other: The importance of the library/archive in francophone literature.

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The Library of the Other: The importance of the library/archive in francophone literature.

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Abstract:

The work of Francophone authors provides fertile ground for the analysis of the importance of libraries and archives in the production of post-colonial literature. In particular, the work of Jacques Derrida, Leila Sebbar and Assia Djebar lend themselves to this kind of assessment. Beginning with Derrida’s published presentation, Archive Fever, the library/archive is defined. Francophone writers and researchers working within the libraries/archives of metropolitan France must constantly decipher information based upon historical bias. The effects of this research are reflected in the writings of francophone authors. Sebbar shows the library/archive as an exonerated institution where two cultures meet. Djebar writing is the product of thorough research of a trained historian. She engages the historical record by interweaving the past with the present, mixing archival research with North African oral tradition and personal narrative to creates a new voice. The work of Francophone authors demonstrates the importance of the library/archive and points to the importance of this kind of analysis in French literature.
The writings of francophone, North African authors create an ideal point of departure for an examination of how libraries and archives play important roles in the formation of literary style, theme and creation. Leila Sebbar and Assia Djebar are two francophone authors whose work perhaps most represents a reaction to the silencing of voices inside the historical subjugation of post-colonial, non-western cultures. Often women in colonial cultures are said to have undergone a double colonization. Without education and access to written language their plight has been to be excluded from history and place.¹ Both authors symbolize an effort to correct the plight of women in postcolonial culture through literature.

The writing of many francophone authors is the product of an extensive historical and cultural research. Searching through the archives and libraries of metropolitan France, francophone authors have symbolically followed Ariadne’s thread by searching their way out of a labyrinth of information exclusion and cultural preference². Olson explains the difficulty these writers face:

¹Memmi in his Portrait du colonisé (1957) suggest that women in colonized society have experienced a progressive loss of memory. ²Todorov conducts an extensive research of historical, ethnocentric preferences and bias in his work, Nous et Les Autres: La reflexion française sur la diversité humaine.
Effective searching for marginalized topics will require greater ingenuity and serendipity than searching for mainstream topics. Certainly libraries, like other institutions, reflect the marginalizations and exclusions of the society they serve (Olson, 639).

The archival research of francophone authors is worthy of examination because through this kind of scholarly effort, they are challenging the French pantheon by communing with the preserved voices of the past. In the present time, these new voices create a cross-cultural testimony that is historically nonexistent. Their research is an example of the untangling, unearthing, and exhuming of information from the historical archive that is potentially skewed or biased by historical and cultural preferences.

By examining the importance of the 'library/archive' and applying these ideas to the work of Jacques Derrida, Leila Sebbar, and Assia Djebar, it will be shown how the work of defining the "postcolonial" archive can be applied to francophone literature. In Spivak’s "Can the Subaltern Speak?" we see the idea of archive/library presented as the

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task of “measuring silences”⁴. Foucault furthers the definition by inserting the idea of the archive as an entity that is defined by its contents. In the Foucaultian⁵ perception of stored knowledge, the archive can also be understood as dictating “the law of what can be said” (Foucault, 129) and governs the information that can be contained within it. Both Spivak and Foucault’s acknowledgement that the effects of imperialism and colonial domination are well reflected in the concept of archival collections is furthered by the work of Jacques Derrida and his definition of the archive and its importance to literature.

For francophone writers dealing with the “postcolonial” archive, their work demonstrates the human reality of bicultural existence and interpretation. The works of these artists serve as testimony to the particularities of life as the “other” in the context of the francophone world. McCullough brings out the recurrent theme of the palimpsest⁶ to frame the intellectual struggle

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⁴ Both Djébar and Sebbar use the theme of silence in their works to represent both finding a long subdued voice and the use of silence as a form of resistance.
⁵ Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* shows his own interpretation of how discourse is dictated by the archive and its immediate place.
⁶ The OED refers to *palimpsest* as: (1)a canvas on which many layers of images have been represented; (2) a parchment on which a succession of historical chronicles have been superimposed, each one on top of the previous one; and (3) a strata of rock which can be interpreted to reveal information about successive geological eras.
of writers working between the recorded knowledge of multiple, cultural influences:

So how can the people issus de l’immigration Maghrébine rewrite their memory? Should it be as a palimpsest, a ‘superimpression’, writing over the current historical annals and textbooks? Or can it be woven around contemporary discourses, around the ‘grave-keepers of memory’ (McCullough, 120)?

