"IN PLACE OUT OF PLACE": THE CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY AND PLACE IN MUSLIM WOMEN'S FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

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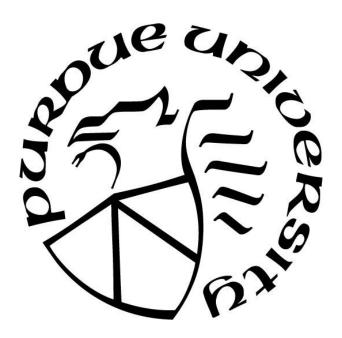
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To Baba, much love to you

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ABSTRACT

Author: Ismail, Riham. PhD
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Title: "In Place Out of Place": The Construction and Negotiation of Identity and Place in Muslim
    Women's Fictional Narrative
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This dissertation examines the negotiations between narrative, identity, and place in the fictional works of three major contemporary Muslim women descendants of Arab immigrants: Leila Houari, Faiza Guène, and Mohja Kahf. The study focuses on four novels: *Zeida de nulle part*, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, and *The Girl with The Tangerine Scarf*.

Two key questions structure my examination of the four novels: 1) How do Muslim women living in a non-Muslim society construct and negotiate their individual and collective identities?; 2) To what extent does their experience of space (domestic, public, national) shape their perceptions of self? These questions form a foundation for better understanding the experience of Muslim women living in predominantly non-Muslim societies. I must emphasize, however, that this is in no way a representation of all Muslim women living in majoritarian non-Muslim societies and in no way can summarize each and every experience. If anything, the dissertation provides an account of diverse sets of experiences of what some may encounter, rather than a collective static representation.

By doing so, this study aims to decrease the dissonance between the different viewpoints of the women characters in these novels by highlighting their experiences and subjecting certain misconceptions to critical scrutiny. The dissertation relies on an interdisciplinary approach, as it

integrates different theories and concepts ranging from cognitive science, postcolonial studies, literary studies, psychology, and religious studies.

INTRODUCTION

A human's relationship with space is increasingly recognized as a substantial component in the construction of individual identity (Taylor 3). Urban theoretician Edward Soja asserts that "The spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance" (1), and that this is mainly due to an increasing awareness of the interdependence of different social, historical, and spatial components and their complex intertwined roles in nourishing each other (3, 7). Understanding the interface of space and human cognition is particularly significant in the context of discussing identity construction in groups of marginalized women whose sociocultural experience of space is frequently circumscribed by limits and prohibitions. Through the fictional writing of women, it is possible to explore different perceptions and enactments of space across cultures, time periods and individual experiences. In her essay "Theory and Space, Space and Women" Ruth Salvaggio describes this process: "Instead of shaping masculine space into something feminine, these women bring feminine space to life by writing from, through, and about the spaces women themselves have occupied" (262). Some critics, for example, Eveline Kilian and Hope Wolf, go so far as to claim that life writing, or writing of the self, cannot be achieved without a relationship to space. They further assert that formation of identity through life writing frequently depends on one's sense of self and movement in connection with space. In other words, the ability to (re)locate one's self in varied and diversified cultures and different social contexts and spaces triggers the construction of self and its narrative since "the physical journey correspond[s] to an inner, metaphorical journey of the self" (Kilin & Woolf 1). Space, then, is not only a context, a background, for one's story, but more importantly central to personal identity. Michel De Certeau takes this one step further to indicate the intricate relationship/link between narrative and space (91; 115). He emphasizes how the Athenians call the vehicles used in

transportation "metaphori"and then proposes that stories are "metaphori" since "they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (De Certeau 115). With a similar interest in the association between writing and space, Gérard Genette discusses the "spatiality of language" (43-48). For Genette, the written literary work is innately (or intrinsically) spatial: "Cette spatialité du langage considéré dans son système implicite, le système de la langue qui commande et détermine tout acte de parole, cette spatialité se trouve en quelque sorte manifestée, mise en évidence, et d'ailleurs accentuée, dans l'oeuvre littéraire, par l'emploi du texte écrit" (45), 'This spatiality of language, considered in terms of the system implicit to it, the language system which controls and determines any speech act, this spatiality is somehow manifested, revealed, and indeed accentuated in the literary work, via the written text'.[1]

In this dissertation, I examine the notion of space from two perspectives. First, approaching space as an actual environment in which the characters interact and shape their identities, I rely on Henri Lefebvre's conception of a spatial connection as "an interaction between 'subjects'"—i.e., the main characters in the novels "and their space and surroundings." Second, I approach the space of autobiographical and biographical narratives as a *virtual* space. In this *virtually* created space, marginalized and minority women are able to locate the self, express their feelings and construct their narrative identity by narrating their own stories. Space in the form of fictional narratives, whether autobiographical or biographical, furnishes them with a potentially nonrestrictive and all-inclusive space in which they can express and construct themselves. It must be stressed that theoreticians have established a difference between space and place. For instance, Henri Lefebvre argues that space is a mental perception and that it is conceived as abstract; thus, space is perceived

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[1] Amy Wigelsworth's translation p.27.

as a conceptual experience (313). Lefebvre further explains that "the content of the concept of space is not absolute space or space in itself; nor does the concept contain a space within itself […] rather the concept of space denotes and connotes all possible spaces, whether abstract or 'real,' mental or social. And in particular it has two aspects: representational spaces and representations of space" (299). On the other hand, place is seen as the physical environment, the concrete occupied location and the surroundings. However, throughout this study, I use space, place, location, surroundings, and nature interchangeably to mainly refer to the physical environment.

The literary narratives I have identified within the parameters of this research project are profound statements related to the processes of identity construction by three very different and significant authors: Leila Houari, Faiza Guène, and Mohja Kahf. It focuses on four novels published between 1985 and 2006: *Zeida de nulle part, Kiffe kiffe demain, Du rêve pour les oufs,* and *The Girl ith The Tangerine Scarf.* I have chosen these three women authors of Arab and Muslim background, as their works explore the negotiations between narrative, identity, and place. The three authors are descendant of immigrants of Arab origins and the four novels deal with the topic of alienation and foreignness, with the four main characters all being marginalized in their societies. Through examining the work of these Arab-Belgian, Arab-French, and Arab American women authors it is possible to define different issues which are relevant to or may inform policy construction and advocacy groups. It is important here to emphasize that the experiences I am presenting are very genuine idiocentric experiences for a specific population and not allocentric. That being emphasized, the questions and tools I use to understand the very unique experiences, are also relevant to discussions of identity construction beyond these populations.

Two key questions structure my examination of the four novels: 1) How do Muslim women living in a non-Muslim society construct and negotiate their individual and collective identities?;

2) To what extent does their experience of space (domestic, public, national) shape their perceptions of self? These questions form a foundation to better understand the experience of Muslim women living in predominantly non-Muslim societies. Undoubtedly, examining Muslim women's experiences comes with its own baggage of an imposed homogeneity originating from a stereotypical view rooted in a western perspective as well as within these women's communities respectively. Therefore, this new genre of literature challenges this dangerous perspective, and the writing itself can be perceived antidotal as it questions these stereotyping and monolithic constructions. It is my contention that this is in no way a representation of all Muslim women living in majoritarian non-Muslim societies and in no way can summarize each and every experience. If anything, the dissertation provides an account of diverse sets of experiences of what some may encounter, rather than a collective static representation. By doing so, this study aims to decrease the dissonance between the different viewpoints by highlighting the experiences of these women characters and subjecting certain misconceptions to critical scrutiny.

