

*Memory and Strategies
of Displacement in Ma-
lika Mokeddem, Nina
Bouraoui, and Paulina
Chiziane's Literature*

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“Rami: Betrayal is a crime, Tony!

Tony: Betrayal? Don't make me laugh! Purity is
masculine, sin is female.

Only women can betray, men are free, Rami”
(Chiziane 2016, 38)

In cosmopolitanism as a unity of global differences, women are still considered second-class citizens, as exposed by contemporary African women writers. A deep identity crisis continues to haunt African women at home or as refugees. Nationalism and sexism pose a

critical issue in performing identities in a post-colonial and post-national era: “For nationalists, the nation is the sole criterion of legitimate government and of political community” (Smith 1992, 56).

The following writings truly reflect the dynamics between their authors and their struggle with in-between cultural identities as unique sources to inform and to educate on non-western societies¹ under growing nationalist circumstances. Exploring the socio-political context of these migrant experiences through literature has the potential to reveal a deep understanding of real-life conditions of women in postcolonial Africa. Such details on different female characters by female writers such as Malika Mokkedem, Nina Bouraoui, and Paulina Chiziane, are fictional but essentially born from a collective truth of a much-culturally diversified African population, corroborating traditions with western influences. Colonialism, with its unprecedented economic and social crisis, triggered the cultural redefinition of African women identity. This is often related to political issues, namely the rising of extremist parties as in Mokkedem’s rural Algeria, nationalistic views in France and Algeria as in Bouraoui’s *Garçon Manqué*, and even resuscitation of ancient practices and superstitions as in the revival of polygamy in Chizanes’s *The First Wife*.

Although fictional, these stories prompt the identity as a functional parameter for the validity of the story

that an author builds about her. The narrative identity thesis has been criticized for its incapacity to fully comprehend one's personality on multiple times settings², but it serves as a practical guide for the identity markers that immigrant francophone writers have in common: their resonance with traditions towards which they feel responsible and in debt, their adaptability to a presupposed advanced occidental society, or their power to inspire social debate and political progress towards immigrants' rights beginning with the '50 and '60³. Although principles of diversity, polysemy, plurality, and dialogue characterize postcolonial society, it is nonetheless the cultural heritage that brings the light of tolerance in all of the stories. Particularly, literature as memoirs or political essays has an agenda on tolerance and union of cultural diversity between metropolitan France and Algeria or within the same country as in Chiziane's debate on polygamy in Mozambican society.

As noticed by Nina Bouraoui in *Garçon manqué*, the way to multiculturalism has been slow and often difficult to achieve because of the colonial shadow of misrepresentation. At her own arrival in France in the '70, the French were cautious with the Algerians, typically associated with poverty, hunger, war, and desert: "Ce pays, cette terre encore lointaine. Entendre. Tu vis en Alger. Tu as une voiture ? Tu manges à ta faim ? Dans les années soixante-dix, les français ne sont pas encore très habitués aux Algériens. Aux nouveaux Algériens. Aux mariages mixtes. Aux immigrés. Ils sont encore dans

l'image de la guerre, du désert, du fellagha et des maquis" [This country, this land, still farway. To hear all the time. You live in Alger. Do you have a car? Do you eat as much as you need? In the '70, the French are not yet really used to the Algerians. To the new Algerians. To the mixed marriages. To the immigrants. They still have this image of the war, of the desert, of the insurgents and the maquis] (Bouraoui 2008, 93).

A new literary genre, the refugees' literature, has a clear political and social agenda: to protect the other, often seen as a poor immigrant excluded or never assimilated; to inoculate a sense of community for people with different cultural background living together; to further feminist agenda of African women in life events and education projects. A child of the eighties, refugees' literature presents a genre of disparate personal stories that portray the poor, the immigrant, and the unrecognized as an imperfect person with split or erased national identity⁴. The growing number of young writers to take an active role in producing social change, artistic creativity, and even political capital is encouraging. While the narratives of displacement have already built a frame of reference for this genre, the future resides in exploring the complicated interstices of the new generations' search for inclusive cultural and national identity: "Je porte ma valise à deux mains. Mes affaires de vacances. Ma vie algérienne est repportée. J'aurai toujours une grande valise. Comme tous les Algériens. Comme tous ces étrangers qui descendent du train, du bateau, de l'avi-