Using a combination of techniques to introduce new voices into the intellectual debate, the work of francophone authors has value in defining the relationship between postcolonial literature and the historical archive. Analyzing the use of books, libraries and information inside the texts of these authors reveals the significance of such institutions in the process of research and literary creation. Inside francophone literature, the library/archive often becomes a physical setting or symbol that defines places where cultural understandings can be deepened through research and scrutiny of the record of knowledge and experience. The term archive can take on many meanings, but for the purpose of discussing its use in literature, it is best to generally deal with it as a real, physical entity where information is stored. Taoua
describes this concept in her article concerning the importance of postcolonial archive:

Why the anti-colonial archive? I use the idea of the archive in the conventional sense of documents, information contained therein and places where such documents are kept (i.e., Archives d'Outremer, Archives Nationales). I also employ archive to mean the set of discursive practices that allow certain statements to be made while foreclosing other possibilities, as Michel Foucault defines the term in *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969) (Taoua 2003, 148).

To expand from the literal sense of the term archive, the work of Jacques Derrida will be employed to serve as an introduction to the historic and psychological impact of the archive in literary creation.

The archive becomes a focus of francophone literature because it validates the historical exclusion of the record of the “Other”. However, in its imperfect quest to eradicate the voices of the Other, it also serves as an intellectual laboratory where historical fact is able to be revisited, rethought and reinterpreted. Inadvertent remnants of the lives and actions of subjugated cultures exist and persevere inside the written record of the library/archive. These scraps and remnants have begun the
seeds of literary creation for francophone writers. As Osborne writes, it is impossible to reconstruct valid historical testimony without archival research:

As a principle of credibility the archive does need to exist as a real place, but, more than this, it functions as a sort of bottom line resource in the carving-out of claims of disciplinarity. ...To take the most obvious example, the discipline of history, for instance, in whatever form, places a premium on archival credibility. One can write about the past in many ways, but unless one is able to generate archival credibility, one is not really doing history (Osborne 1999, 53-54).

For Derrida, the archive is both a non-entity and a necessity. The ability to store information and preserve the human record is addressed by Derrida in his London presentation, Archive Fever. Derrida begins his discussion of the archive by turning to the Greek etymological origins of the word. Derrida suggests that the rootarkhe in Greek is a place where things begin and where power originates.

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7This essay was first presented by Derrida in London, June 5, 1994, as part of a conference on memory.
8The OED defines this word as: A ‘first thing from which something is, or comes to be, or is known’ (Aristotle, Metaphysics v. 1013a 18-19). Applied to materials which do not arise out of anything more primitive, to causes of change, to propositions fundamental in deductive systems, by teleologists to benefits and beneficiaries, and, colloquially, since they are sources of initiatives in states, to governments.
The word contains both the ideas of “commencement” and “commandment”. Derrida makes it clear that the archive represents a place where certain things are placed to be remembered and certain things are chosen to be left out and to be forgotten.

...we encounter in Derrida texts a strong concern with the archive, with memory and dispersion in relation to the reception, assimilation or rejection, digestion or exclusion, absorption or expulsion, incorporation or foreclosure, of issues of hypomnesis and forgetting (Krapp, 2).

Inside Derrida’s recognition that the archive serves a dual purpose of preserving and disposing exists an affirmation of the universal need to store certain information for future use. The power of the archive to include and exclude information is a troubling polemic for the authors who move between cultures. Their attempts to revisit the historical record are at best inhibited by what has been historically excluded from the record. The intellectual exercise of understanding the predominantly ethnocentric interpretation of shared past events (eg. Colonial conquest, war, revolution) serves as a great source of inspiration (perhaps an inevitable temptation) to join their voices to the intellectual conversation. In this
way, the silence defined by Spivak is filled in by the work of francophone authors who add a new voice and perspective that has been historically excluded or ‘silenced’. The validity of their interpretation of past events lies in the fact that they are integrated into the reality of a bicultural testimony that comprises both French and North African cultural traditions. This new addition to the French intellectual debate is facilitated by the library/archive and by the revisiting of the French cultural record in view of the tradition of historical exclusion. Tied to the problem of exclusion is the use of the power of the archive as a political or cultural tool to achieve European cultural hegemony. The historical manipulation of the archival process by Western powers further obscures the research of francophone intellectuals and paves the way of the eventual development of a ‘postcolonial archive’.