The fictional narratives of Muslim women writers of Arab descent at the center of this dissertation, represent two different continents, the U.S. and Europe, and three nations: Belgium, France, and the United States. The literary genres of these focal works are both autobiographical and biographical. In her article "Fictional autobiography as a feminist tool," Agubue Nweze examines women writers in the Caribbean and African diaspora. Nweze notes that the autobiographical narration "make[s] the female character come alive; thereby forcing readers and critics to reckon with her development as a living human being within the society" (137).

Moreover, while some western feminists still perceive Muslim women writers' experiences and writings as monolithic, these fictional narratives elucidate the diversity of women from a

Muslim culture or identifying as Muslim. This form of expression also provides an opportunity for self-definition and assertion.

The dissertation relies on an interdisciplinary approach as it integrates different theories and concepts ranging from cognitive science, postcolonial studies, literary studies, psychology, and religious studies. The question of identity and its relationship to narrative in Muslim women authors has been approached mostly from a postcolonial angle. For instance, Reem Hilal examines how the events of September 11 have impacted the construction and negotiation of identity. However, it has not been examined from cognitive perspective and through the lens of the intersectionality between space and narrative nor within feminist theorist bell hooks[2]' framework of narrative and language as a place of struggle (16, 17). For hooks, space means the place the voice comes from; it is not only "where I am coming from" but also "the multiple voices within me" (16).

The study draws on different theoretical texts and authors such as narrative psychologists: Kate McLean and Ros Crawley, Sociologist Jean Beaman, environmental theoretician Peter F. Perreten, literary critics Evelin Kilin and Hope Wolf. The study relies on narrative psychologists Kate McLean and Ros Crawley to argue the importance of family stories in shaping self- narrative and the significance of shifting pronouns. It employs Philipe Lejeune's theory on the construction of autobiography and environmental theoretician Peter F. Perreten on the relationship between autobiography and self in nature. The study also relies on sociologist Jean Beaman's work to understand race and ethnicity through the experience of children of North African descent living in France. It turns to Evelin Kilian and Hope Wolf for their framework on life narrative and its intersectionality with space. For the Arab American context, it engages literary critics such as

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[2] hooks purposely does use lower case when styling her name.

Carol Fadda-Conrey, Stephen Salaita for the literary context and Kim Knott on the influence of religion on human's spatial conception.

As previously mentioned, the three authors I have chosen for examination in this study represent different backgrounds and national identities. In the case of Arab-Belgian author Leila Houari and Arab-French author Faiza Guène, an analysis cannot be conducted without historically contextualizing their writings within the colonial and postcolonial scope. Understanding French colonial history becomes pertinent as it still manifests itself in some current French policies and their perception of North African immigrants. The relationship between France and North African countries—specifically the Maghreb—dates back to the French colonization of Algeria in 1830. A year later, France advanced towards Tunisia and declared it a protectorate in 1831, and then in 1862 declared Morocco as a second French protectorate. Tunisia and Morocco gained their independence in 1956, while Algeria remained an overseas French territory until 1962 (Beaman 8). Colonization produced a disadvantaged status not only for individuals of Maghrebi origin but also for the children of immigrants to whom it is passed down. North Africans were portrayed as "culturally" different than their French colonists, "an attitude that persists in the postcolonial period" (8).

The emigration of immigrants of North African origins to France began during the 1900s. After the First World War, France brought a large number of immigrants from its colonies for the purpose of reconstructing France (Beaman 8). However, despite the fact that these immigrants were recruited as temporary labor, a large number ended up settling down in the country with no prospect of returning back (8-9). Literary critic Max Silverman emphasizes how North African immigrants "were marginalized and excluded from full participation in French society. Economically they frequently performed the dirtiest and most menial tasks; legally they were

disadvantaged as they were not French citizens and therefore did not have the same rights as the French; socially and geographically they were confined to areas on the outskirts of major cities" (46). The number of immigrants from the Maghreb kept on growing, and by 1970, hundreds of thousands of Algerians migrated to France (Beaman 8). Upon the suspension of the migration of low-skilled North African workers to France in 1974, this growing number of working-class immigrants ended up living permanently in France (8). They settled in the HLM (Habitation à Loyer Modéré), which is the common French term for low income housing. These HLMs are densely populated by immigrants and their descendants, and they are mainly located outside of Paris and different French cities. Although they are born and raised in France, descendants of immigrants of North African origin are often perceived as outsiders (12). Francophone scholar Laura Reeck argues: "With specific reference to France, the North African immigrant community has come to symbolize such outsiders on the inside. It has formed as a direct result of post-war and postcolonial immigration and of family reunification that brought women and children to join a male working immigration in France" (Reeck 14).

Due to their social and spatial exclusion and being caught between different cultures, second generation immigrants found themselves "forced to create their own" slang language and culture (Lefkowitz 313). Consequently, Verlan becomes "an attempt to validate the culture of the banlieue" (313) and the commonly called Beur Literature becomes a medium in which they are able to express their identities and experiences. The Beur Literature is used to describe the literary works produced by the children of North African immigrants living in France such as Leila Houari, Azouz Begag, Soraya Nini, Farida Belghoul, and Rachid Djaïdani. Formed in the 1980s, the term Beur, which I discuss in greater detail in my second chapter, is often used to describe second generation immigrants of North African origins. The latter consider the term pejorative as it

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negatively portrays the HLMs and their residents (Kleppinger 5; Beaman 12). Reeck emphasizes the difficulty the children in the North African community have found "to talk about themselves" (15) caused by their rejection to the "beur" label. Alain Battegay and Ahmed Boubekar argue how the French media perceive them as a "vogue": "La mode beur connaît de larges implications commerciales et un look branchébanlieue, 'jeune', 'beau', 'exotique' s'impose comme une voie d'accès à la scène publique, à des carrières dans le spectacle, la politique ou les médias" (60–61), 'The Beur vogue had commercial ramifications, and a hip banlieue look took hold— young, attractive, exotic. This look became a primary means of getting access to a career on stage, in politics, or in the media'.[3]

However, the rise of the Beur Literature in 1999 forced journalists and the French media to acknowledge its potentiality (Kleppinger 162). At the same time, with the growing body of literature that focuses on the banlieue and its problems, the Beur Literature developed to a new subgenre known as "romans de la banlieue" 'the Banlieue novels' (Kleppinger 163). Additionally, the topics discussed in the banlieue literature demonstrate a shift from the commonly discussed themes in Beur Literature. Thus, with authors such as Faiza guène and Karim Amellal, the attention in the banlieue novels begins to move beyond the North African immigrant population to an interest in the difficulties they face living in the urban/banlieue setting (166, 167).

Next, I provide an overview of each chapter of the dissertation. The chapters are organized chronologically in the order of the date of publication of the novels.

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[3] Laura Reeck's translation p.15.

Chapter 1: *Zeida de nulle part:* **Leila Houari**

Identity and shifting voices

  In this chapter I discuss the concept of writing as a safe space in which the main character is able to express herself and her thoughts. In *Zeida de nulle part,* Belgian Beur author Leila Houari*,* traces the journey of young Zeida and her search for self-identification. By using two different points of view and pronouns (I and she) the author Houari narrates her (auto/biography) which appears to use two different voices. Living between two cities, Brussels and Fez, and two cultures, Zeida is lost between the two worlds. This displacement is evident not only in the story but also in the (auto)biographical narrative in which the novel is produced. Consequently, the reader can observe clearly an entanglement between the two voices of the author along with Zeida. I argue that the shifts between first and third perspective create a sense of closure and a complete acceptance of the self for both Zeida and Houari.