on, chargés. Une maison entière dans les mains. [...] Un jour, on fouillera ces valises suspectes. On parquera les Algériens au fond des aéroports. Dans un sas spécial. Avec un desk particulier. Après une forte dérobée. On fouillera, avec des gants, les affaires et les corps de ces hommes, de ces femmes, de ces enfants. Algériens, passagers très dangereux. Ces bombes humaines. Ces gens de la guerre. Ces terroristes par leur seul visage, par leur seul prénom, par leur seule destination” [I carry my luggage with both hands. My vacation stuff. My entire Algerian life is on. I will always have a big suitcase. Like all Algerians. Like all these strangers who get off a train, a boat, an airplane, overcharged. With an entire house on their hands. [...] One day, we will search these suspected suitcases. We will push the Algerians on the back of the airports. In a special office. With a special desk. After careful surveillance. We will search, with gloves, the things and the bodies of these people, of these women, of these kids. The Algerians, dangerous passengers. These human bombs. The people from the war. These terrorists simply because of their look, of their name, of their destination] (Bouraoui 2008, 100).

As in Bouraoui’s case, life in France is not a fairytale. Bouraoui’s own experience is relevant⁵. Even if ultimately the franco-algerian writer integrated French society, the beginning of her life in Rennes is a rocky one, as described in *Garçon manqué*. Here the geography of her childhood intimately relates to her blurred nation-

al and gender identities. If Bouraoui identifies with the narrator/character in the story, for Mokeddem, identification is more subtle, inspired by a surprising and unexpected feminist solidarity within a misogynistic Algerian society of the 80' and 90' ⁶. Reading these stories, one immediately associates political dissent with blurred gender stereotypes within an already established school of feminists. With the aesthetics revolution of autobiographical writing as well as the emancipated ideas on women comes a sense of powerful advocacy to redefine the genre of displacement literature.

Confused by their dreams of freedom and migration, many of the characters portrayed start to believe in old European values (common linguistic Indo-European linguistic origins, historical memories, or geopolitical frontiers) as *fundamental codes* (Foucault 1966, 13) that reflect a nation's language, technics, and establishments as a live experience. The migrant literature is the place where African women writers start to explore the archaeology of their nations and enable an active exchange of their cultural production. The design of this mise-en-opposition enabled marginal cultures to receive international attention and to bring rapidly awareness on their specific agenda on gender or cultural identity and social rights. By raising awareness for the coexistence of a diversity of cultures and identities within the same nation, the migrant literature makes clear African women's proximity, as a natural approach to what seems to be marginal and

weak. This exchange of cultural productions happens when there is certain flexibility within the writer herself between the position of the object (the novel) and subject (the reader): “Nul regard n’est stable. Le sujet et l’objet, le spectateur et le modèle inversant leur rôle à l’infini” [No gaze is stable. The subject and the object, the spectator and the model, continuously switch their role] (Foucault 1966, 21).

Historically, Europe has been a place of racial tolerance after World War II, a place where artists from around the world found artistic reclusion and political exile. In this respect France succeeded in creating a prosperous ambient for jazz black singers, Russian dancers, or African writers: “France est l’un des pays où les préjugés de race ont été les moins forts” [France is one of the countries where the stereotypes of race were less powerful] (Noiriel 1988, 337). For France, where the cult of national identity is still considered a guaranty of the state, racial tolerance comes as unexpected. This could be explained within the context of European integration and global economy, and literally translate into equal rights for natives and immigrants⁷. Specifically, for the French this also sub mined the control exercised by the state on questions of national security, language and culture preservation, traditional French identity staples. The so called “threat” posed by outsiders was thus not only economic but also cultural, culminating with a right nationalist discourse. Aggravated by the raise of European

Union, right discourse continues to build its narratives on the perceived disappearance of France as a sovereign state.