Throughout Derrida’s London presentation, the fact that the development of the archive is closely tied to the development of European nation-states is stressed. This link to the abuses of imperialism and orientalism can be applied to the notion of deconstruction and its link to decolonization. Other scholars
These ideas mesh well with Derrida’s description of the ‘archon’ (men and gods) who create and control the archive. Derrida asserts that the archon have a divine right to exercise social order through the creation and interpretation of texts. He completes this description of the exclusionary facets of the archive by noting that law can be found “there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given” (Derrida, Archive Fever 9).

Derrida extends his theory of exclusion and the archive to show that its influence is pervasive in Western history. The archival impulse, according to Derrida, is to be found in both the collective and the individual mind and exists as a reaction or reflex to the threat of undesirable or excess information. Therefore, Derrida suggests that the contradictory nature of archiving, that of inclusion and exclusion, is found in both historical and fictional works. This linking of the common thread of narrative by Derrida is important when considering the new kinds of narrative styles created by Sebbar, Djebar, and other francophone authors. Steedman notes that Derrida’s essay on the library/archive paints an even darker picture of the archival process by introducing his main premise, the mal d’archive:
The mal (the fever, the sickness) of the archive is to do with its very establishment, which is the establishment of state power and authority. And then there is the feverish desire—a kind of sickness unto death— that Derrida indicated/or the archive: the fever not so much to enter it and use it as to have it (Steedman, 1159).

Derrida’s essay completely constructs the thesis that information collections often reflect long standing collection and organizational bias that degrade their validity. The importance of applying Derrida’s deconstructionist principles to the library/archive is that it allows scholars to acknowledge the mal d’archive and to recognize the importance of cross cultural analysis and research in making the archive accessible (democratizing the library/archive) by expanding even its intended parameters.

Derrida’s discussion of the archival process is far from being an unmitigated condemnation. He admits in other writings that the establishment of the archive as a process of collection, organization, preservation and dissemination of information has obvious validity as a tool to preserve the human record:
Off the record, cela veut dire hors enregistrement, hors archive. Y-a-t-il du ‘hors-archive’? Impossible, mais l’impossible c’est l’affaire de la déconstruction (Derrida, Résistance, 66).

From this, it is clear that Derrida does not intend to propose a tabula rasa for the world’s archives. The need for archiving written records is a consistent, historical reality for many cultures and Derrida does not intend to refute or deny the basic need of information preservation. In fact, he asserts in his writing that the archive has a permanent and consistent use and justifies itself by ‘vanquishing to dust’ any information that is not contained within it.

The work of francophone writers deals directly with the issue of the inclusion/exclusion in the archive and how the process has at times served as a tool of cultural colonization and domination. It is perhaps inside the literature of postcolonial writers that the synthesis of research and derridian deconstruction is best demonstrated and put into place. The work of Leila Sebbar is an excellent introduction and validation of francophone literature’s ability to define the information needs of the excluded “Other”. In the published collection of correspondence between the Sebbar and Canadian author Nancy
Houston, the two women explore the notions of exile and otherness:

Et puis, pour moi la fiction c’est la suture qui masque la blessure, l’écart entre les deux rives. Je suis là, à la croissée, enfin sereine, à ma place, en somme, puisque je suis une croissée qui cherche une filiation et qui écrit dans un lignée, toujours la même, reliée à l’Histoire, à la mémoire, à l’identité, à la tradition et à la transmission, je veux dire à la recherche d’une ascendance et d’une descendance, d’une place dans l’histoire d’une communauté, d’un peuple, du regard de l’Histoire et de l’univers. C’est dans la fiction que je me sens sujet libre (de père, de mère, de clan, de dogmes…) et forte de la charge de l’exil (Sebbar, Lettres parisiennes 138).