Chapter 2: *Kiffe kiffe demain***: Faiza Guène**

Identity and pop culture

  This chapter explores the question of identity and its relationship to the spatial in the French context. It considers Faiza Guène's first autobiographical novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain,* and examines the influence stories told through media have on narratives of the self. I argue that pop culture gives Doria, Guène's main character, a sense of both individual and collective identity. I claim that the character's reliance on pop culture in narrating her life and in some cases envisioning her future provides her with a sense of self. I conclude that pop culture gives her a safe space into which she can escape and in which she can process her feelings of parental and social exclusion. At the same time, I show how the strategy of coping through pop culture emerges due to the failure of a social

and political system to include her, whether due to her race, ethnicity, gender, or simply what she represents.

Chapter 3: *Du rêve pour les oufs*: Faiza Guène

Gender identity and place

This chapter will examine in more detail the impact of space on the construction of identity narratives by focusing on Faïza Guène's second novel, *Du rêve pour les oufs*. Understanding the influence place has on gender roles and identities is significant. It also not only puts into context but also sets the stage for discussions on gender relations (Duncan1). I look into the question of identity in the spatial context. I examine the varied ways in which the main character, Ahlème, experiences space. I argue that place plays a critical role in autobiographical narrative. I also explore the significant influence space has on the flow of self-narrative.

Chapter 4: *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf*: Mohja Kahf

Religion, space, and life

I explore the relationship between life writing, memory, and the physical environment in the Arab-American context. I underline the importance of memory for the construction of identity and how memory intersects with narrative and space in Mohja Kahf's biographical novel *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf.* At the same time, I investigate the relationship between religion and space by conducting a spatial analysis of the main spaces presented in the novel and their impact on the construction of the identity of the main character, Khadra. I provide an analysis for the four spaces she experiences throughout the course of the novel, starting from Indiana —where the story begins— to[4] Mecca, Damascus, Philadelphia, and lastly back to Indiana again where the biography

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[4] See Fadda-Conrey.

ends. As she engages with these different spaces, she deconstructs and reconstructs her sense of

self.

CHAPTER 1.   BELONGING TO NOWHERE AND EVERYWHERE: FEMININE IDENTITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A THIRD SPACE IN LEILA HOUARI'S *ZEIDA DE NULLE PART*

While in London on a book tour for her bestselling autobiography *Becoming*, Michelle Obama describes herself as a "Storyteller" rather than a writer. The former first lady further remarks to her interviewer, feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and the audience attending the sold-out event, "I wanted this book to read like a story. I wanted young people to get lost in the journey." Ms. Obama's statement can't help but raise several questions: First, why would she describe herself as a storyteller? Second, why is it essential for her that her autobiography would be read like a story? Third and more importantly, what is it about stories that make them substantial frameworks in any individual life's account?

Stories are oral or written accounts that we create in order to understand ourselves and the world around us. Sometimes we are our own author, the storyteller of our own story. Other times, we are mere characters, taking role in someone else's story. However, whether we are the major protagonist deuteragonist, or simply one of the supporting characters, one can agree on the fact that "we are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell" (McAdams et al. 3). Undeniably these narratives are salient as one relies on them to understand the world he or she inhabits. Storytelling also creates a space of self-constructing and internalizing one's own self-definition. Narrative psychologists and theorists emphasize that identity is not only explored but also digested through the accounts one creates and tells about him or herself. As psychologist Kate McLean asserts "stories help us understand the outer world, they also bring meaning and sense to an inner world. We use stories to make sense of our selves. It is with and through stories that we develop an understanding of our selves through time – an identity" (2). Anthony Giddens takes it one step

further and claims an interconnectedness between the self and reflexivity. Hence identity encompasses one's capability to create a reflexive and coherent narrative of the self, instead of simply signaling character traits (53). It is imperative here to underscore the multiplicity of these narratives of the self as they vary based on different factors such as time, place, and occasions.

Over a hundred years ago, American philosopher and psychologist William James distinguished between the "I" and the "me" in the self-identity narrative. According to James, the first reflects the self as the teller or the narrator of a story while the second concerns the self as "the story" being told. The autobiographical self emerges when one becomes the narrator of his or her own life. Thus, it could simply be summarized as "The 'I' tells a story of the self, and that story becomes part of the me" (McAdams et al 3). With this distinction between the "self as a subject" and the "self as an object" there is then a multiplicity of voices in the psychological life of the "I". Dutch psychologist Bert Hermans substantiates this:

> [We] Conceptualize the self in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of relative?? I-positions. In this conception, the 'I' has the possibility to move from one spatiality to another in accordance with changes in situation and time. The 'I' fluctuates among different and even opposed positions and has the capacity imaginatively to endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between voices can be established … Each of them has a story to tell about his or her own experience, from his or her own stance … resulting in a complex narratively structured self. (248)

Hence, the 'I' positions are diverse and express different perspectives in the same individualistic subjective experience. These various stances of one single pronoun portray nothing but a reflection of the multiplicity in one's psychological experiences. As a result, one's life story becomes a dialogue, or a conflict between narrators, perhaps even a "war of historians" in one's head (Raggat 18). These shifting voices represents a dialogical self.[5] One here can assume that different shifting

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[5] This term was first introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin and was later adopted and developed by psychologist Hubert Hermans.

voices in one's narrative represent a common experience. They also represent the different angles from which one sees one's life story unfolds and the importance of using different perspectives to fully comprehend one's own experience. Moreover, the shifiting voices serve as a tool in the process of producing coherent self-narrative. I would take this one step further and argue that if we have shifting voices inside subjective experience, then it becomes pertinent to narrate one's life story using different pronouns to convey and deliver different voices. The next question would be then, what if the autobiographical text narrated by the person herself or himself uses third person pronoun alternately with the first-person pronoun? In other words, the narrator and the author use a 'she' or a 'he' to express themselves in alternative sequence with an 'I'?

The famous French essayist and autobiography expert Philippe Lejeune explains that constructing an autobiography using a "she" or a "he" (third person pronoun) instead of the "I" (first person) is as perplexing as using the "I" (first-person pronoun) instead of the "he" or "she" (third). According to Lejeune, the discrepancy occurs when a "he" or a "she" is used to express an "I", at the same time as an "I" is used to describe a "he" or a "she" (Lejeune 29). On the alternate use of first and third person pronouns in an autobiography Lejeune emphasizes that the bilaterality of the narrational voices (I and she/he) represents the variations of perceptions between the narrator and the protagonist of the story. These disparities between perspectives promote "the games of focalization and voice" (31). Leila Houari's *Zeida de nulle part* provides a good example of the entanglement between different pronouns and voices in self-portrayal narratives. The transition between the different pronouns makes it hard to categorize the novel in terms of its literary genre. As a result, the reader is left in limbo within an auto/biographic writing style. The ambiguous distinction may be perceived as an accurate portrayal of Zeida's quest of understanding and knowing the self.