Objectively postcolonial French context left exiled writers confused while caught between their native culture and their adoptive French society. Such an example is Malika Mokeddem's *L'interdite* [The cast out]. Back in her Algerian village, Sultana (an alter ego of the writer Mokeddem), is so deeply immersed in her French identity, essentially career oriented, that she does not answer to the Algerian female pattern to the extent that she is not even recognized by her own people. Sultana is born Algerian but her appearance is French. Salah immediately labels Sultana as Occidental: "Même ton silence est calculé, calibré. Un comportement d'Occidentale ! Tu ne sais pas parler comme les vrais Algériens. Nous, on parle pour ne rien dire, on déblatère pour tuer le temps, essayer d'échapper à l'ennui. Pour toi, l'ennui est ailleurs. L'ennui c'est les autres. Tu as des silences suffissantes, des silences de nantie. Des silences pleins de livres, de films, de pensées intelligentes, d'opulence, d'égoïsme..." [Even your silence is calculated, calibrated. The attitude of an Occidental Woman! You don't know how to talk like true Algerians do. We, we talk to say nothing, we chat to kill the time, to try and escape the boredom. For you, boredom is elsewhere. Boredom is in the others. You have sufficient silences, silences of the wealthy. Silences full of books, movies, smart ideas, opulence, egoism...]

(Mokeddem 1993, 49). Salah goes further and mentions the Algerian anchored “gangrene of mentalities” that keeps all men stuck in misogyny. Sultana and Salah are coming from a common origin, the modern generation of the '70 Algerian students. Consequently, they find themselves in a time of deceiving modernity and sexual emancipation. An entire generation seems conflicted between keeping their national identity and adopting their French postcolonial path. For this generation's women the tendency to generalize postcolonial way of life dramatizes the road to exile and studies abroad, while men fall in old stereotypes of misogyny and sexual discrimination. The most representative is the mayor of the village, Bakkar, who apostrophes Sultana for being a female doctor doing a male job, thus confronting tradition.

Sultana had no choice but become a doctor and adopt an additional identity, one related to her intellectual career, a phenomenon often observed by sociologists: “we have already seen that, sociologically, human beings have multiple identities, that they can move between them according to context and situation, and that such identities may be concentric rather than conflictual” (Smith 1992, 67)

Among many identity markers, language plays a key role in this transition. A language of conflict and exposure of collaborators and colonials, French is discredited in Algeria. But could the literary classic Arabic, the dialect-

tical Arabic, or the Berber really replace it? The question appears to concern many other writers⁸ because French still functions universally, while Maghreb Arabic and Berber language are regarded as unworthy of official business by the Algerians in Mokeddem's story. Within the story Sultana asks this question as one of her generation's issues. A mentor to young Dalila, she encourages her pupil to continue her studies in French, as the only way to resist patriarchal values deeply rooted in their society. Ultimately they realize that it is not the language that brings misfortune but what people do with the language: "Une langue n'est que ce que l'on en fait! En d'autres temps, l'arabe a été la langue du savoir et de la poésie" [A language is what we do of it! In the past, Arabic was a language of knowledge and poetry] (Mokeddem 1993, 93). The village of Ain Nekhla marginalizes women, under the continuous menace of an extremist nationalist party, the mayor, and the taxi driver Marbah. The two men strategically reinforce a culture of fear and exclusion of progress while proclaiming a fight for patriotic decolonization. Sultana represents a double threat since she has access to the village community by birth, and connection to France by exile. Salah too inspires distress, the only Algerian male in this story with progressive views towards women rights. He advises Sultana to avoid direct confrontation with the local nationalists: "Les femmes, ici, sont toutes des résistantes. Elles savent qu'elles ne peuvent s'attaquer, de front, à une société injuste et monstrueuse dans sa quasi-totalité.

Alors elles ont pris les maquis du savoir, du travail et de l'autonomie financière" [Women, here, are all resistant. They know that they cannot fight openly this society, unjust and monstrous on all its levels. So, they chose the fight through knowledge, work, and financial autonomy] (Mokkedem 1993, 131).

Women do fight back openly when they set on fire the mayor's town hall. They gather around Sultana in whom they see a powerful advocate through her education and financial independence. The relation between female villagers and Sultana is codependent since Sultana too finds comfort in their stories and start confronting the men of the village whom she labels as "frustrated, brainless dicks continuously erected but dissatisfied, with deep hate against women everywhere instilled in their eyes" (Mokeddem 1993, 163).

