

Decolonial Methods in Kateb Yacine's *Mohamed Arfad Valiztek's* Post-Independent Algeria

How does Kateb Yacine use decolonial theory in his play *Mohamed Arfad Valiztek* to expose the lingering effects of colonialism post-independence and how has his work been affected by archival colonial powers?

Abstract: This research explores the decolonial methodologies present in Kateb Yacine's *Mohamed Arfad Valiztek* (1971), focusing on post-independent Algeria. Through an analysis of Yacine's use of language, structure, and visual elements, this essay examines how the play critiques colonial legacies and challenges Western theatre conventions. Using decolonial theorists like Walter D. Mignolo, Frantz Fanon, and Jean-Paul Sartre, it argues that Yacine's piece reframes post-colonial identities and historical narratives. Additionally, it brings to light the challenges of archival access and gatekeeping within theatre and post-colonial research, proving the play's importance within ongoing decolonisation struggles.

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Introduction

This research explores the theatrical choices that Kateb Yacine, Algerian playwright and novelist, makes within his play *Mohamed arfad valiztek (1971)* (Mohamed pack your bags/ Mohamed prends ta valise) which embody decolonial methodologies and reveal insights into Algeria's ongoing struggle for decolonisation in the post-colonial-era. This analysis will reference this play using its original Arabic name, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*. Kateb Yacine was a Novelist and playwright, most famously known for his novel *Nedjima*. He was born in Constantine, Algeria in 1929, splitting his time between Algeria and France throughout his lifetime. Kateb Yacine's work explores the long-term and short-term effects of colonialism post-independence; he was one of the first to use political theatre to tackle decolonial theory within Algeria, and this situates him as an important member of the activist art scene within Algeria's post-colonial history. The play addressed throughout this research, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, was released in 1971, and performed throughout the 1970s; its central focus was the migration and immigration that followed Algeria's Independence. The play serves not just as a political theatre piece but also as a profound critique of the unfinished process of decolonisation. This play was chosen for this research, as the migrant crisis is a direct impact of post-colonial rule, and it addresses decolonial methodologies still present and used today. A migrant crisis is defined by the *European Union Commission* as “the complex and often large-scale migration flows and mobility patterns caused by a crisis which typically involve significant vulnerabilities for individuals and affected communities” (Migration and Home Affairs, 2023).

Throughout this research, the full script of *Mohamed arfad valiztek* was not found or accessible, as it is in the IMEC archive in Caen, France. This led to an exploration of the concept of gatekeeping, a method of withholding or sharing information one decides another should

know, and the methodology of scavenging, which rejects Western research and archival processes. Furthermore, this absence provides the opportunity to interrogate the dynamics of archival power and underscores the ongoing challenges of accessing and reclaiming Algeria's cultural and historical narratives. Addressing these ideas is a further step towards understanding where colonialism persists, and how to decolonize these institutions, narratives, and archival and theatre-based studies.

Theorists such as Walter D. Mignolo, Frantz Fanon, and Jean-Paul Sartre will be used to define, explain and frame colonial and decolonial theory concerning Algeria's colonial and post-colonial times, and the role of art in challenging colonial structures. Walter D. Mignolo, is vital to this research as a prominent theorist on decolonial theory, modernity as a Western concept, and colonialism's long-term impacts. Frantz Fanon is a colonial and decolonial theorist, who specifically examines these theories within the landscape of Algeria and France. Lastly, Jean-Paul Sartre, also a decolonial theorist, more specifically explores the concept of colonialism as a system. Colonialism is defined as the imposition of political, economic and cultural control over a nation, whereas, decoloniality is not defined as the end of colonialism, but a further delinking of colonial structures and reviving of a country's political, economic and cultural autonomy. Decolonial methodologies refer to the active reclamation of identity, culture, and agency in artistic studies. Specifically, a rejection of individualistic nature, a rejection of traditional Western performance conventions, and a reimagining of historical narratives. Throughout this research, Kateb Yacine will be situated in the importance of continued efforts for decolonisation, post-independence. Algeria became a French colony in 1848 and gained its independence after 130 years in 1962.

To trace these decolonial methodologies within Yacine's work, this dissertation will analyse the specific theatrical choices in, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, from its structure and characters to its visual and physical elements. This research will use Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal as political theatre theorists to explore political theatre, its use as an activist tool in reframing historical narratives and their influential impact witnessed in Kateb Yacine's plays.

Lastly, Olivia C. Harrison, a political theatre and history researcher, focusing on North African and French literature, has written many insightful works about Kateb Yacine and his impact on political theatre studies and Algerian literature. She will be used, by providing pieces of the script and insight into the meanings of his language, set design and history.

In order to support this research, I will explore the appropriateness and the gaps in using a case study approach for a qualitative research study. Additionally, I acknowledge the lack of my primary resources and how secondary sources and research are used as support. Subsequently, to support my claims, *Case Study: A Strategic Research Methodology* by Khairul Baharein Mohd Noor, will be used and analysed. Noor explains that a case study “becomes particularly useful where one needs to understand some particular problem or situation in great-depth” (Khairul Baharein Mohd. Noor, 2001). Throughout this research, the case study, which is Kateb Yacine and his play, allows for an in-depth example of political theatre as a decolonial tool and the long-term impacts of colonialism. Allowing a focus on one example supplies the ability to extract each aspect of theatre and Yacine's choices to understand them fully and understand his impact on political theatre and decolonial thought. Noor further explains the criticism that follows a case study methodology, which includes the lack of “scientific rigour and reliability and that they do not address the issues of generalizability” (Khairul Baharein

Mohd. Noor, 2001). Although these criticisms are valid, to contradict them, this research will aim to go into detail, using specific scenes, quotes from the author, and visuals of the play, instead of generalizing his work. Yacine's play will be dissected to fully understand his thoughts and choices.

The primary resource used is Kateb Yacine's play which due to the lack of available resources is not used to its full extent. Therefore in support are many secondary resources in the form of academic papers and journals to support the research's claim. These secondary sources include the first scene of the play, the ending, summaries of the general plot and a linear timeline.