In *Zeida de nulle part,* Houari traces the journey of young Zeida and her search for self-identification. Living between two cities, Brussels and Fez, and two cultures, Zeida is lost between the two worlds. Throughout the novel, Zeida tries to define herself according to one world without the other, all before realizing she is a product of both spaces –Belgium and Morocco. In an attempt to belong somewhere, Zeida goes to Fez in hopes of reconnecting with her roots. However, in seeking to belong somewhere she realizes that she belongs nowhere. Zeida then concludes:

> Étrangère, voilà. Elle se sentait tout bonnement étrangère, il n'avait pas suffi de revêtir une blouza, de tirer l'eau du puits pour devenir une autre, tous ils avaient essayé de lui faire plaisir, personne n'a pensé un seul instant qu'elle était sincère, qu'elle voulait effacer, faire une croix sur son passé, non personne, n'y a cru et elle avait fini par se convaincre aussi, le choix de s'être retirée totalement de tout ce qui pouvaient lui rappeler l'Europe n'avait fait qu'accentuer les contradictions qui l'habitaient . (Houari 74)

> Foreign, that's it. She just felt like a foreigner, it wasn't enough to dress like them, to draw water from the well to become someone else, everyone was trying to make her feel welcomed, no one thought for a single moment that she was sincere, that she wanted to erase, to put aside her past, no nobody believed it and she had ended up convincing herself too, the choice to have withdrawn completely from anything that could remind her of Europe had only accentuated the contradictions inside her. (Houari 74)[6]

On women's Beur[7] writing Touria Khanous argues that the authors often "depict situations in which the female protagonist experiences cultural dislocation between the home space and the space of the dominant culture" (Wylie, Hal, and Bernth 116). The story no doubt highlights not only the cultural but also the spatial displacement of Zeida, a factor which has become essential to her experience. This displacement is evidenced not only in the story but also in the (auto)biographical narrative in which the novel is produced. Consequently, the reader can clearly observe an entanglement between the two voices of the author along with Zeida. This

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[6] My translation.

[7] Literary works produced by the children of North African immigrants living in France.

entanglement asserts itself with the mixed use of the first and third person pronouns. Psychologist Ros Crawley emphasizes that "to repeatedly recount an open memory from a third person perspective increases closure" compared with recounting from an 'I' perspective (900). Therefore, I argue that repeated entanglement of the two pronouns creates a third space in which the author and the main character find a sense of closure. I claim that this third space not only liberates both, but rather provides them with an acceptance of who they are and facilitates their transitioning.

Houari shares some ground with her main character. Born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1958, Houari was the eldest of seven children and at the age of seven she moved with her parents to Belgium. Her apprehension of the duality of her identity as Moroccan and Belgian, and the complication that accompanies such existence have always been at the center her writings. No doubt writing, as she remarks, created a safe space for her where she can "traduire son malaise d'une manière positive", 'translate her discomfort in a positive way'[8] ("Ecrire ailleurs et être d'ailleurs"). Accordingly, writing becomes a venue in which she can soothe an unsettled self, a safe ground which provides comfort for a feeling of unbelonging.

> Fin des années septante, nous étions quelques jeunes, la plupart d'origine marocaine a nous intéresser au théâtre, à l'écriture. Tous nous étions en quête d'identité. Pendant des mois, nous avons cherché à connaître le Maroc, son histoire, ses traditions, la religion, les personnages qui ont fait son histoire, le Maghreb, pratiquement tout y est passé. Comme un petit noyau voulait s'adonner à l'écriture, nous avions décidé de lire et d'étudier les auteurs arabes d'expression française. D'expression française parce que nous étions tous venus très jeunes en Belgique et aucun de nous ne connaissait l'arabe. Une véritable boulimie s'empara de nous. Tout auteur arabe traduit ou écrivant en français nous le dévorions. Ce fut une période bénéfique et importante pour des jeunes comme nous qui avions absolument besoin de références pour nous affirmer. (qtd. in Redouane 43)

> At the end of the seventies, we were a few young people, mostly of Moroccan origin, we were interested in theater and writing. We were all looking for identity. For months, we tried to get to know Morocco, its history, its traditions, religion, the people who made its history, the Maghreb, practically everything happened there.

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[8] My translation.

We were a small group that devoted itself to the writing, we had decided to read and study Arab French-speaking authors. French speaking because we all came to Belgium very young and none of us understood Arabic. A real hunger for reading took hold of us. We would devour any writing by an Arabic author translated or writing in French. It was a beneficial and important period for young people like us who absolutely needed references to assert ourselves.[9]

This eagerness to read Arabic authors who produce their works in French can be translated into a desire to keep alive a 'lost heritage' while maintaining Belgian identity. Yet she seems to be haunted by that mere existence 'de l'entre deux'.

Some critics describe the literary production by Beur authors as an expression "of the dilemma of identity construction in the diaspora, highlighting not the both/and of biculturalism, but the neither/nor of homelessness" (Elia 49). Feminist literary theorist Gayatri Spivak calls attention to how "brown women" or women from developing countries are caught between two fires. Spivak notes "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak 306). For beurettes[10] it is a constant attempt to live up to different societal and cultural expectations and demands frequently imposed by their families from one side, and schools, politicians, and media from another. The families and the society are often at odds. As a result, women of Maghrebi descent often find themselves caught between two antithetical worlds/ stands (Keaton17). Unsuitably, both sides never prepared them for the difficulties of the process nor equipped them with the tools needed for adjustment and survival (17).

Similarly the works of many Beur authors and immigrant children, Houari's writings have dealt mainly with issues of dislocation and displacement between the two worlds. Consequently,

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[9] My translation.

[10] The french word used to descibe women from North African (Maghrebi) descent.

her writings have been nothing but entangled and adrift between them. Yet neither has fully accepted her. Thus Houari, like her heroine Zeida, fits in the "nulle part" or what Francophone scholar Valérie Orlando describes as "the no-(wo)man land between the two cultures" (Orlando 53). Undeniably Zeida struggles with her uprootedness as she feels she exists nowhere. She is what we can call "border woman"[11], in the sense that she lives between the two worlds as she is incapable of fully rooting her identity in Brussels. Yet when she goes to Morocco she is never considered as native either and she is constantly and alternatively referred to, by her extended family and the locals living there, as the "foreigner" or the "European". Upon her initial arrival and while touring the little Moroccan town with her cousin she hears everyone calling her the 'girl from Europe': "Partout où ils passaient elle croyait entendre Europe, Europe, fille d'Europe." Then she looks at her cousin and says "Dis, tu les entends, pour eux je ne suis plus la fille d'ici'" (68); 'Wherever they passed she thought she heard Europe, Europe, the European daughter […] "you hear them, for them I am no longer the girl from here"'.[12] This identification as a 'European/ foreigner' or 'stranger' prevails throughout the (aut)biography. For instance, when staying with her aunt in Morocco Zeida goes out for a walk and comes back late. The parental aunt was worried and by the time Zeida returns the aunt tells her, "Fais attention quand même, tu as eu de la chance: en général, ils sentent très vite les étrangers. [13] Zeida regarde sa tante bizarrement, étranger, qui est étranger ? C'est mon village ici, elle était triste maintenant" (Houari 43), 'Be careful though, you were lucky: in general, they quickly sense strangers. Zeida looks at her aunt in shock, a stranger, who is a stranger? Here is my village; she was sad now'.[14] In another scene, when she is

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[11] This term is introduced by Gloria Anzaldùa.

[12] My translation.

[13] Interestingly the word "étranger" means foreigner and could also mean stranger. Thus, this part could be read as Zeida being both a foreigner and a stranger at the same time.