A similar world of gender transgression is recounted in Paulina Chiziane's *The First Wife - A Tale of Polygamy*. Mozambican women find comfort in each other's confessions in spite of Mozambique's split between the women of the north, more educated and emancipated, and the women of the south, significantly subjected to patriarchal customs and beliefs. In the south, birthplace of Rami⁹, men are the gatekeepers of power in the public sphere and at home: "A husband at home means security, protection. Thieves keep away if a husband is present. Men respect each other. [...] In a husband's presence, a home is more a home, there's comfort and status" (Chiz-

iane 2016, 12). To exemplify, after a man's accidental death, women in the family are not only disrespected for becoming widows but also accused of killing him, called witches, gold diggers, whores, self-seekers (Chiziane 2016, 11). Betrayed by her husband Tony, Rami turns to her female friends and neighbors who share similar stories of abandonment and jealousy. Many are abandoned after many years of marriage like unwanted baggage, baffled by their husbands' cruelty. Personal and social issues such as polygamy, infidelity, and misogynist claims are aggravated by the financial dependence. In addition, the number of men in the north of Mozambique is decreasing because most of them work abroad in inhuman conditions: one of Rami's aunts takes a second husband because the previous one destroyed his lungs in the South African gold mines. Polygamy could be a necessity as one of the mistresses reveals: "In my village, polygamy is the same as sharing scarce resources, for leaving other women without any cover is a crime that not even God forgives" (Chiziane 2016, 79).

Through Rami's aunt, Maria, the 25th wife of a king, we are introduced to the small economy of a traditional polygamist family: women are treated with respect, each wife has her house and her properties, and they all have duties and rights within the assembly of the king's wives. However, as Rami notices, there is a total lack of love and emotional fulfilment since all of the king's marriages are merely political or financial treaties with different communities and tribes.

Wealth is a measure for human relationships and a barometer for sexual relations in Rami's life. At one point, she notices that all of her husband's mistresses are well kept, have better clothes, and beautiful houses. One of these lovers, Luisa admits that money is the main reason why all of these women hold on to Tony. Men are hunted and used for financial gain; ultimately consumed by their own patriarchal rules.

Rami becomes a repository for domestic and social injustice, a reclusion necessary to heal her own wounds. After consulting a "love counsellor", a sort of marriage counsellor for polygamists, she concludes that lack of education is not the only reason for polygamy. Poverty too is a key element next to other triggers such taboos, myths, and local habits. Popular beliefs deeply rooted in the collective wisdom transform women into servants, generation after generation, blaming women even for natural disasters and diseases.

A frowned upon practice, sustained by traditions and primitive believes, polygamy not only humiliates women but also enslaves them financially. As opposed to Rami, who holds a teaching degree, the rest of the women follow a limited education on how to please a man. Once abandoned by men, women foresee their future in poverty, as noted by Rami: "Things are like this because you don't work. Every day you have to beg for a few crumbs. If each of us had a source of income, a job, we'd be free

of this problem. It's humiliating for a grown woman to have to ask for money for salt and coal" (Chiziane 2016, 169). The very few who dare to accede to financial independence are deeply despised as happened to Rami and one of her husband's wives because of their clothing business in the bazar. In Tony's own words: "Now that you people have got these business ventures, you think you're ladies, but you're no better than whores" (Chiziane 2016, 246).

The market/bazar is an unexpected space of compassion between women trying to liberate themselves, a space to share personal stories of family rape and other domestic violence ¹⁰. To these women, men often condition their economic status and provoke immediate misfortune. Other times their unhappiness is independent of their choices. One of them used to be married with three kids but she lost her husband to economic migration. Another woman has a child from rape during the civil war. Ultimately, Rami realizes that the key is in women initiative to improve their lives and stand up for themselves and their children.

Rami manages to start a business for each of the other wives and they all obtain relative financial independence. Financial success counts also as psychological success for these African women, most of the time uneducated and raised to blindly submit to men. Successful, they manage to stay together in a sisterhood of business part-

nership and family links by learning from each other's experience. Although a teacher by training, Rami learns from Lu the retail business details and discovers that she is more successful in business than in teaching.

Mixing political and economic factors appear initially as a bad decision, but the narrative makes sense once Rami understands that all these factors are related and that she needs to embrace polygamy and officially recognize all the wives and their children ¹¹. Financial matters are of high importance in polygamy and this is primarily because the wives are regarded as assets. According to old ceremonies of bride price weddings, the wives' income becomes common fortune: the assets, the social security, and the retirement savings. During *kutchinga*, for example, a ceremony by which a widow is obliged to sexual intercourse with one of her brothers in law, she is treated as inherited propriety. Rami explains how this ceremonial is ultimately related to the bride price paid during the wedding: "Kutchinga is a stamp, the sign of ownership. A woman's bride price is paid in money and cattle. She's property. Whoever invests in her expects something in return, the investment needs to pay" (Chiziane 2016, 311). After Toni passed away, Rami, a widow of the south, is stripped bare of all possessions, including her house, while the other wives do not suffer the same harsh treatment.