Another methodology used within this research is scavenging, explored by Sophie Marie Niang's *Notes on Scavenging as Method* (2024), she defines it as a method of acquiring and finding information from various media and sources, on communities and subjects that have been accidentally or deliberately excluded from the mainstream. This research method will be further explained and explored in chapter 3.3 when addressing the relationships between archival power and gatekeeping.

Throughout this research, it is of utmost importance to situate myself within this research and further situate this research within today's cultural, and socio-political environment. As a white, upper-class woman I must acknowledge my upbringing within the context of this research. While my background grants me access to certain Western academic traditions, it also brings the responsibility of navigating the potential biases that may arise from an inherently Eurocentric worldview. My grandparents were both born and raised in Algeria until they were 18 and migrated to France due to the end of the war and Algeria's independence. They are originally Spanish and French whose parents were then moved to Algeria when it became a French colony,

in the early-mid 20th century. My grandparents are known as Pieds Noirs, “a term coined to refer to any white settler born in Africa, later evolving into a slang name for French settlers in Algeria” (Algeria.com, 2019). Growing up I heard many violent and beautiful stories. While hearing their words I began conducting my own research to situate their stories in a historical context. The Pied Noirs were colonizers, they took jobs and homes from Algerian communities, while also being let down by France by being received as refugees when coming back to live in France and having to leave their “home country” which was French Algeria. This history has always stayed near me as proof of the vast devastating impacts of colonialism and how it creates long-term effects. This led me to explore the decolonial practices that are still ongoing in countries like Algeria. As a descendant of the *Pied-Noir*, I must acknowledge the tension that exists between my family's colonial legacy and my desire to engage with the lived experiences of Algerians, particularly as I explore the decolonial struggles that continue today. I have never been to Algeria, I am not Algerian, and within this research, I situate myself as an outsider only trying to understand and learn about a history I have been near but never witnessed and to see how one of my greatest passions, theatre, can be a weapon for decolonization. Furthermore, my identity positions me to approach this research with a heightened awareness of the potential for unintended bias, and I aim to be vigilant in my analysis. This process of self-reflection allows me to remain conscious of the limits of my perspective and to approach the decolonial struggles with a commitment to amplifying voices that have long been silenced. My ethical responsibility as a researcher lies in ensuring that my work does not perpetuate harm or reinforce colonialist narratives. To situate myself around academic research, I explore Avery F. Gordon’s book *Ghostly Matters*, where she claims, “*It would be like having voices inside your head* because a postmodern social formation is still haunted by the symptomatic traces of its productions and

exclusions” (Gordon, 2008). Implying that echoes and ghosts of colonialism still linger and haunt future generations, leading to the underlying importance of remembrance, recognition and the never-ending deconstruction and resistance of colonialism. This research hopes to not be a “ghost story” but to be a story that remains and retains and learns from itself the importance and consequences of exclusion and how to bring back to the living, Algeria's decolonial fight and Kateb Yacine's activist storytelling. I will rely on critical dialogue with scholars, activists, and artists from Algeria to inform my work, ensuring that my interpretation remains grounded in lived realities.

Many countries are still working towards and using decolonial practices. This work is here to situate the importance of performance arts, demonstrations, and activist methods as decolonial practices. I aim to deconstruct performances by Kateb Yacine to explore the power, importance, and necessity of words, action, and performance.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Decolonial Theory

Throughout this research, Walter D. Mignolo, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Frantz Fanon, will aid in defining and explaining coloniality and decoloniality within the context of Kateb Yacine’s theatre.

In Walter D. Mignolo's research in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis*, it is understood that ‘to decolonize’ cannot be answered with a universal solution. It must be questioned alongside, “who is doing it, where, why, and how” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p.108). He further claims that decoloniality aims to promote and take action in favour of

“conviviality, harmony, creativity, and plentitude” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018 p. 109). To attempt to define decoloniality, it is necessary to understand its roots, which Mignolo states are modernity and coloniality. Without them, there would be no need for decoloniality to exist or persist.

Modernity was created as a fictitious ambition that humans believed was driven by modernization and development, which was implemented by institutions that would benefit from this imaginary outcome. To further place modernity in a context of time, the beginning point—or as Mignolo calls it, the “present time”—is only the present for the Western world. This in turn led modernity, from the Western perspective, to become a colonial narrative. Mignolo describes coloniality as “the main thrust [to] illuminate the darker side of modernity” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Modernity created a need to describe its opposite, which appears to be “Tradition,” as it helps construct the imaginary past of the concept of modernity. Mignolo specifically states that “tradition materializes the hidden logic of coloniality” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018 p. 111-113)

To better comprehend coloniality Jean-Paul Sartre in his book *Colonialism and Neo-colonialism* describes colonialism as “[denying] *human rights* to people it has subjugated by violence, and whom it keeps in poverty and ignorance by force, therefore, as Marx would say, in a state of “sub-humanity” (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964). He further implores that “colonialism is a system”, which revolves around the oppressor and the oppressed (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964).

With the definitions of modernity and coloniality, decoloniality can be defined, in shorter terms, as “building a praxis of living and communal organization delinking from the modern state and capitalist economy” (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018 p. 121). Furthermore, the colonizers are not the agents of decolonisation. In the example of Mignolo’s research, France did not decolonise Algeria; only the colonialism ended, but what came after was the role of decolonisation. Another

word that adds to the definition of decolonisation is revolution. The first examples of decolonisation, which were originally called revolutions, occurred in North, South, and Central America. In Mignolo's research, he mentions two waves of decolonization, which had similar outcomes for independent nation-states. The first wave's "rhetoric of modernity" was focused on the idea of "progress and civilization," whereas the second wave was focused on development and modernization (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018 p. 123). While there are clear similarities, there are defining characteristics that keep these two waves separated. The first wave fought against the Spanish church and monarchy, while the second wave, more prominent in Asia and Africa, was a response to the pre-existing and present colonial states, colonized by European nations such as France (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018).