Her work also brings to life the struggle of francophone writers to move between the information resources of their shared cultures. Brigitte Lane credits the author’s fiction with creating an awareness that was nonexistent in French society:

Nevertheless, Leila Sebbar’s greatest literary contributions to making Maghrebi women known to the French public is undoubtedly her Shérazade trilogy…. a series written over a period of nearly 10 years and
centered on the travels and search for identity of a modern character of fleeing beurette (Lane, 384). Sebbar is a pioneer in creating fiction that deals directly with the problems and intricacies of the bicultural, “Beur” existence in French culture.

Sebbar approaches the library/archive as a place of great importance where two cultures meet face to face. McCullough sees her characters as bringing this idea to life inside the modern world of urbanized French culture:

The Beur generation was the subject of the Shérazade trilogy. In an interview with Evelyne Ballenfat, Sebbar stated ‘C’est d’abord l’absence d’une mémoire, C’est l’histoire qui donne la conscience, l’intelligence (McCollough, 120).

The library/archive therefore is a place of research for the Beur generation of Paris, a place to find identity, history and dignity in a world where these basic rights are lacking.

In Sebbar’s novel, Shérazade⁹, a theme of romantic love and violence between East and West helps to humanize the historic relationship between Algeria and France. This theme is incorporated by other francophone writers and very

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⁹Sebbar uses the disappearance of the syllable ‘hé’ from Shéhérazade to show the passage from antiquity to modernity in the creation of her character.
often describes the attraction that drew the two countries together and their resulting relationship. The violent seizing of Algeria by the colonial power erodes into a lover’s desperate attempt to control and hold something that is not attainable. Assia Djebar uses this theme of love throughout *L’Amour, La Fantasia* where the French army is shown arriving at day break and an officer records his first glimpse of the white beauty on the advancing shore. A kind of siren leads the French marines toward the irresistible conquest of Algiers. Djebar shows a pristine, white beauty on the shore in her virginal robes who is destined to be raped and enslaved by French colonial forces:

Le regard orientalisant—with its interpreters militaristes d’abord et ses photographes et cinéastes ensuite—tourne autour de cette société fermée, en soulignant davantage encore son “mystère féminin” pour occulter ainsi l'hostilité de toute une communauté algérienne en danger

(Djebar, *Femmes d’Alger* 183).

In opposition to Djebar, Sebbar shows the theme of love and hate is presented in a less violent form, muted and modernized against the backdrop of metropolitan Paris. The attraction between Julien and Shérazade recalls the natural
passion and interest shared by two cultures whose past and present are intertwined.

From the beginning of her novel, Sebbar sculpts her purpose of using the library/archive as a background for the relationship between Shérazade and Julien, Algeria and France, East and West.

Il la voyait souvent à la bibliothèque mais il n’avait à aucun moment réussi à savoir ce qu’elle lisait, ni à lui adresser la parole (Sebbar, Shérazade 10).

The author presents the library as a place where two people like Shérazade and Julien are bound to meet one another. Their shared interest in the culture of the Maghreb is enriched by the collections of Parisian libraries. This ability to connect with the past and to deepen their knowledge of the Maghreb gives the library an exonerated position in the setting of the novel.

Sebbar gives the library a privileged place in the cityscape of Paris to demonstrate how these institutions have the ability to transport the mind and the spirit to another place while still well within the modern realities of the metropole. In the novel, libraries also serve to protect and cloister from the realities of the outside world. Shérazade often seeks the confines of the library, knowing that it is the last place in the city where her
family would think to look for her; “Ils avaient pensé à tout, à la drogue, à la prostitution, mais jamais à la bibliothèque.” (Sebbar, Shérazade 70)

Although born in Algeria, Shérazade was transplanted at an early age into French culture and most of her knowledge and memories of her native country are based upon the memory of her grandfather. The old man taught Shérazade and her sister to read and write in the Algerian dialect of their region. Shérazade clings to this oral transmission of culture that was given freely and taken away abruptly. Her retention (or archiving) and transmission of these oral lessons serve to show an important source of information for postcolonial cultures that do not maintain extensive archive collections. Sebbar uses this example to demonstrate how she incorporates her own autobiographical memories to give a voice to a people’s memory and history in recorded oral tradition. The men and women of Sebbar’s youth populate her novels. Their stories are recalled with detailed description and serve to fill in gaps in archived history.