Polygamy brings major shifting in women's social and emotional lives: they get to share one husband, waiting

for him for five weeks, and hiding their jealousy. Social status is only gained by marriage and preserved by the very existence of men in their lives. Thus, during a governmental operation in 1983, when around 1000 people were deported from the city to the northern province of Niassa, “all the women who had no husband were arrested and deported to reeducation camps, accused of being prostitutes, vagrants, criminals” (Chiziane 2016, 241).

Male protagonists are also touched by social malaise when women are excluded from the public sphere. Vincent, a Frenchman, walks the street of the nightly Alger emptied of women as if the city has buried them behind its walls: “L’absence totale de celles-ci crée ce sentiment d’irréalité. Je ne m’y ferai jamais ! Prêssées, affairées, elles traversent le jour, le temps d’une rue, le temps d’un courage, entre deux bornes d’interdit. Le soir les avale toutes. Des murs de pierre ou de terre, des murs de peurs et de censures les enterrent. Je désespère” [The total absence of women creates this sense of surreal. I will never get used to it! Occupied, hurrying, they cross the day, the time of a street, the time of one’s courage, between two interdictions. The night swallows all of them. Walls of rock and dirt, walls of fears and censorship bury them. I panic] (Mokeddem 1993, 64-65).

On his own, Tony in Chiziane’s novel, is struck by his family’s atrocities towards his wife and admits to the marginalization of women in their society: “What a murder-

ous culture! [...] he never knew life was that bad, nor could he have imagined how much women suffered. He had always thought the social structure was harmonious and that traditions were good, but he now understood the cruelties of the system” (Chiziane 2016, 336).

Chiziane’s *The First Wife* offers one particular case of collective reflection and debate. Although polygamy is quietly accepted as an instilled reality of wealthy men, many of the male protagonists redefine their position on power, life guidance, and women growth. They do that because Rami cannot accept the initiation rites of the north, or the archaic traditions of the bride price in the south, both traditions enabling a culture of humiliation and enslavement of women. She recognizes the power of the many and initiate her family and community transformation: “The bride price in the south and initiation rites in the north are strong, indestructible institutions. They resisted colonialism Christianity and Islam. They resisted revolutionary tyranny. They will always survive. Because they are the essence, the soul of the people. Through them, a nation affirms itself before the world and demonstrates its will to live according to its own ways” (Chiziane 2016, 65-66).

Many times, the character of Rami is making Chiziane’s point to strongly battle polygamy as social disease, beyond the individual interests of one woman. Thus, while confronting Luisa, the third of Tony’s wives, Rami goes

over her own narrative of insecurity and jealousy and realizes the depth of Luisa's deplorable life who is not socially recognized, continuously at the mercy of the man on whom she and her children depend for money and happiness. Suddenly Luisa's drama seems bigger than Rami's own love troubles¹².

A further conclusion on the social, economic, and political status of these women illustrates the existence of a politically engaged agenda in African women literature. Names such as Assia Djébar (born in 1936), Maryse Condé (born in 1937), Hélène Cixous (born in 1937), Marie NDiaye (born in 1967), or Nina Bouraoui (born in 1967) have been central in understanding the intersection of racial, ethnic, national, and sexual identities. In Nina Bouraoui's story, the main character is a brilliant individual mixing collective identity. The feminine French side (Nina, Yasmina) is seldom opposed to her masculine Algerian identity (Ahmed, Brio): "Non, je ne veux pas me marier. Non, je ne laisserai pas mes cheveux longs. Non, je ne marcherai pas comme une fille. Non, je ne suis pas française. Je deviens algérien" [No, I don't want to get married. No, I will not let my hair long. No, I will not walk like a girl. No, I am not a French girl. I am becoming an Algerian boy] (Bouraoui 2008, 51).