In addition to Walter Mignolo, Frantz Fanon is a theorist, philosopher and writer, who explored Algeria's occupation and the union of the masses within Algeria working towards gaining their independence. Fanon's research in, *A Dying Colonialism*, further implicates the importance of activist protest and bringing crowds together to fight for a cause, but his work *The Wretched of the Earth* is greatly renowned for being "the bible of decolonisation" (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964), in Stuart Hall's words. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a preface for the latter of Fanon's books, in Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, he discusses *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon's ideas and his own contributions. In it, he explains colonialism, in the context of Algeria, he stands by the idea that colonialism due to a beginning and a persistence due to violence must be ended by violence as well. Along with colonialism, he explores decolonisation, with the belief that a government following independence should focus on national consciousness instead of nationalism. National consciousness includes a focus on education, investment and improvement, whereas he defines nationalism as "the view that defining oneself as part of a

certain nation is foremost, perhaps for the superiority that comes from belonging to that nation” (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964). He believes nationalism can bring people together, but cannot initiate real change. Furthermore, he strikes at the assumptions that “colonized peoples are inferior to their colonizers” enhancing Mignolo’s claim of an idealized ‘modernity’ that the colonists believe the colonised need their help to achieve. This book's importance lives on as Fanon understands that although colonialism can end “colonial abuse lives on.” This enhances the importance of Kateb Yacine’s plays as a post-colonial strategy to continue fighting the indirect and direct “colonial abuse” (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964).

This research will be supported by using and acknowledging these theorists’ work to understand how Kateb Yacine used or hoped to inflict decolonial methodologies within his work.

1.2 Decolonial methodology

From Mignolo’s and Fanon’s research, we derive decolonial methodologies aimed at cultivating both thought and action, specifically in the context of decolonizing Algeria, through Kateb Yacine's play, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*. A decolonial methodology, predominantly from Mignolo's research, is the rejection of colonial legacy and capitalist systems. Through Yacine's dialogue and visual designs, the audience is confronted with the isolation of gaining independence and yet still being trapped in socio-economic positions that echo and derive from colonial exploitation. The next decolonial methodology, which will be examined throughout this research concerning post-colonial Algeria and Yacine's play, is Fanon’s theory on the importance of prioritising national consciousness over nationalism post-independence. This prioritising of national consciousness is witnessed in Yacine's play as he uses theatre as a tool to provoke

critique about the Algerian government's failure to address social issues post-independence, this will be addressed further on. Furthermore, Sartre's theory of reducing peoples to a state of "sub-humanity", is seen within Yacine's play, as he introduces characters who struggle with their identity and navigate post-colonial alienation, within the context of the migration crisis. Lastly, using Mignolo's theory, that modernity is inherently tied to colonialism and is an illusion of Western progress whereas tradition is defined by Western states as the opposite of modernity, or something inferior, the use of tradition in Kateb Yacine's play, can be seen as the reclaiming and reframing of tradition. Engaging in these cultural and "traditional" practices, this decolonial methodology involves reimagining and reintegrating these practices in a way that critiques Western norms and offers alternative ways of living. Kateb Yacine's play, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, will be analysed through his set design, and script, using these decolonial methodologies, to understand his impact in framing post-colonial Algeria and spreading decolonial thought.

Chapter 2. Historical Context

2.1 Algeria's Independence

To situate this research, we must explore Algeria's history as a colonized state, its fight for independence, and the legacy of colonial rule, so we may begin to understand methods of decolonisation. Between 1830 and 1847 France fought to colonize Algeria, which first began as a military camp. Algeria was also an important economic want for France as Algeria had prominent natural resources, such as oil. The overthrow of Louis Philippe's regime in 1848, led to the rule of Napoleon III, who saw Algeria as "not a French province but an Arab country, a

European colony, and a French camp” (Britannica, 2019). Following his downfall in 1870 and the defeat of the Franco-German war settlers took more Algerian land, resulting in a violent uprising and brutal suppression by the French military. Due to this loss in territory, some Algerians moved to marginal lands within forests and deserted areas. During World War I, many Algerians fought with the French army and many migrated to France after the war (Britannica, 2019).

Throughout the occupation, nationalist movements arose across three different groups. The first was assimilationist Algerians who had received a French education, had reformist plans, and were willing to make France’s “union” permanent if native Algerians were given the same rights as the French and European settlers. The second group were Muslim reformers whose inspiration derived from the Salafi movement, a religious movement born in Egypt in the late 19th century. It built a strong sense of Muslim Algerian nationality within the Algerian population. The third group was organized by the Algerian workers in France in the 1920s. The aim was to appeal to Algerians who recognized the injustice and deprivation.

This Algerian nationalism along with French militant actions led to the creation of the National Liberation Front (FLN), led by Ahmed Ben Bella. The FLN launched the war for independence in 1954, which lasted until 1962 when Algeria gained their independence. French sources claimed over 300,000-500,00 Algerian lives were lost, whereas Algerian sources claim 1.5 million (Britannica, 2019b), the war was prolonged due to France’s determination to keep control of Algeria due to its location and economic benefits. This war used guerilla warfare tactics and led to a very violent and traumatic war, Algerian society was polarized due to many different groups fighting for or against independence. Additionally, Algeria was France’s last colony to gain independence, enforcing an even more brutal war between the two countries, due

to Algeria witnessing liberation, passion grew to follow other countries' fight, whereas France fought even harder to hold on to their last colony.

After its independence in 1962, Algeria was primarily led by the FLN, the military group that began the war for independence. In 1965 Houari Boumediene, the second president, came into power, following a military coup. In 1978 president Chadli Benjedid took leadership and fought to change Algeria from a military-run state to a country with multi-party politics. Following this, two parties quickly took the lead, which included the Islamic Salvation Front and the Front des Forces Socialistes. The latter specifically fought for Berber rights in Algeria, whereas the first was a part of the Islamist parties, who hoped to revive Algerian culture after French colonialism for 130 years (Ottaway, 2021). This aligns with Kateb Yacine and the release of his plays around the 1970s which discussed the migration crisis and the hopes to bring back Algerian culture and language.