Although the character of Shérazade loses access to the transmission of native Arab culture when her family moves to France, the stories of the mythical past and the
present day war stay with her and she shares these with Julien:

Shérazade racontait à Julien des histoires populaires algériennes qu’il ne connaissait pas. Il riait avec elle des aventures grotesques de Djeha. (Shérazade, Sebbar 147)

The example of oral tradition in preserving cultural patrimonies defines many of the reasons that francophone intellectuals have developed a literature that intertwines the Western historical record with the oral tradition of postcolonial cultures. If their native culture does not historically archive information, some records simply do not exist. Cross-cultural researchers glean information from the archival record of the dominant culture and mix it with their own experience and memory. Their reconstruction of the archival record can only be done after tireless sifting through of bias and cultural preference in order to establish their own historical perspective. The work of postcolonial scholars can be seen as a double research that is reflected in the literary style of postcolonial texts.

Looking at her culture through the filter of French recorded knowledge, Sebbar chooses the odalisque as an iconic image that reflects her journey toward truth and cultural identity. In contrast, Julien’s character in the
novel can be shown to represent the modern incarnation of postcolonial France. No longer in a position of dominance, the obsessive *engouement* for the Orient still spurns his work. Much like the character of Shérazade, his insatiable interest in the culture of the Maghreb is linked to childhood memories and his early life spent in Algeria. Inside his apartment in Paris, he is surrounded by a collection of Orientalist inspired paintings. Like the country he represents, he was forced to leave Algeria. But, even after his expulsion, his connection to the culture and life he discovered outside of France cannot be forgotten. In the novel, Julien’s character is often busy with research:

Il avait des livres rares à consulter à la Bibliothèque nationale. Il poursuivait ses recherches jusqu’à l’heure de la fermeture. On lui dit qu’il trouverait certains ouvrages à la Bibliothèque des Langues orientales qu’il connaissait bien, depuis qu’il avait décidé d’apprendre l’arabe, après deux années passées à Aix-en-Provence où il avait entrepris des études supérieures. (Sebbar, Shérazade 112)

He visits the library on an almost daily basis to carry out his research on Algerian culture, and language. His character, in the context of Derrida’s notion of inclusion
and exclusion, is empowered by Western domination but also inhibited by it. A symbol of the West, Julien is perhaps more able to accept the preserved record than Shérazade.

To entertain themselves, Julien and Shérazade begin speaking to each other in Arab. Julien teaches Shérazade the literary aspects of classical Arabian language and she reciprocates by teaching him the quotidian dialect of Algeria. Through their discussions, the importance of the language of the Maghreb is shown to strengthen their relationship. By crossing back and forth between cultures, they discover their shared culture, a place that attracts both of their imaginations. Julien exposes Shérazade to the orientalist collection of the Louvre, adding to the theme of research by addressing the visual library of images that reflect the Maghreb.

Shérazade passa la journée à la bibliothèque du centre national d’Art et de Culture que tout le monde appelait Beaubourg... Elle n’avait pas comme lui (Julien) l’habitude des musées, de la peinture.

(Shérazade, Sebbar 237)

This exposure to Western representations\(^\text{10}\) of the Maghreb is important because it is in realizing the idealized images

\(^{10}\)Western travelers to the Maghreb created an image of the imperial harem in their writings and art. Djébar’s novel, *Women of Algiers in*
of the odalisque that Shérazade feels a rupture between herself and Julien. She realizes his acceptance of historically rendered stereotypes separates them and brings her more in contact with her “otherness”. As Shérazade begins to realize her connection to the odalisque and the Western ideal of oriental, female sexuality, she feels her exclusion and isolation more deeply. This point is highlighted by Julien’s interest in the image of the odalisque and his collection of orientalist inspired art. Reflecting the historic, masculine obsession with the odalisque (or female slave) much of the art that Julien collects contains stereotypical imagery that at times seems to trap him inside his cultural archive.