The national and the gender are two different realms which are rooted in secular values and traditions such as religion, ethnic culture, language, common history

and communal memory: “the territorial boundedness of separate cultural populations in their own ‘homelands’, the shared nature of myths of origin and historical memories of the community, the common bond of a mass, standardized culture, a common territorial division of labor (...) a unified system of common legal rights and duties under common laws and institutions” (Smith 1992, 60). Nina identifies with her father’s culture because Algeria, specifically the city of Alger, is the place of her childhood, while France is just an abstract notion: “Je suis habillée pour partir. Un grand voyage. Habillée pour quitter Alger. Pour me quitter. Habillée pour quitter ma vraie vie. Les jeans, les shorts, les maillots en éponge, les claquettes, les cheveux ébouriffés, ça va pour ici. Pas pour la France. Être présentable. Bien coiffée. Faire oublier. Que mon père est algérien. Que je suis d’ici, traversée” [I am dressed to leave. A big journey. Dressed to leave Alger. To leave me behind. Dressed to leave my real life. The jeans, the shorts, the bodysuits in a sponge, the flip-flops, the tousled hair, this is acceptable here. It is not in France. To be presentable. With the hair done. To forget. That my father is Algerian. That I am from here, just brought from France] (Bouraoui 2008, 92).

The character has the same name as the author, but she remains a portrait made up within the narrative. While Nina’s story is inconsistent in terms of chronological time and conflict ¹³, the narrative brings into play the need for coherence and aftermath rethinking of the

original experience as if the author tried to rationalize the past through narration. A strong biographical element continues through the use of the first person¹⁴ although there is a clear boundary between the author (Bouraoui), the narrator (an older Nina), and the main character (the teenager Nina).

As Nina is about to discover, identity formation is a personal ideology that feeds from national and ethnic collective data. Born between two cultures, Nina uses her position as an outsider to observe the opposites and to find a way to reconcile old wounds. In this regard, her name is representative: B-o-u-r-a-o-u-i, literally the father [abi] of the storyteller [raba]. She is destined to speak out for her people on her father's side.

Another conflict in her search for identity is the dichotomy French versus Algerian political agenda. She recognizes the French culture based on a strong territorial concept of nation and citizenship, while the Algerians are still fighting colonial domination. France is a good example of Europe's tendency towards preserving national heritage and values. This tendency has been further developed into extreme security policies, as observed by Nina when passing airport French customs: "Furthermore, violent security policies are being waged in the name of Europe by countries that serve as the main entry points to Fortress Europe – now exacerbated by the conjecture of the 'global war on terror'" (Fricker & Gluhovic 2013, 8).

Malika Mokeddem's narrative also builds a story around another person's reality, while the narrator clearly shares the author's life experience and ideas on ethnic and gender identity. This intentional confusion enables a better understanding of author's psychology and mystics¹⁵. Like the author Mokeddem, the main character Sultana Medjaded is born in a desert Algerian village and becomes a doctor in Montpellier. Back home to the village of Ain Nekhla, Sultana reflects on how the exile offers the emotional distance to understand her birthplace: "L'exile est l'aire de l'insaisissable, de l'indifférence réfractaire, du regard en déshérence" [the exile is a land of elusiveness, meta-reflection, the wondering gaze] (Mokeddem 1993, 17). Sultana presents herself as a rebel because she does not believe anymore in the patrimony of memories, traditions, and funding mythology, still deeply rooted in the old village¹⁶.

A different view on this matter brings Vincent, another character in the book. As a French man who receives a kidney transplant from a dead Algerian woman, Vincent resurfaces a strange case of mixed national and sexual identity, much as the one noticed in Bouraoui's story of Nina. By physical association he truly feels a kinship with his donor and travels to Algeria: "Nous sommes un homme et une femme, un Français et une Algérienne, une survie et une mort siamoises" [We are a man and a woman, a French and an Algerian, survival and death twins] (Mokeddem 1993, 31).

Sultana finds in her singularity a weakness that torments her already fragile condition - as a child she witnessed her father killing her mother, her younger sister death, and her father abandonment. After meeting Vincent, she learns from him to look at the past from the outside and to see clearly into her future.