Furthermore, in 1965, it became much more difficult for Algerians to stay or come to France, contrary to their partial French colonial status, before independence. Many rejected French citizenship to not betray Algeria, but many had jobs and had been living in France for a long time. Through the 1960s and 1970s policies of exclusion which targeted Algerian families began. This led to unemployment and instability, as they had a French education and yet were unable to obtain any higher paying jobs. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, many Algerians returned home from France, in search of better careers, less exclusion from society, and less discriminatory policies (Cohen, 2017).

2.2 Political theater's influence on Kateb Yacine

Kateb Yacine is a poet, writer, revolutionary, and playwright. Yacine was born in 1929 in Constantine, Algeria. He was educated until 1945 in French coloniser schools in Algeria. He finished his studies during the uprising in Setif, Algeria, in 1945, against the French administration for an independent Algeria. This widened his perspective on his country's history and its current colonial status. Following this uprising he released his first novel in 1956, called *Nedjma*, which is now one of the most influential pieces that has shaped francophone North African literature. In this novel, he retells myths, beliefs, and local legends while exploring Algerian culture and society under France's colonialism. In 1959, he released his first trilogy of plays called, *Le Cercle des Represailles* during the ongoing war, where he was rejected in French theatres and therefore performed it first in Brussels (Bradby, 1994).

Kateb Yacine's theatre is placed within the discourse of political theatre. To have a holistic understanding of Yacine's theatre it is necessary to discuss Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright and theorist, who became a large influence within his work during the 1900s to 1950s. He introduced a new form of post-dramatic and post-political theatre, "Epic theater". His theatre took an anti-bourgeois and Marxist stance. Epic theatre was about giving the audience a demonstration of reality instead of false narratives, and also to include the audience in the performance pieces (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Additionally, Brecht fabricated dialectical theatre that he hoped would expose social realities and explore the notion that society is always in motion and is not in a fixed state or does not have a fixed outcome. Brecht was very influential within the theatre scene in post-independent Algeria, by engaging activists and exploring "political questions of state socialism" (Doshi, 2013).

Along with a prominent influence from Brecht, Neil Doshi in *Brecht in Algeria: On the Question of Influence in Kateb Yacine's Late Theater* claims that Kateb was also influenced by third-world Marxism, specifically from his trip, around 1967 to Vietnam, a post French colony. Third-world Marxism was a movement seen in the 1960s where solidarity grew between third-world countries to combat Western colonialism, imperialism, and agricultural and economic exploitation. He frames many of his works within the colonial struggle and independence of North Vietnam from France following the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. To understand Kateb's work holistically it is vital to explore his admiration for Vietnam's fight for independence, Ho Chi Minh's leadership, and Cheo theater. Although his work is not a direct copy of what he witnessed in Vietnam it was solely a guide for the techniques and ideologies he could include within his political theatre, if they fell into the context of Algeria's struggle for independence. Kateb believed that Ho Chi Minh best represented the "ideology of Marxist Liberation" (Doshi, 2013). Throughout the 1960s the North Vietnamese government began funding traditional Cheo theater performed by theater groups around Vietnam. Cheo theatre used folktales and beliefs of rural communities, allowing for improvisation and the use of outdoor scenery as set scenes. It subsequently focused primarily on the actors' gestures and symbols, which inspired Kateb in his theatre creations. Through these performances, he saw a dialectical relationship between political theories and ideologies and the spontaneous rebellion of the communities. Through these experiences, Kateb Yacine developed a message which is reflected in most of his plays and novels, which is that history will always be a continued "anti-imperialist struggle" (Doshi, 2013). Along with Kateb Yacine, it's important to mention other playwrights and writers who fought for an independent Algeria as well. These include Rachid Mimouni,

Mouloud Mammeri, Mouloud Feraoun, and Assia Djebar. These writers, activist's and filmmakers, all wrote throughout a post-independent Algeria.

Along with Brecht and Vietnam's Cheo theatre influences, Augusto Boal is an important political theatre activist, who built the Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil. Boal is now a primary example of using theatre as a decolonial methodology and a weapon for marginalized and oppressed voices. Boal himself described theatre as a "rehearsal for revolution,"(Coudray, n.d.) this statement is prominent in Kateb Yacine's performances as he explores migration and coloniality as a retelling of history. The theatre of the oppressed formed by Augusto Boal began in the 1970s in Brazil and spread rapidly. Boal was greatly inspired and influenced by Paul Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Boal and Freire both aimed at breaking down systems of authority, such as student and teacher or audience and performer, Kateb worked towards a similar system (Babbage, 2018). This will be explored in further chapters.

Chapter 3. Theatrical analysis

Kateb Yacine's theatre pieces will be dissected through the lens of decolonial methodologies. The decolonial methodologies, inspired by Mignolo, emphasize collective action and moving away from Eurocentric thinking. They view tradition not as backward but as a strategic element against colonial narratives. These approaches advocate distancing from Western state structures and capitalism. Yacine addresses these decolonial approaches through his set design, script, and props the actors interact with.

To analyse Kateb Yacine's play, as detailed as research allows, a summary of the plot of *Mohamed arfad valiztek* will be provided. This play is described as a "bitingly funny satire" that

deals with the emigration that occurred the decade following independence (Harrison, 2022). It focuses on “the mass immigration of post-independence Algerian workers to France and the hardships that they faced abroad” (Doshi, 2013). It may be one of the first plays at the time that followed the 132 years of colonial genealogy within Algeria, along with other colonial histories (Palestine/Israel) and historized the period of large migration post-independence. The play is devoted to the predicament of an Algerian migrant in France (Harrison, 2022). The play follows Mohammad, an Algerian peasant who is displaced by his brother and sent to work in France, in factories “under inhumane conditions” (Harrison, 2024), in the end, he returns to Algeria, revealing the exploitation of Algerian workers in France, but their need for money, to send home. The play ends with Mohamed, the main character, echoed by a chorus, singing the anti-colonial and anti-racist messages of the play (Harrison, 2024).