-Mais qu’est-ce que tu as avec ces femmes-là?
-Je les aime.
-Tu les aimes en peinture?
-Oui c’est ça. (Sebbar, Shérazade 98)
Through the character of Julien, Delacroix’s invasion of the female space and his artistic exploitation of a private image seem to still haunt the present time. Where Delacroix entered in, Julien is unable to escape, unless Shérazade guides him through the passageways of time.

their Apartment (1980) discusses the paintings of Delacroix and his penetration into the cloistered female world of the harem.
As much interest as Shérazade takes in learning about orientalism, it is perhaps the obsession of the odalisque that makes her realize that she cannot conform to stereotypes she refuses to accept. In leaving Paris she explains to Julien her unwillingness to embody the stereotype of sexuality: “Sur un bout d’envelope que Julien ne découvrit que le lendemain matin, elle avait écrit ‘Je ne suis pas une odalisque’” (Sebbar, Shérazade 206).

A feeling of alienation drives the character of Shérazade to pursue her quest to return physically to the culture of her birth. Although she has been inspired by the information she was able to glean while in France, her need for information has not been met. Her desire to discover better sources of information can be related to her desire to return to Algeria and to see directly without the filter of French culture impairing her understanding.

Through the character of Shérazade in her novel, Sebbar demonstrates ways that librarians can respond to the information needs of “other”. As the police search for Shérazade they pay a visit to the local library she frequented before her decision to run away to Paris. The librarian has not forgotten the young woman and tells the
police that Shérazade and others like her made an impression on her and her collection strategies.

C’est grâce à Shérazade et à d’autres lycéennes comme elle, que j’ai ces étagères sur l’Afrique du Nord...elles ne sont pas réservées, de plus en plus de lecteurs d’Aulnay, des Français, prennent des livres qu’ils n’auraient pas eu l’idée de demander avant (Shérazade, Sebbar 132).

The librarian of Sebbar’s novel combats the idea of majority rule by responding to the specialized information needs of a non-traditional patron. In this way she diversifies the collection of her small municipal library and improves it for other information users that may need such resources in the future.

Like Leïla Sebbar, Assia Djebar’s writings reflect a life lived between two cultures. Many of her autobiographical allusions paint the portrait of life for women who have been historically excluded from the archival record. Djebar’s style incorporates the use of oral tradition to tell the untold story of granddaughters, mothers, and grandmothers from generation to generation. The oral transmission of these stories left few written traces and exists outside of the written archival records left by predominantly male-influenced societies. In the
following sentence Djebar speaks through one her literary characters to describe the first memories of a life lived between two cultures:

Awakening in her father's library, a room containing his Muslim prayer rug and French texts, Isma identifies with a parent who, like herself, negotiates between East and West, and pays tribute to her father, the teacher who launched his daughter on the bicultural journey that resulted in her appropriation of language and space (Mortimer, 112).

The need of francophone intellectuals to incorporate their own existence into the written record often puts them in conflict with traditional French knowledge resources. The books, educational system, and libraries of the Francophone world often do not legitimately define francophone existence outside of the mentality of the French Metropole. One of the more successful reactions to this exclusion is the use of mixing fiction with autobiography to account for the lack of intellectual acknowledgement. Murdoch discusses this problem in the framework of modern consciousness that stresses the use of written records and historical documents to validate information:

The effect of colonial domination on the literary production of the colonized is thus of a plural
nature. Further, the problems implicit in the (re)construction of identity through writing raise questions of discourse and signification germane to the production of autobiography, where identity itself may be read as a construct subject to external patterns of connotation (Murdoch, 71).

Djebar is particularly adept at this strategy of blending historical facts, autobiography and fiction in her writing. The author begins her journey into a bilingual and bicultural landscape as a small child in her novel *L’amour, la fantasia*\(^\text{11}\). This symbolic entry into the world of the colonizer (and the dominant language) is depicted in one of the first scenes of the novel. The author describes herself as a small girl walking hand in hand with her father to school; “Fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l’école, un matin d’automne, main dans la main du père.”