Sultana is not only suffering from her own family drama but she has empathy for all Algerian women submitted to private and public sexual discrimination: “Si l’Algérie s’était véritablement engagée dans la voie du progrès, si les dirigeants s’étaient attelés à faire évoluer les mentalités, je me serais sans doute apaisée. L’oubli me serait venu peu à peu. Mais l’actualité du pays et le sort des femmes, ici, me replongent sans cesse dans mes drames passés, m’enchaînent à toutes celles qu’on tyrannise” [If Algeria had genuinely engaged on the path of progress, if governors had started to change the mentalities, I would have undoubtedly found peace. Forgetfulness would have come to me step by step. But the reality of the country and the women’ destiny here immerse me continuously in my past dramas, they chain me to all of these women under tyranny] (Mokkedem 1993, 155).

Finding kinship among other women gives a pedagogical sense to their stories for future generations to help them navigate stereotypes and discrimination. This side is particularly expressed in Chitziane’s story where women have long discussions about their misfortune. Rami

and the wives are convinced that Mozambican women are real pillars to their nation in educating young women and men: “ We shall teach men the beauty of forbidden things: the pleasure of weeping the taste of the wings and feet of the chicken, the beauty of fatherhood, the magic of the rhythm of the pestle as it grinds the grain. Tomorrow, the world will be a more natural place.” (Chiziane 2016, 433) Women do not complot against cultural heritage; they simply respond to realities of their time, unfit to ancestors’ traditions: “it’s very hard to accept polygamy in an age when women are affirming themselves and conquering the world” (Chiziane 2016, 460).

By comparison, it is no accident that Sultana becomes a mentor for the young Dalila, in Mokeddem’s narrative. She encourages the young pupil to continue her studies and to build a life independent of her illiterate brothers and father. Dalila’s dreams reflect a desire to escape her people’ nationalism as well as a powerful tendency towards western, oblivious of the weight of nationalism and traditions in France. Although aware of disadvantages immigrants were facing at the time¹⁷ , Dalila feeds utopian images of France as honorable, powerful, and omniscient.

Looking at this progressive acceptance of ethnic performance and gender identity by young female and male characters, political initiative and social equity appear to be a generational phenomenon. Nina from Bouraoui’s

story is continuously revolting by contrast to the peaceful and invisible presence of her parents. She performs cultural differences with such a tenacity as if one generation would catch up with the lack of voice from their predecessors. The same happens to Rami in Chitziane's novel who learns from her mother's silences about her aunt's death at the hand of her husband. Determined to light out the truth she will speak up for the old women. Sultana, who avoids falling on her mother's victimized steps, transcends Mokeddem's view on generational transformation too. It is clear that, beyond its therapeutic power, their literature creates sites of memory meant to educate on heritage; to learn, assess, and criticize it.

Within Chiziane's story *The First Wife*, the readers are familiarized with the artist's ethnic background, with the region's customs, history, cultural traditions, and even geographical details. Rami, raised in the south, is not familiar with the polygamy of the north: "A husband isn't a loaf of bread to be cut with a knife, a slice for each woman. Only Christ's body can be squeezed into drops the size of the world, in order to satisfy all the believers in their communion of blood" (Chiziane 2016, 23). This kind of documentation is highly creative in a story that promises the benefits of tolerance and acceptance.

As a result of these major transformations operated by the literary, these novels function with all the apparatus that engaged literature implies, including the power to exorcize (Artaud 2000, 39) mysterious, latent, altercations,

and old feuds. The public success of Bouraoui, Mokeddem, and Chitziane's stories is explained not only by the appeal of their writing style but also by their characters whose main advocacy comes from cultural heritage towards a redefinition or displacement¹⁸ of old national identities. They voice different minor identities established on their own right and decentralize the assimilative political strategies of French colonial discourse and Algerian/Mozambican discourse of tradition.

Literature has the potential to link people with different national interests, history, and material conditions. In Antonin Artaud's words, culture speaks the language of the soul: "La vraie culture agit par son exaltation et par sa force" [The true culture acts by its exaltation and its force] (Artaud 2000, 16). African women's writing transmits an electrified spectacle of life by which it mirrors a minority's will to change. As proved by the Bouraoui, Mokeddem, and Chiziane's novels, this literature harmonizes the global and the local cultures, and subsequently the family factors and the communitarian identities. If the patriarchal discourse disregarded women by gender principle and the poor women by socio-economic strategy, the oppressed were able in these stories to overcome handicaps and to stand for their rights to build a better life. Education and financial independence changed the terms of real-life conditions for these characters. Moreover, old traditions such as polygamy do not answer to modern times wishes. The strong characters within these

stories reflect a harmonious, inclusive African society in continuous change, more tolerant to all identities: “In the modern era of industrial capitalism and bureaucracy, the number and in particular the scale of possible cultural identities have increased yet again” (Smith 1992, 58).