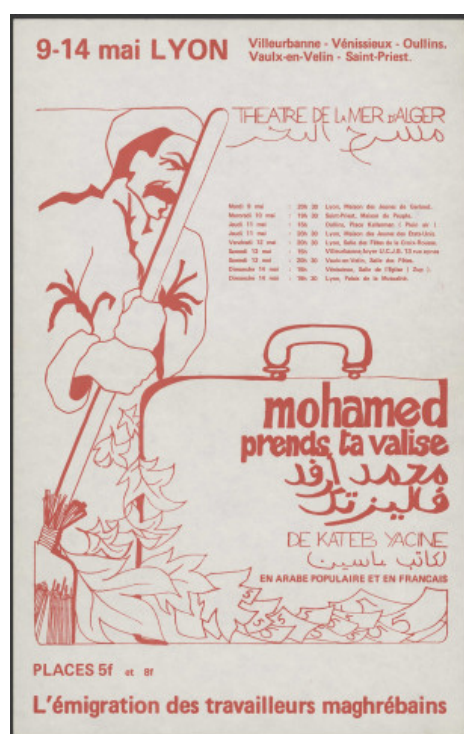


Fig. 1. Promotion pour la pièce de théâtre Mohamed prend ta valise de Kateb Yacine par le Théâtre de la mer d'Alger (Promotion for the theatre piece Mohamed arfad valiztek by Kateb Yacine produced by Théâtre de la mer d'Alger), Archives du département du Rhône et de la métropole de Lyon, 1972

The image above in Figure 1, shows the posters that were made by *Le Theatre de la Mer d'Alger* when announcing and advertising Kateb Yacine's play *Mohamed arfad valiztek*. The poster shows a man holding a broom, sweeping leaves which turn into money towards the right corner. The name of the play is placed within a luggage in front of the man. At the bottom of the poster, it says "L'emigration des travailleurs Maghrebains", which translates to the emigration of Maghreb workers, promoting what the play will explore. Displaying this image within this research, may contextualize the play and provide a visual representation of themes the play represented.

It aimed at being a play performed by workers and for workers, by using dialectical language, Arabic, and reimagining theatre as a reflection of the present world. Additionally, he wanted to show the complexities between the French and Algerian bourgeoisie. Yacine has said that a writer "must transmit a living message, placing the public at the heart of a theatre that partakes of the neverending combat opposing the proletariat to the bourgeoisie"(Liukkonen and Pesonen, 2024). Within *Mohamed arfad valiztek* he aimed to demonstrate this through his words, set, and performance (Liukkonen and Pesonen, 2024). It first premiered in 1971 in Algiers, Algeria, and then toured all around France in Schools, Factories, and Dormitories (Doshi, 2013). The play uses two storylines as parallels which are Algeria and France and Israel and Palestine. To go into depth this research will focus more on the Algerian and French characters and scenes of the play.

3.1 Decolonial methods present in set design

Location and Set design are immensely valuable parts and contributors to the storytelling and perhaps political standpoint of a play. Stephen Di Benedetto, in his book, *An Introduction to Theater Design* reiterates how the set of a scene, stage, or place, can create an atmosphere, set a time or place, and give the audience an insight into what the characters might interact with from the set. Firstly there are various types of stages which can formulate a different perspective or reaction from the audience, these include, a proscenium, a thrust stage, an arena, and found/environmental spaces. The proscenium is the classic theatre space that was developed in the 18th and 19th centuries where the audience is directly facing the stage and cannot see what happens on the sidelines or behind the set design. A thrust stage, or a three-quarter stage, extends the seating area to both sides of the stage therefore there is only one wall for the backstage area and actors must act towards all three sides. This format creates an issue of detail since at all times everything can be seen, everything must have a meaning or must be done swiftly, unnoticeably. Furthermore, an arena theatre has seating all around the stage, meaning they can see all around and actors and set designers must work cohesively so the audience no matter which seat can have a similar experience and perspective of the play. Additionally, the closeness of the audience to the stage in an arena space allows for intimacy, and perhaps messages can be more strongly delivered. As discussed in Chapter 2.2, Kateb Yacine has perhaps rejected these set designs in support of Boal's and Freire's theories on decentering authority and allowing a mutual discussion between audience and performer. Kateb Yacine chose instead, Found/environmental spaces which are when the stage is created, placed, or used to fall into natural architecture or nature. An example of a found/used space for theatrical purposes was

Robert Wilson (1995), who set up a scene in an underground vault in London and placed beds all around the vault; his theatre performance was based on the influenza epidemic from the 19th century. The brick walls, and cold and dim atmosphere allowed the audience to feel the weight of his performance and perhaps become intimate with the building and how it can make one feel (Stephen Di Benedetto, 2017).

Kateb Yacine's performance's set design falls under found/environmental spaces, as he toured performing in dormitories and factories. Understanding the importance of a set it is now possible to understand why Yacine has chosen factories, dormitories or outdoor areas as his set, to portray visual historical and decolonial activism. In 1962, after Algeria had won their independence under the Evian Accord, Algerians were able to somewhat travel, or move, between Algeria and France. This meant that in 1965 there were over "500,000 Algerian nationals in France" (House, 2019) France never saw this immigration as a long-term accord, they were only hoping to reduce tensions and repent for their malpractice as the colonial power. Therefore Algerian French citizens were ostracized, had little to no social housing, bad conditions, and had low-paying and exhaustive jobs (House, 2019). Through Kateb Yacine's tour, he went all around France reaching out to the Algerian communities and therefore performing in factories and dormitories, to ignite people's minds and power.

Through this, he decenters himself and his production from Eurocentric thinking. Instead of performing in theatres, or arenas, he uses the backdrop of how many Algerians lived in France to produce a stronger decolonial message. Yacine's performances in these spaces could be seen as a direct challenge to the French government's treatment of Algerians and reclaiming of their narrative powers. Additionally, the found spaces he chooses can be metaphors for the process of decolonisation, places that have been ignored, ostracized, rejected and excluded from the cultural

mainstream, where communities have to fight to reclaim their history and homes. The set design then allows the audience to visualize the difficulty, violence and exclusion the French government produced.