As a francophone female voice, Djebar’s work has a two fold significance in redefining stereotypes in both her native and adopted cultures. The author’s feeling of alienation is not only the initial feeling of exclusion from French culture. For Djebar, there also exists the

notion of a loss of connection to the traditional female roles\textsuperscript{12} of her native culture after entering more completely into the role of a westernized woman in modern France. Mortimer discusses how Djebar’s writing differs from the other prominent names in francophone literature:

Yet Djebar’s experience, in contrast to theirs, is distinctly gendered. She came to believe that the process of Western acculturation, resulting in her mastery of the colonizer’s language and access to public space, excluded her from most, if not all, aspects of traditional woman’s world (Mortimer, Assia Djebar’s, ).

In her article, Mortimer goes on to acknowledge Djebar’s interweaving of autobiography, fiction, historical fact, and oral tradition to create a kind of “auto fiction” that helps the writer to define and redefine herself inside the confines of Western culture.

The research that exists behind much of the historical detail of \textit{L’Amour, La Fantasia} is important because it demonstrates the various strategies used by Djebar to unravel colonial texts and to undermine their authority. Her use of the texts reveals the French ethnocentric

\textsuperscript{12} Djébar’s work is part of a body of feminine literature, l’écriture feminine, that engages the issues of female voice and traditional subjectivity.
perspectives that reduced colonial perceptions of Algerians to something less than human. Combining the history of French military conquest, the struggle for independence and her own experiences, Djebar is able to work towards a historical reconstruction of the archive. Anne Donadey discusses this interweaving of sources and styles in her essay:

Throughout the novel, Djebar establishes a palimpsestic relation between the French colonial archives and her own writing, between the oral testimonies of women and her autobiographical notes, between the colonizers' writings and the female Algerian oral tradition. She reconstitutes the past, using documents that have already rewritten history (Donadey, 885).

Donadey’s essay shows how as a trained historian Djebar incorporates excerpts from military communiqués, travel accounts and personnel correspondence to give the novel’s plot a realism that separates the work from other fiction. Djebar’s research leads her to sifting through the official recorded “History” to pull out the untold “history” of women and the colonization and liberation of Algeria. Steadman also acknowledges the author’s use of primary
resources in her essay concerning Djebar’s incorporation of 19th century travel journals:

Djebar combs through historical travel texts to find evidence of what is assumed to be missing— the stories of Algerian women… Djebar reads the texts she can find, those of French officers and civilians recording their observations as they travel through Algeria, for brief mentions of Algerian women that undermine their erasure from the historical record (Steadman, 182).

Djebar’s research has unearthed from the French written record historical mentions of the silenced voices of Arab women and children in the struggle against subjugation by French colonial culture. In doing so she uncovers histories that have been covered over by the dominant cultural archive. Moving further into the historical records of the French occupation of Algeria, Djebar admits that it is not an easy task to find these brief mentions of the voices of the “other”:

…Trente-sept descriptions seront publiée, dont trois seulement du côté des assiéges… il reste tout de même trente-deux écrits, en langue française, de ce premier acte de l’occupation … cette conquête ne se vit plus découverte de l’autre… le mot deviendra l’arme par
The style adopted by Djebar in her novel works well in light of other postcolonial theories, where deconstruction and the deluzian notion of relation attempt to repair the intellectual intolerance of dominant cultures over subjected cultures. Djebar applies the tools of Derrida, Cixous, Spivak and others to reject the universal “I”, replacing it with a fractured and more diverse collective voice. The replacement of a traditional male, phallocentric voice allows for a new voice to be heard among the clamor of more traditional testimony. Murdoch demonstrates how this Djebar’s literary creations work toward a restructuring of postcolonial cultural identity:

By examining her attempt to recodify colonial history and its subject corollaries in her novel of the French invasion entitled *L’amour, la fantaisia*, I show how the multiplicity of issues inherent in the inscription of biculturalism informs the critical role played by displacement in the elaboration of postcolonial identity (Murdoch, 72).