[14] My translation.

walking with her cousin Mustapha while touring the little town in which her aunt lives, her cousin, (self-conscious of the passersby curiously staring at Zeida) tells her not to mind them as they are not used to seeing foreigners/ strangers during this season: "ils continuaient leur chemin, Mustapha lui disait de ne pas faire attention aux gens, ils ne voyaient pas beaucoup d'étrangers en cette saison, alors ils étaient curieux", 'they continued on their way, Mustapha told her not to pay attention to people's stares, since they are not used to see many foreigners during this time of the year'.

Even towards the end when her uncle (the aunt's husband) arranges with a jitney driver to take Zeida to Casablanca, he slips some money into the driver's assistant pocket and asked him to look after her, explaining "elle n'est pas d'ici elle a besoin d'être guidée" (74-75), 'she is not from here, she needs to be guided'.[15] His statement couldn't trigger any more confusion to the already lost and confused Zeida, who then internally reflects "Eh! Oui elle n'est pas d'ici, d'où était-elle?" (75), 'Yes she is not from here, where was she from?'.[16] As a result, Zeida proclaims that she is a tourist everywhere. She is constantly reminded in Brussels that she is not fully at home — "elle retrouva la nuit avec plaisir et soulagement, les néons dans cette ville absente tenaient la chandelle pour les âmes en mal d'amour, sur les murs des graffitis lui rappelaient qu'elle n'était pas dans son pays" (19), 'she found the night with pleasure and relief, the neon lights in this city and the graffiti on the walls reminded her that she was not in her country'. Hence, she tries to attach herself to her Moroccan identity, but "partout elle était touriste, cela elle ne pouvait pas l'accepter, sa gorge se serra" (75), 'she was a tourist everywhere, her throat tightened realizing it'.[17]

Throughout the (auto)biography Zeida is considered a foreigner. This foreignness lasts until almost the very end of the narrative. Yet the fact that she is Belgian and from 'Europe' gives

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[15] My translation.

[16] My translation.

[17] My translation.

her a status, a free space where she could do anything without being judged by Moroccan society because simply, she is not considered from there. Zeida is fully aware of that privileged status. Furthermore, she exploits this status whenever it suits her, at any time she sees fit, and as long as it benefits her. This becomes evident when she is with Watani, her cousin's best friend and someone with whom she gets romantically involved during her visit to Morocco. During their first meeting, Zeida excuses herself to go home so that her aunt won't worry about her. She asks him to meet the next day, and he agrees with pleasure, yet warns her to be cautious since people may talk about her. Zeida then replies: "Il n'y a pas de mal à parler et puis je suis une étrangère, fit-elle en riant, qu'est ce que cela peut leur faire" (Houari 57), '"Let them talk", She replied laughing, "what difference would it make?"'. [18] This back and forth between identities accentuate an unsettled mind. Accordingly, Zeida "exists on the margins of two identities: one Moroccan and one European" (Orlando 53). However, at the very end of the novel she realizes that home for her, which she used to think of as her origins and where she belongs, is not exclusively in one place. Finally, Zeida realizes, and only in the last few lines, that she belongs to "both sides of the Mediterranean" (Orlando 53; Houari 84). Indeed, her identity is shaped through "cultural globality". The latter is a term used by Homi Bhabha to describe an existence constructed "in the in-between space of double-frames" (Bhabha 216). This feeling of "in between" and "space of double-frames" reveals itself "linguistically" in the narrative (Orlando 53). This shift is perceived by the switch between the first person and the third person pronouns. Alec Hargreaves writes that the various voices intertwined in Houari's narration are meant to demonstrate to the reader the different set of struggles Zeida and her family go through. By enacting the tumult and

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[18] My translation.

"turmoil" most immigrant families undergo, Houari pushes the reader to experience what it is like to exist in the in-between of the Belgian and Moroccan cultures:

> When I discussed these twin narrators with the author, it became clear that Houari had initially adopted a homodiegetic approach because she wanted to recreate as vividly as possible the emotional turmoil which she herself has experienced as an adolescent. The switch to less emotive heterodiegetic narrator was a token of the increased psychological control enjoyed by the more mature Houari and, eventually, by the protagonist herself. (Heargraves 97)

In some parts of the text Zeida is referred to in the third person, while in other parts her voice and the narrator's voice are significantly mixed up and blended in the first person. The mingling of the narrator's and the main character's voices appear instantly in the opening paragraph of the novel:

> Je caresse ton corps pour effacer les larmes du temps. Un oiseau ce matin est venue surprendre le désir, les yeux sont souris tout simplement … A travers le vitre elle aperçoit une ombre bleue, croit voir la mer. Elle revient vers le lit où cette nuit des corps cherchaient le diamant des montagnes vertes. Elle replie les draps, range l'amour, rhabille sa mémoire, qui s'était un peu trop dévoilée. (Houari 13)

> I caress your body to erase the tears of time. A bird came this morning to surprise the desire, the eyes simply smiled ... Through the window she sees a blue shadow, she thinks she sees the sea. She gets back to bed where the bodies of this night were looking for the diamond of the green mountains. She folds the sheets, tidies up the love, gets back the memory.[19]

The prologue begins with an 'I' narration, yet the first-person pronoun is intermittently interrupted by the narration shifting to the third person pronoun. The shift could best describe her feelings of confusion and uncertainty. Throughout the novel Zeida relies on sex outside of marriage in an attempt to gain autonomy. These romances complicate her quest for self-identification along with her relationship with her parents, who see her sexual endeavors as a breach of the family's moral and cultural values (McConnell 104). They also symbolize the extent to which Zeida employs sex as she desperately seeks connections. Therefore, the change between pronouns demonstrates a

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[19] My translation.

sense of separation and distance from the self. She looks through the window and imagines seeing the sea outside. The sea here may represent an inner desire of the self longing for liberation, as the large body of water may seem freeing. About the strong attraction and the precariousness of the sea Nietzsche wrote

> *In the Horizon of the infinite:* We have left the land and embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us – indeed we have gone further and destroyed the land behind us. Now little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean […] it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage. Woe, when you feel homesick for land as if it had offered more *freedom* – and now there is no longer any 'land'. (Nietzsche 180)

According to Nietzsche, with infinity one is able to develop an "authentic self". The authentic self permits the individual to "realize great fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence". One can attain this optimal state by "liv(ing) dangerously" and "send(ing)" one's "ships into the unchartered seas" (Nietzche 283). Yet the sea also offers uncertainty and restriction which is bound to the constraining nature of its limiting infinity. The sea simultaneously offers the escape and the barrier. Along these lines, the imagination of this space, the sea, demonstrates its inaccessibility. This liberating place is unattainable and limiting at times due to familial, cultural, political and societal pressure put on Zeida, and on Beur women in general. The sea may be perceived as a space, a territory that separates her from home, yet at the same time it could carry her to home. In this fashion, it is a figure of both gathering and separation. Zeida's imagination of the sea after having sex connects her to the act as it provides her the 'freedom' of exploration and reinforces it. At the same time, it isolates and detaches her from the same act and in its turn from the real world she lives in. Sea and sexuality both represent an escapism from reality while also proposing an 'alternative reality'. One also notes that in disconnection with the actual space she is inhabiting – the room she is in and the bed she made love on – she constructs an alternative space – the imagined