Furthermore, the design of the set Yacine has chosen rejects forms of classical theatre, which reflects the decolonial methodology of using one's traditions to counteract imposed colonial influences. Although using a found/environmental set is not specifically traditional to Algerian culture, the rejection of classical theatre rejects modern and Western influences. Tradition in this set design can be seen by using their community areas as sets, which may build a sense of togetherness and home. The use of a found/environmental set can be a stance against the French bourgeoisie and upper class by not using or accommodating to the theatre present at that time. The tradition can be seen to be kept by not using those spaces and creating their own wherever their community is. Additionally, the theatre was and is an activity for and enjoyed by the upper-class citizens, therefore by performing in found and created space, Yacine reclaims theatre as an activity for the people.

In terms of performers and collaborators, Kateb Yacine worked with two theatre groups from Algeria who toured their plays in Algeria and France, Al-nishat al-thaqafi lil-'umal/L'action Culturelle des Travailleurs or Workers' Cultural Action, and Al Assifa, more closely with the first. These theatre troupes are classified by Olivia C. Harrison, in her article *Binational Theatre in the Postcolonial Contact Zone: Kateb Yacine, Al Assifa and the Politics of Multilingualism in Algeria* as Binational meaning they were formed by two nationalities Arabic and French, but also open to inviting any nationality that supported their separate causes (Harrison, 2024). Although little is left of proof of these theatre groups and binational theatre, Harrison focuses on the found photographs, tapes, and manuscripts she has access to. She further explores preformed scenes,

where she retells how throughout the play when there was a retelling of when Algeria gained independence there was a wardrobe change on stage. The clothing rack was on stage as a prop and the actors changed the colours they were wearing, swapping the French flag colours for the colours of an independent Algeria flag. She reiterates “the transfer of power performed by the costume change” (Harrison, 2024), which may seem minimal but this allows the audience to visualize the actors reclaiming their land and colours. Further rejecting this idea of “modernity” that France tried to impose on Algeria’s culture.

Fig. 2. Mohamed prends ta Valise, Théâtre de la mer d'Alger, 1972-1973



The photograph above, Figure 2, shows a still shot of *Mohamed arfad valiztek* being performed. This photograph was found on *Le Theatre de la Tempete* site, which is a theatre company that performed Kateb Yacine’s play, from 1972-1973, in Paris. Shown, is a man standing, holding a luggage that says “Emigration” and beside him a barrel that says “Petrol”.

Through this photo we can analyse the props used to help tell the story. This character holding a luggage, with “Emigration” on it, may represent the action of perhaps moving to France, or with him he will always carry baggage filled with his experiences in France, the treatment, labour and exile felt. The barrel of petrol beside him is perhaps an on stage prop to help locate the character, if he is working at a factory or if he is in Algeria.

3.2 Decolonial methods within the Script

The analysis of his script and language will not encompass the whole script, due to its lack of accessibility to read it. Instead, because his play is not available to the public, we can see the long-term impacts of colonialism. Therefore, by using scenes available online, Yacine’s script will be dissected to understand or witness where he uses the decolonial methodologies presently used.

Firstly, language was an essential aspect for Kateb Yacine. He was educated in colonial schools which taught in French, this caused him to lose his mother tongue, Arabic. *Mohamed arfad valiztek* was his first play written in Algerian Arabic or “popular Arabic” with translation help from actors of ‘l’Action Culturelle des Travailleurs’, he further states, “I have come back to what I always wanted to do: a political theatre produced in a language that is broadly accessible to the largest public possible. From now on, I am going to use two languages: French, but mainly vernacular Arabic” (Kateb et al., 1989). Additionally, Arabic is the language of Algeria, by performing in his and their language, in France, he provides Algerians accessibility and inclusion to decolonize themselves and fight the Western language, French, which has been imposed on

them. By highlighting these linguistic and cultural subversions, this analysis aligns with broader decolonial goals of restoring agency and voices to marginalized communities.

As mentioned, in chapter 3, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, explores Mohamed being displaced to work in France, in French factories, and finally being able to return home to Algeria, by the end of the play. This play explores the migration crisis, and identity crisis, and promotes antiracists and anticolonial practices.

The first scene of the play was found, translated into English by Olivia C. Harrison. The first scene introduces 4 characters, 2 in French Algeria and 2 in Mandate Palestine, they seem to be mirroring each other. To provide a general summary of this scene, all four characters - Mohammed I, Mohammed II, Moshe, and Ernest - are planning on going home (from where is not mentioned). Mohammed I and Ernest are in Algeria though one believes it is France, while Mohammed II and Moshe are in Palestine, though one believes it is Israel (Harrison, 2022). This scene introduces the colonial genealogy between “French Algeria and Mandate Palestine that has produced what we now call the *migrant crisis*” often forgetting the first migrants were the settlers, also known as the Pied noirs, in the context of Algeria (Harrison, 2022).

Throughout this scene, the four characters meet, two in each country. They begin arguing about their home, and then French and British generals appear and become involved in the argument about whose home they are in. The last part of this scene includes a rooster coming onto the stage, they each try to catch the rooster and continue arguing about whether the rooster is Gallic or British.

This scene will be analysed using literary devices, specifically repetition, imperatives and symbolism to understand Kateb Yacine’s underlying thoughts. Firstly, in this scene, repetition of words and phrases is very apparent, repetition as a literary device serves to create emphasis and

rhythm to a text or performance. The line “this is my home” is repeated in this scene 3 times, the emphasis is on the word “home”, which could be aimed at emphasizing that each character truly believes it is their home as one's home has been taken (Algeria and Palestine) and the other has been told that this is their new home (France and Israel/Britain). Additionally, the use of repetition could reflect the cyclical nature of colonial exploitation, and the struggle for identity and a home which embodies one’s culture. Imperatives, interrogatives and exclamatory phrases are also used abundantly throughout, these are used to instruct, command, or to add emphasis and exclamation. Using these throughout the scene can add to the importance and significance the characters feel to their “home” and their beliefs. With the use of Frantz Fanon's theory, the use of exclamation points or aggressive imperatives can also be analysed as the endless cycle of violence felt from both sides of this history. Additionally, the two characters named Mohamed, may symbolize their mirroring colonial fears and similar experiences at the hands of colonisers and how to rise against it. This can be identified as a decolonial methodology, described by Walter Dignolo when he claims that decoloniality should not follow the individualistic nature of Western powers. The use of connecting these two characters by their name builds a sense of togetherness and community, that they are fighting for the same cause, independence. Lastly, symbolism is seen through the rooster in the scene, in which the characters argue between themselves if it’s a Gallic (French) or an English rooster which reflects the ongoing colonial appropriation of identity and culture. The inclusion of a rooster is less about the rooster itself but a symbolic struggle over ownership, identity and control, specifically between French and British dominance in the region and the decolonial struggle for Algeria's Identity.