NOTES:

1. For the readers: “l’auteur se définit comme la personne capable de produire ce discours, et il l’imagine donc à partir de ce qu’elle produit” (the author is defined as the person capable to produce these discourses, and she-the reader- imagines him-the author- starting with what has been written) (Lejeune 1975, 23).

2. Due to the “obligation to consider a human being as a whole [...] adequate to the richness and complexity of the human being as a whole” (Batters 2006, 31).

3. In her anthology on *The Narrative Mediterranean*, Claudia Esposito marks the beginning of the Maghrebi literature in French in the 1950’s and 1960’s, a time

that coincides with Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria's political independence, when: "numerous writers left the Maghreb for France" (Esposito 2014, XII).

4. During the '90s, France took the first steps towards understanding these millennial African writers and their continuous lack of stability to a certain national identity.

5. Economic dominance, ended up with a massive migratory phenomenon in the recent years, a story that seems to repeat Albert Memmi's prediction on colonialism, only transposed into modern capitalist terms.

6. Another Algerian, Hélène Cixous builds in *The Laugh of the Medusa* an account for the difficulty to overthrow historical-cultural limits that oppose women to men, or a race to another one.

7. As mentioned by Gordon Philip and Sophie Meunier in *Globalization and French Cultural Identity*.

8. The language is unstable and volatile in Maghreb mainly because French still dominates the public space: "As the Algerian Italoophone writer Tahar Lamri concurs, writing in French affords a larger readership and has the advantage of eliciting debates around the world – including with other Algerians of course" (Esposito 2014, 158).

9. Rami is a modern acronym for Rosa Maria, suggesting the character's tendency towards modernity.

10. Rami acts as a historian and conduct her research not only among her sister wives but women everywhere. One woman from Zambezia has five children mirroring her country's history: the eldest boy is the result of a rape by a Portuguese during the colonial war; her second is a black son from a rape by "the freedom fighters"; another mulatoo comes from the Rhodesian commandos who destroyed the freedom fighters; a fourth son is from the rebels in the civil war; and the fifth, the only one that is the coronation of love and peace with a man that she truly loved.

11. One woman in the market advises her: "keep your money hidden away in a corner. Money in a man's pocket is for all of his women. In a woman's hands, it's bread and food" (Chiziane 2016, 174).

12. Rami imposes on Tony the responsibility for his five women and sixteen children. She invites all of them to his 50th anniversary and has them recognized in front of the entire family and community.

13. "At any rate, we cannot avoid noticing that self-representation takes many non-Narrative forms. Many (writers) see themselves, not in terms of story or plot, but in terms of character, in terms of roles and seek

to be consistent in their display of character” (Batters 2006, 39).

14. In the Autobiographical pact, Philippe Lejeune refers back to Gerard Genette’s comments on the autodiegetic narrations: " Mais il (Gerard Genette) distingue fort bien qu'il peut y avoir récit à la première personne sans que le narrateur soit la même personne que le personnage principal" [But he distinguishes carefully that it is possible to have a first-person narration without having the narrator identical to the main character] (Lejeune 1975, 16).

15. “confusion sur laquelle est fondée toute la pratique et la problématique de la littérature occidentale depuis la fin du XVIIIème siècle” [confusion on which are founded the entire practice and ideas of the Occidental literature since the end of the eighteenth century] (Lejeune 1975, 33).

16. She feels the displacement because a nation, as defined by Renan (“What is a nation?”), is a community united around the will to share and to continue these traditions.

17. Immigrants nowadays radically contest nationalistic values that are traditionally based on ethnic origins, culture and language, patriotism, and other common national interests. Such nationalistic criteria are obsolete in the light of post-industrial society and cosmopolitan culture (Smith 1992, 63-65).

18. By national displacement this study understands one's identity in a context of rupture from a certain nation and culture under the pressure of political and social urgencies of assimilation by European cultures.

19. Change comes inevitably from the socio-economical terms: "Often steeped in mystery, roots and rites are secondary to what exists in the present and in the material world" (Esposito 2014, 22).

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