sea through the window – and self-portrayal emerges through this imagined space. This mental space becomes imperative as it mirrors an inner reflection of an allegorical journey of the self. The sea is substantial for the construction of the narrative and fluidity of her inner thoughts, since it represents a liminal space, a transitional territory of the 'floating in the between' while waiting for the unknown. The liminal place is best defined by scholar Kathrin Tordasi as "that area which combines and confuses the territories that are usually separate" (137). Nature and sea have always captivated mainstream imagination as an embodiment of women. Who would forget John Fawles famous quote about the sea and women: "[n]o other element has such accreted layers of significance for us, such complex archetypal meaning. The sea's moods and uses sex it. It is the great creatrix, feeder, womb and vagina, place of pleasure; the gentlest thing on earth, the most maternal; the most seductive whore, and handsomely the most faithless. It has the attributes of all women […]" The sea then represents nature which embodies women in turn. In *Le Féminisme ou la mort*, ecofeminist Françoise d'Eaubonne establishes a correlation between the male's cultural suppression and exploitation of both women and nature (132). Consequently, the suppression of nature epitomizes that of women. In that sense, there is a duality and connection between the three notions: women and nature, self and nature, self and woman. Note also that the French word 'mer' ('sea') is a homonym with 'mère' ('mother'). With this shift between sea and motherhood the 'I' merges to a 'she'. In her study examining identity and home in the work of Grace Nicholas and Derek Walcott, Aleida Fokkema ponders the concept of sea:

> as a literary topos, the sea expresses both change and continuity, repetition and sameness […] the sea express metaphorically the link between the wanderer and the mother, between displacement and belonging. The sea, then, questions and reifies identity. It offers the continuity of history and ancestry, the sameness of community and belonging, but frames theses in uncertainty and change. The sea offers an idea of home without enforcing a possessive and restricting concept of belonging. (d'Haen 111)

If one applies the same theoretical perspective to Zeida's prologue, one can observe a "repetition and sameness" between Zeida's life story and that of her mother. This represents a connection between "wanderer and the mother", "displacement and belonging", as it presents "the continuity of history and ancestry". I shall stress here that throughout the novel her mother remains nameless, an element that will be discussed later in this chapter.

With this background, one then can comprehend such a merger between the two voices, the narrative shift between the 'I' and the 'she'. In the opening paragraph, we understand that Zeida goes to see her mother in order to tell her about a dream (Houari 13), in which another blend in between the two pronouns occurs. The daughter then becomes an embodiment of the mother's voice, and the daughter's self-narrative intersects with that of the mother. Zeida's mother was waiting for her in a dark room with white walls: "sa mère l'attendait dans une pièce sombre aux murs blanc, elle avait vieilli depuis le temps, oui!" (14). It is pertinent here to draw attention to another reflection between the mother and the room she is in. There is a spatial reflection, a representation of the human in the space and vice versa. The dark gloomy room with the 'white' walls mirrors the mother at the same time as she mirrors the kitchen she is in, which gives the impression that her existence emerges from the merger between her and the space. This fade into one another makes them a single entity. There is a connection between the depiction of the surrounding place and the portrayal of the self. This link raises the question whether the spatial element influences the construction of the mother's identity or whether it is the other way around.

The bodily presence becomes a reflection of the surrounding landscape. This accentuates the fact that places inhabited by characters have similar spirits and natures to the ones who inhabit them. In the figurative sense the mother's soul is waiting for her inside the white wall, which could be a representation or rather a reflection of her aging body. In that sense the mother's soul is

contained inside her body which is in turn caged inside a kitchen. The use of the pronoun "elle" is initially perplexing as it could signify the mother or simply reflect "la pièce" (the room). As a consequence, we get the idea that both the mother and the kitchen have aged. This mirroring image becomes a lived reality as it surpasses the spatial and becomes a representation and a symbol of the human internal as much as its external surroundings. Reasonably, one could argue that the merger between the mother and the room is nothing but demonstration of the mother's invisibility, an entity that cannot be distinguished from the space she inhabits. It may also represent an undeniable proof of the mother's existence, and at same time her nonexistence. This supposition proclaims itself in the opening lines, the reader's first encounter with the mother, when she talks about death and her desire to be gone.

> Tu sais me dit-elle, ceux qu'on aime sont déjà sous terre et on reste seul avec le vide; un jour de profond sommeil je voudrais mourir, mais propre, mon seul souhait c'est que vous mettiez mes plus beaux vêtements, tous sans en oublier un seul, comme cela les vers avant d'arriver à mon corps, passeront par la soie et le fil d'or. Elle pleurait maintenant. (Houari 14)

> You know she said to me, those we love are already deceased and we are left alone with the void; when my day comes I would like to die in my deep sleep, but clean, my only wish is that you dress me in my most beautiful clothes, all without forgetting a single one, so that before worms decompose my body, they will pass through the silk and the golden thread. She was crying now.[20]

It is important here to note that the mother narrative often emerges from the kitchen. She repeatedly defines home as "Chez moi, c'est là où je mange du pain", 'home is where I eat my bread' (Houari 84). In terms of the physical (her body) in relationship with the spatial, we notice that the mother has been consigned to the kitchen in Belgium. This is very interesting since the mother was also relegated to the domestic sphere when she was in Morocco, and after her marriage she moves with Zeida's father to Belgium where she is mostly in the kitchen and in which her

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[20] My translation.

narrative constantly ensues. This demonstrates her patriarchal imprisonment. In *Écarts d'identité*, Azouz Beggag and Abdellatif Chaouite argue that women of North African descentare limited and restrained to the physical space of 'the household' (69) in some cases.[21]

As the (auto)biography progresses, an accumulation and fusion between the different voices emerge. The reader notices another entanglement of the two pronouns 'she' and 'I' precisely when Zeida is in a conversation with her mother and especially when the latter expresses her sentiments and state of mind as she recounts her story. As Zeida learns about her mother's past, she also gets to see a new side of her mother as she opens up and shares her feelings. The reader can easily see her mother's feelings of dislocation and uprootedness while she was still living at her parent's home in Morocco. Growing up the mother herself struggled with her uprootedness as she was constantly considered a foreigner due to her light skin color. This light color skin would identify her with the French colonizer more than her Moroccan origin: "Je [sic] faisais les commissions, j'étais en robe, j'avais les cheveux blonds, la peau blanche, aussi lorsque j'arrivais près de chez moi […] les gamins me jetaient des pierres, ils pensaient que j'étais française" (Houari 32). This feeling of displacement and alienation is deeply rooted; one can trace in her narrative this subliminal sense of helplessness. As the mother remembers and constructs her own life story the pronouns merge and the "She" and "I" becomes alternatives. For example, when Zeida's mother tells Zeida about her childhood and how she married Zeida's father, she describes her own mother's feelings as follows:

> Ma mère avait les yeux tristes et rempli de larmes, jamais je ne l'avais vue
> dans cet état, elle allait et venait elle jeta sa djellaba sur elle. Comme elle était

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[21] I cannot stop stressing that this claim cannot be generalized to include all women of North African descent, as will be shown in the different novels that will be examined through this study. It is also important to re-emphasize that Hourai's novel was published in 1985and that since then is spatial notion that ties women to the kitchen has changed, as demonstrated in this study through later works by Faiza Guène.

veuve, il fallait qu'elle demande l'avis d'un homme, elle se rendit chez son frère et ne revient que tard dans la soirée ?

– Je ne dormais plus, je savais que bientôt toute ma vie serait bouleversée.