Olivia C. Harrison’s other article *Binational Theatre in the Postcolonial Contact Zone: Kateb Yacine, Al Assifa and the Politics of Multilingualism in Algeria*, includes more lines and

passages of the script which will be further analysed with the influence of her analysis as well. The play follows an almost linear track of exploring colonial times and post-independent scenes. In this specific scene the settler and the colonised both take a boat to France post-independence, but now “their roles are reversed: now migrants are ‘intruders’” (Harrison, 2024), while the French are at home”. Kateb Yacine then quotes a slogan of the antiracist movement, “Nous sommes ici parce que vous étiez là-bas’ (We are here because you were there [i.e., in the colonies])” (Arabic Translation not found) (Harrison, 2024). This phrase combats colonial thinking, that colonialism ends following independence, and that decolonisation is an ongoing process due to the now-imposed identity crisis of Algerian and French (Pied Noirs) people (Harrison, 2024).

3.3 Decolonial methods within Archiving

Following the analysis of the available scenes and quotes found by Olivia C. Harrison, we can now examine the absence of his play and its accessibility to the public. Kateb Yacine’s scripts, letters, and notes are kept in the Institut Mémoires de l’edition Contemporaine, in Caen, France. This archive is only accessible in person and on-site, leaving many unable to utilize or access the information and history they hold.

It’s pivotal to re-acknowledge the researchers who have come before and explored these theories and methodologies. Sophie Marie Niang’s *Notes on Scavenging as Method* (2024), explores scavenging for information as a methodology within Queer and feminist studies more specifically. Niang quotes Halberstam, from his book ‘Female Masculinity’ as he aims to define scavenger methodology as a “methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce

information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour.” This methodology can be seen throughout this research paper as Kateb Yacine’s play has been deliberately excluded from Algerian history and Algerian archives, requiring a scavenging methodology, which resembles piecing together fragments of the play that exist in various locations and formats, from published scripts to letters and notes. Niang further explores that “research is settler colonial” by upholding the “segregation of ideas” and by separating disciplines, whereas scavenging can lead to resistance of academic formats that deem these types of works as incomplete or illegitimate because they do not fit the established frameworks (Niang, 2024). Additionally scavenging leads to the diversification of ideas or the ability, as such in this research, to explore the lacks and gaps of these ideas in academic research. This can further be a decolonial methodology of rejecting Eurocentric thinking and research methods, by forming a non-western research method, scavenging, scavenging for works that have been hidden or rejected by formal research institutions. This scavenging process allows me to resist the academic tendency to treat these works as incomplete or illegitimate simply because they do not fit within established frameworks or institutions.

The inaccessibility of Yacine’s works in Algeria therefore reflects a broader pattern of colonial control over cultural production and historical memory. To understand why this may be happening we must see how and why theatre is very ‘gatekept’ and how this is a method of colonialism.

Gatekeeping, first identified in 1922 by Robert Parks, although still unnamed, in his book, *The Immigrant Press*, was understood as withholding information, specifically by news agencies and reporters using their power to decide which news to publicly announce or leave behind. This already gives power to the reporters by controlling the ideas and information the

public may have by withholding parts of a story and creating their own story with the news they do share. Cultural gatekeeping is believed to “discourage cultural inclusivity” (Dinar Pamugari, 2023). Additionally, gatekeeping often occurs with niche or less-known subjects rather than mainstream and popular trends. This can further conclude that cultural gatekeeping is elitist due to the idea that possessing a broad cultural understanding only derives from privilege and education. With this knowledge, it can be assumed that theatre falls under cultural gatekeeping as its aim was to be kept an elitist activity. Furthermore, theatrical works, by nature, rely on live performance and a physical audience, which inherently limits access due to geographic, economic, or political constraints. Kateb Yacine’s play could be described as being gatekept from the public it was made for (Algerians) and the play's birth (Algeria). This form of gatekeeping not only curtails cultural expression but perpetuates colonial legacies by limiting access to knowledge and art that could foster critical dialogue and collective action. This can be seen as a form of neo-colonial control. This is a further method of limiting Algerians the ability to reclaim their cultural narrative. As defined in the theoretical framework by Jean-Paul Sartre, Neocolonialism is colonialism in the form of economic and cultural control rather than direct political and militant governance. Therefore withholding Kateb Yacine’s work, is a form of neocolonialism and archival control, by exerting cultural control over Algerian stories and works of art.

This is a necessary conversation, during present times, as we are seeing a shift in finally returning artworks to their home country instead of being displayed in their colonisers country. An example of this which will contextualize Yacines work being in a French archive, is the Parthenon sculptures. The Parthenon sculptures are currently held and displayed at the British Museum, in London, United Kingdom, these sculptures belong to Greece. This battle for

retrieving what belongs to Greece has been ongoing for over 20 years, since the first request in 1983 (Perks, Woodhouse and Pepin, 2024). This example demonstrates neo-colonialism and archival power structure, within colonisers' countries, and how art is consistently being stolen, withheld and appropriated.

Kateb Yacine's work is a reflection and example of how colonialism still persists post-independence. The work must begin to decolonise archives and art practices, from Western conventions. This can begin by using unconventional research methodologies such as scavenging, and understanding gatekeeping as a colonial practice.

Chapter 4. Legacy

Presently examined, Kateb Yacine contributed to an ongoing resistance of colonialism and the continued use of decolonial methodologies in political performance art and activist theatre. It is of utmost importance to understand and witness his legacy and the echoes of his work in regards to contemporary theatre and Algeria's ongoing cultural and economic battle to decolonise itself from France.