Djebar’s revisiting of the archival record, through her research in French libraries and archives, recreates and reanalyzes the accepted History of Franco-Algerian
relations in many ways. In recreating the massacre and suffocation of an entire tribe and Pélissier’s unflinching account of the violent atrocity committed against Algerian civilians during the war of occupation, Djebar makes strides toward reworking the accepted ideal of French military behavior. Pélissier’s emotionally charged descriptions show the suffering and a populace and the place of human weakness in carrying out imperial domination. The author even goes as far as to thank the French officer for his, “eloquent and realistic—much too realistic—description of the Arabs suffering” (Djebar, 75). Djebar’s recreation of such scenes calls into question French superiority over a weaker culture. Clerc describes Djebar’s ability to bring history back alive in order to show two sides of one story:

Ceci relève du travail de l’historien dont la voix se fait l’écho de celle des victimes. Mais plus profondément encore, «ressusciter les barbares dans la langue française », c’est faire parler les silences de la langue pour lui faire cette « ombre si longtemps engloutie dans les mots ». Celle-ci peut relever de l’Histoire, mais aussi de la présence de cet Autre quotidien que chacun porte en soi et que le « déjà
Clerc’s makes it clear that Djebar is interested in sewing back together “histories” with recorded and archived “History”. In this way, the library/archive becomes a laboratory of deconstruction for the francophone writer, providing author’s with the ability to reedit recorded “History”. Green’s essay on the L’amour, la fantasia highlights this idea by showing how the narrator’s conversations with older women becomes a complex method of historical revision, wherein the author is allowed to both create a narrative while participating in the oral tradition of story-telling:

The narrator’s participation in the tradition of women’s story-telling also, quite unexpectedly, permits her to correct the historical record left by the French and to find her own place in the story (Green, 963-64).

Incorporating story-telling and oral tradition also enables Djebar to achieve a double translation, not only translating from the oral to the written but from the Arabic and Berber dialects into French. This move toward the language of the colonizer is criticized by some but is shown to be a translation back and forth between the Arab
language of her mother and the French language of her father and of her education.

Later in the novel the narrator herself becomes a story-teller, retelling a true account from one of the French historical documents located by the author’s initial research. Telling the story to an older member of her family, the narrator illustrates how both archival documents and oral tradition are ultimately both reduced to a narrative or “retelling” between two people. Clerc goes on to show how the blending of first person insertions in Djebar’s novels unmask a valid testimony while also establishing what Derrida and others have referred to as réappropriation.

Mais la fiction n’est masque du Je Parlant qu’en apparence : à travers elle se dévoile la parole véritable de celle qui, en historienne, explore les racines d’une identité occultée par les strates des diverses conquêtes et reconstitue les avatars d’une réalité souvent douloureuse, à travers les témoignages et les documents d’archives. La fiction s’insère dans cet espace de réappropriation, à la fois personnelle et collective, d’un passé perdu (Clerc, 73).

This described inability to completely translate oneself into either one of two shared culture leads francophone
writers to the search (or research) for something that does not exist in their adopted culture. The idea of being lost outside of and inside of a host culture is a repeating theme in postcolonial francophone literature.

Both Sebbar and Djebar’s work serve to show that postcolonial literary creation is closely interwoven with the existence of the library/archive. Sebbar’s novel demonstrates this idea by showing a young woman on a quest that cannot be satisfied until she returns to Algeria. Although she spends much of her time inside French libraries and museums, the information she finds there is biased, skewed and serves to exclude as much as to inspire. By writing the words “Je ne suis pas une odalisque,” she refuses the Western filter, unable to accept its interpretation of her identity. Djebar’s novel attempts to reconstruct History by retelling the untold side of histories that are often hidden or outside of the traditional library/archive. The author asks herself: “Can I, twenty years later, claim to revive these stifled voices? And speak for them? Shall I not find dried-up streams?”

By analyzing the use of the library/archive inside francophone literature, a link between literature and libraries, archives and recorded knowledge can be
established. Inside this historic relationship, there are many aspects to take into consideration. The existence of the library/archive assures that certain information will be preserved and that certain other will be excluded and indirectly lost to the human record. Therefore, the archive gives the double assurance of preservation and exclusion, and has at times been directly and indirectly applied as a tool for achieving cultural hegemony. This subversion of institutions of cultural preservation is central to the development of a literature of the “Other” in a post-colonial context.

Writers working within the confines of an archive that excludes or distorts portions of their identity have an added impediment in finding valid resources to satisfy their information needs. Working within French libraries, museums and archives, the information and materials consulted by francophone writers is very often biased by long standing cultural preference. This phenomenon is reflected in the literature produced by these writers and results in a persistence of themes relating to cultural identity, appropriation of language, and literary style.
Bibliography

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