Jamais elle ne m'avait raconté un lien profond se renouait, la corde du puits était retrouvée, on pouvait boire un peu de l'eau …

Peut-être papa … Peut-être que lui aussi … pourrait me prendre par la main et me rendre mon enfance.

– Eh bien ya benti! tu [sic] veux connaître la suite tu as l'air distraite.

– Non, continue, j'ai des nuages dans la tête. (Houari 36)

My mother's sad eyes were filled with tears, I had never seen her in this state, she came and went she threw her djellaba on her. Since she was a widow, she had to ask a male guardian for advice, she went to her brother's house and didn't come back until late in the evening?

– I couldn't sleep anymore; I knew that soon my whole life would be turned upside down.

She had never mentioned it to me before and a deep bond was forged, the well cord was found, we could drink a little water ...

Perhaps dad ... Perhaps him as well ... could take my hand and give me back my childhood.

– Well benti! you want to know the rest you seem distracted.

– No, keep going, I have my head in the clouds.[22]

After Zeida's father asked for the mother's hand in marriage, the grandmother went to ask her brother's opinion since it was a cultural practice then to check for a man's thoughts on the matter. Zeida's mother then describes how her own mother felt and her own feelings and how she couldn't sleep at night knowing that her life would change forever. Then abruptly Zeida's thoughts intervene in the narration with the revelation that her mother had never told her this story: "Jamais elle ne m'avait raconté un lien profond se renouait" (36). According to Zeida, this revelation

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[22] My translation.

renewed their profound mother/daughter bond. Zeida then gets carried away, thinking that if her father shared his own story as well, it would help her reconcile with herself and gain a closer bond with him. Meanwhile, and as demonstrated in the previous citation, there is a merger between pronouns which by its turn results in an intricate framework of narrative and thoughts. It travels from straight narration of the mother about her own mother, to a dialogue between the mother and her daughter, and lastly to an internal monologue between Zeida and herself, all before it returns back again to the mother/daughter dialogue. I argue that the mother's story and experience made Zeida reflect on her own, as if her mother was voicing her daughter's thoughts, and the daughter has given her mother a voice. Accordingly, the daughter becomes part of the mother's narrative and the mother an important component of her daughter's inner monologue. No doubt the story of her mother's past has provided Zeida with a sense of her present, one can clearly observe that in the narrative where the pronouns/voices get mixed. Thus, the reader might still think it is the mother talking, only to realize that Zeida, and possibly Houari, have intervened in her thoughts. This intervention becomes clear for the reader only when the mother interrupts this merging process of thoughts/shifting pronouns by asking "Well now daughter! Are you paying attention? You seem/ look distracted". By mixing her thoughts with her mother's Zeida becomes an active agent, a part of her mother's story. We see an "I" emerging as an expressive voice of the main character Zeida, her mother, and probably the author herself through the narration. Hence, one can claim that the overlapping of voices has resulted in a mixed genre of an auto/biography. To further explain this argument a discussion about the mother/daughter bond would be of a value here, as it would provide a good perspective on the previous premise. To do so I rely on psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's spatial examination of the "mother-daughter bond" as it presents an analytical explanation of the notion of the "female body," which Benjamin considers

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a "transitional place" (Salvaggio 275). [23] Benjamin employs the notion of spatial metaphors

originally introduced by D. W. Winnicott. According to her, the female body becomes one

> in which the child can experience both the inner space of self and the space between self and other. As the young boy seeks to separate himself from the mother, the young girl more closely linked to her mother's body seeks both separation and connection. Woman's desire, understood in these spatial terms, makes her body a kind of "space-off" since she is at once separate from others and in between at once "here" and "elsewhere." (Benjamin 98)

The body here epitomizes a boundary and at the same time opens up into unlimited possibility

(Salvaggio 275). With Benjamin's argument in mind, one then can assume that the mix between

the 'she' and 'I' in Houari's novel could be seen as a continuation of this "separation and

connection" between mother and daughter. Psychologist Stephanie Taylor argues that in order for

women to construct their own self narrative, they rely on their parents' life story to shape or form

their own (61-66). Furthermore, Kate McLean in *The Co-Authored Self: Family Stories and The*

Construction of Personal Identity emphasizes the vital role family stories play, more specifically

mother's narrative (life stories), in defining one's own identity. As McLean' confirms, "Parents'

stories are like the DNA they gave us – they become part of us. Their stories become interwoven

into our own story – the stories of our mother and our father are braided together with our own

personal stories to form a mature identity […] *our parents' stories are our own*[24]" (McLean 102).

The act of Zeida's mother narrating her personal story then becomes redemptive and salvaging for

the daughter herself. An important aspect to consider here is that by telling her own story the

daughter was reminded of her mother's own humanity. Children often think of their parents and

define them according to their roles in the family as caregivers whose only duty is to work and

raise a family (McLean 83). They are authority figures and in some cases the reinforcers of cultural

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[23] The term "transitional place" was used by Ruth Salvaggio while explaining Jessica Benjamin's term the "intersubjective space".

[24] McLean's emphasis.

and societal rules, roles and norms. However, children infrequently perceive their parents as the absolute human beings they are. Many children are hit by that realization once they reach their adolescence and early adulthood (83). Therefore, one could agree that parents are a key factor in the construction and development of their children's identity through the narrative they use to define themselves. This in turn becomes part of the master narrative the children take in or the alternative narrative the children create for themselves as a way to resist their parents' master narrative.

In a study on the importance of parents' narratives in the construction of their adolescents' children's identity, results show that the more mothers open up and share vulnerable stories from their own life with their children, the more the son or daughter does the same (85). In once instance, when one of the mothers told her daughter the story of the death of the mother's father, the daughter acted in accordance and shared with the mother what she remembered and her emotional side of the story (84). Children become more curious about their parents' life stories when they develop emotional maturity as they get older. Moreover, parents are more prone to share stories from their past if the children are going through harsh experiences and struggle with emotional, mental and psychological complications. The study also finds that parents may be more willing to open more of themselves to their child, as the later becomes an increasingly competent "conversational partner" (McLean 85). This practice is considerably crucial as:

> such disclosure may provide parents with an opportunity to explore and express different parts of their own identities with a new audience. Disclosing different parts of the self to one's children may allow parents to see their roles, or selves, coming together in a more integrated fashion. One may begin to see the self not as a mother in one context, a friend or a coworker in another, and a wife in yet another, but as a person across contexts, a melding of adult selves that is increasingly common in midlife. (86)