4.1 Political theatre legacy

Political theatre is an ever expanding genre of theatre, a key figure is Kateb Yacine, as displayed through this exploration of his work, and his use of theatre as a tool for change. Kateb Yacine's play was a large influence for fighting for the anti racist movement, discussing the

migration crisis, and fighting the lingering colonial ties. Olivia C. Harrison claims that it was the most popular play, during the 70s and 80's that ACT produced with Kateb Yacine. Harrison introduces binational, as a "cultural and political claim"(Harrison, 2024), which revolves around the citizenship predicaments following colonisation and post colonial states. Therefore binational theatre is a space for postcolonial identities (Harrison, 2024). This new type of militant theatre is a further step in expanding the genre of political theatre for postcolonial and decolonial studies to have a space within theatre.

Furthermore political theatre today relies heavily on interactivity with its audiences, this concept can be drawn back to Augusto Boal's, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. In this book he explores concepts of "forum theatre" and "image theatre", both which focus on interactions between the performers and audience (Boal, 2008). Boal's theory brings Kateb Yacine's play to the forefront of contemporary political theatre. As Yacine uses language to challenge colonial narratives, modern political theater has witnessed a surge in multilingualism and local dialects in theatre performances. Discussed in chapter 3.2, repetition is used to emphasize continued colonial influence; within contemporary political theatre repetition is often used similarly. This can be seen in theatre pieces that address global struggles, similar to the migration crisis in Algeria, such as refugee experiences, immigration or economic exploitation.

If performed today, this play would serve as a poignant commentary on the current migration crisis, with parallels to the struggles of refugees and migrants crossing borders. Similarly Kateb Yacine's, critiques of neo-colonial structures persisting, would resonate today in the context of global capitalism, economic inequalities and economic exploitation faced by African and Middle Eastern countries, by former colonial countries to maintain control.

4.2 Kateb Yacine's influence on Algeria's ongoing decolonization

Kateb Yacine spoke and wrote outwardly for decolonisation and trans-local solidarity within Algeria. To recognize his work in the present, it is vital to address the political climate of Algeria and France today to decide if Kateb Yacine's work is still relevant in the 21st-century discourse. In 2010, protests began, called the Arab Springs. These protests led by the young generation were triggered by rising prices of essential items. In 2011 they continued, Yahia H. Zoubir from the European Institute of the Mediterranean claims, that these protests continue to persist due to “the feeling of abandonment by a regime characterised not only by a high degree of nepotism, clientelism and corruption, but also as one that limits citizen participation in political life and genuine representation, hinders democratic freedoms, and violates people's dignity” (Zoubir, 2011). Throughout these protests, the public was able to overthrow the longest-running president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in 2019, after years of protest, but unable to change the political party, National Liberation Front, in charge which focused on military rule, the same party system since they gained their independence in 1962 (Ottaway, 2021). This is a primary example of Frantz Fanon's theory, on the difference between national consciousness and nationalism. Nationalism can only hold people together but is limited to forming real change, whereas national consciousness can put a focus on education, culture, and economic change. Through this, we can see that this long-term government may be focusing more on nationalism, by limiting their citizens to having a voice in political, democratic and cultural freedoms, than national consciousness. We can see here that this colonial presence is still haunting Algeria, even after 60 years of independence the political party has made slight changes, although more drastic ones may be needed, further exemplifying the long-term effects of colonization and the political

unrest that led to having to rebuild one's state and national identity. Currently, the president is Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who works in coalition with the National Liberation Front and other similar parties (Ottaway, 2021).

In France, in 2021 current president Emmanuel Macron, made a speech addressing their long and violent history with Algeria, in hopes of redeeming relations. He said, "We will not forget. To the abandoned combatants, to their families who suffered the camps, the prison, the denial, I ask forgiveness, we will not forget," (France's Emmanuel Macron heckled asking Algerian veterans for forgiveness, 2021) as noticed by other scholars, there was no apology within this speech, only an ask to forgive. Although, unsure how sincere, this is a small step forward, this was the first governmental public discussion France has held regarding Algeria. Before 2021 there have been no apologies and no grievances for their horrors and long-term colonial rule. This further demonstrates the importance of Kateb Yacine's play in the 1970s, and its relevance in today's neo-colonial power structures.

Conclusion

Throughout this research, I have relearned a history from a new perspective, coming to a deeper understanding of how colonialism persists in subtle and pervasive ways. This study contributes to a greater conversation about the persistence of colonial legacies in post-independent countries and focuses on art forms such as theatre and their continued work in challenging and reframing these inherited structures. This dissertation explores the decolonial methodologies in Kateb Yacines, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, examining how his theatrical choices, such as set design and scripture, reveal insights into Algeria's ongoing struggle for

decolonization post-independence. This analysis demonstrates that Yacine's play challenges colonial legacies, using theatre structures that reject Western norms and reframe cultural and historical narratives. By using theories by Walter Mignolo and Frantz Fanon, *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, can be viewed as more than a critique of colonialism but a direct reimagining of post-colonial identities.

The study of gatekeeping, scavenging, and the inaccessibility of archival materials, further reveals the relationship between colonial archival power and the persistence of neo-colonialism. Furthermore, it is necessary to address the limitations encountered throughout this research, this includes the inability to access the complete script of *Mohamed arfad valiztek*, restricting a full textual analysis. This allowed the exploration of scavenging and archival power structures as a methodology.

In order to keep this research alive, further explorations could include the comparison of Kateb Yacine's work with other North African and postcolonial playwrights, or a deeper analysis of gatekeeping and how to reshape archival practices, post-colonialism.

Kateb Yacine, brings to light the role of art in the process of decolonisation, offering a reflection and critique of colonial and post-colonial structures. This dissertation, while focusing on one play, underlines the enduring power of theatre as a tool for resisting colonial legacies and advocating for decolonial practices.

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Figure 1:

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Figure 2:

Theatre de la mer d'Alger (n.d.). *Mohamed prends ta Valise*. [Photo] Available at: <https://www.la-tempete.fr/saison/1972-1973/spectacles/mohamed-prends-ta-valise-552>.