Zeida's interest in her parents' life stories emerges as an important element in the construction of her own voice and understanding of her self and her past experiences. Fivush *et al.* argue that

autobiographical narratives reinforce the understanding of the individual's own experience and emotions (46). In the creation of our own stories we get to construct our own meanings which helps us understand ourselves. Equally important is that those personal narratives are not just individually constructed as we share our lives and experiences with other people (46). In our day to day conversations, regular routines, and activities we share different stories, feelings, struggles to our friends, colleagues, or family members (46). Through the course of this practice we start to make sense of our experiences, we get to interpret and reassess different events and the various meanings behind them. This cannot really occur without social interaction, since by sharing our stories we get to listen to different insights from our own circle of people. These people give us advice through their own experiences and by sharing, in turn, their own stories. Therefore, our ability to understand our individual experience results from our socially shared stories and develops in the practice of listening to others' personal stories. The latter provides an effective and suitable environment to reevaluate and comprehend our own individual experiences. Hence, individual lives are located and partially integrated in family histories and personal narratives are regulated through the stories told by others, notably family members (49). Fivush states that "following from the sociocultural perspective, we view family co-constructed narratives as a critical context in which parents help adolescents to structure their experiences in ways that allow for emotional expression and regulation, and these skills will be internalized such that family narrative styles will be reflected in the adolescent's own narratives over time" (*Personal and Intergenerational Narratives* 50). At the same time, Fivush points out that when fathers contribute to the family narratives by sharing with their children their day to day activities, the children display better emotional adjustment and well-being. That is in a sense due to the fact that "Today, I …" narratives provide a substantial foundation which is necessary in order to comprehend and

appreciate one's self and the world around us. It also offers a feeling of continuum, an interconnection that transmits from one generation to another in a fashion that encourages the development of a secure and stable sense of identity (*Continuity and Self* 138-39). It is important here to note the disparity between the parental and maternal intergenerational narratives. This discrepancy is due to different gender identities and roles. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Carol Gilligan suggests that females provide more elaborate and emotional narratives than males, while male narratives are likely "more achievement oriented" (Gilligan 17; Fivush 50). Research shows that women's autobiographical narratives center on relationships and emotions, contrasting males' autobiographical narratives (Compère et al. 285). Meantime, adolescents who had more exposure to maternal intergenerational narratives demonstrate better performance in their ability to assume different perspectives and have healthier emotional well-being (*Personal and Intergenerational Narratives* 54).

Thus, for parents to share their stories about the past and present works as a self-identification for the parents and provide a sense of coherence between their past and present. It also helps them understand their past experiences in relationship to their present. At the same time, the practice of sharing these autobiographical narratives with children proves to be an important component in the children's ability to understand their own identities and provides them with a sense of intergenerational narratives continuum. According to various studies, this developing interaction through sharing family narratives is perceived as gendered, since mothers are deeply involved in this sort of activities more than fathers. This is evident in Zeida's (auto)biography, in which she desperately seeks to know her father's story and history (Houari 36)

> Elle avait peur de son père et n'osait rien dire, pourtant elle l'aimait beaucoup, mais il ne le voyait pas: le froid de l'exil a reculé ton passé, mon père, a meurtri la fierté, tu étais cavalier, tu chassais dans les plaines vertes de l'Atlas, tu restais des nuits entières sous la tente avec les bergers, l'odeur du menthe se mélangeait à l'odeur

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des bêtes, tu me dis j'ai été jeune mais tu me racontes jamais … je cherche ta jeunesse et la mienne se fait hésitante, tu en as gros sur le cœur, mais tu ne veux pas partager tes mots. Tes mots qui sont durs, ont la dureté de ton expérience. Si tu m'avais battue, cela m'aurait fait moins mal. (Houari 17)

She was afraid of her father and dared not to say anything, yet she loved him very much, but she did not see his love: the cold the exile distanced you from your past, my father, the pride, you were a horseman, you hunted in the green plains of the Atlas, you stayed whole nights in the tent with the shepherds, the smell of mint mixed with the smell of animals, you tell me I was young but you never tell me your story … I seek to know the story of your youth since mine is hesitant, you have a big heart, but you don't want to show it through your words. Your tough words have the harshness of your experience. If you had beaten me, it would have been less painful. [25]

Nonetheless Zeida never succeeds in getting access to that story. As a result, through the course of the (auto)biography the reader sees the tension in the relationship between them. Whenever she talks about her father and her memories of her father, she uses an "I" instead of a "she". The reader also observes striking similarities and parallels between the story of the mother and that of Zeida. This is especially true when it comes to their relationship with their fathers, from whom both are estranged and alienated. The two fathers confine the daughters to certain places while banning them from others. For instance, Zeida's maternal grandfather deems the school the mother attended for a single day as an unsafe place, since for him it symbolizes the French colonizer. If his daughter attends school, will turn her against her roots and transform her into 'French':

Le premier jour de classe, manque de chance, je rencontre mon père, il devint rouge de colère, me prit par les oreilles et me ramena à la maison en criant que lui vivant, qu' aucun de ses enfants, encore moins une fille, n'irai [sic] étudier chez ces (koufars) de français, cela suffisait qu'ils nous prennent le pays, voilà qu'ils se mettaient aussi à détourner les jeunes de la religion par leur savoir. (Houari 33)

I was very unlucky the first day of class, as I run into my father, he was very angry, took me by the ears and brought me home while shouting that as long as he is alive, none of his children, let alone a girl, wouldn't go to study with these French

(koufars), for him not enough that they take the country from us, now they are using knowledge to divert young people away from religion.[26]

The school then, as a public space and a symbol of knowledge, becomes dangerous, and staying out of it becomes safe. Zeida's father has a similar experience when Zeida is awake at night, looks out the window and sees two Belgians kissing in the street. She then gets lost in her own thoughts and desires when her father suddenly storms inside the room and out of his fear that she would forget about her culture and become Belgian, he violently grabs her hair and threatens her. He later adds that he would have preferred to let her die when she was younger, as she was suffering from an illness when a child, than to see her dishonor her culture: "Ah! Si j'avais su que tu deviendras une petite revoltée qui déshonore sa race […] je n'aurais pas dû laisser cette sorcière te guérir ; je te tuerai bien maintenant" (Houari 17). Here the street at night is deemed a dangerous space. Moreover, the mere thought of occupying it is perceived as an act of rebellion and dishonoring one's race. Another dichotomy that works in parallel with the dangerous and safe spaces is that of spaces marked by dishonor and honor; safe/honor versus dangerous/dishonor are used interchangeably. Throughout the novel, Zeida's family equates female honor with home (34, 35, 71). By doing so, they reinforce gendered spaces which in turn reproduce gender status distinctions. [27] This consolidates social expectations and already established notions of honor/safety or dishonor/danger. These dichotomies sequentially either restrain women's practices inside the places they inhabit or liberate them based on the spatial perception of each space. It also puts pressure on women to conform to these conventionally constructed expectations tied to each space. At the same time, spatial constraint and limitation contribute not only to physical but also to emotional and psychological alienation. This is attested in the life stories of mother and daughter.

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[26] My translation.

[27] For more on this check Daphne Spain.

In terms of their occupation of space, both become responsible for a cultural dispossession and a collective loss of dignity. It is imperative here to note that among various implications, daughters of North African immigrants and women of North African also encounter the following complication:

> While these women's bodies are westernized because of their adoption of French Values, they are simultaneously constructed ethnically within the space of their North African culture. As French consumers, Beur women are encouraged to become more liberal and more modern. As Arab and Muslim women they are expected to adhere to their traditional values, and indeed Maghrebian families at times resort to violence in order to force their daughters to conform to these traditions. (Khannous 111)

This reveals itself in the mother and daughter self-narratives. It also complicates and deepens the sense of displacement for both of them alike while it is interwoven in their stories. As previously mentioned, the reader never learns the mother's name. This highlights the identity crisis the mother herself is going through. Further, it gives a sense of synchronization with Zeida's feelings and life story. Just like her daughter, the mother feels deracinated since everyone thinks she is French because of her light skin and blond hair. The name 'Zeida' in turn reflects her own and her mother's feelings. The name is descriptive and representative not only of her sociopolitical status as a child of immigrants in Belgium, but also of how she feels in her family and how she is perceived in the society. 'Zeida' is a name of Arabic origins which simply means 'extra' or 'additional'. Dictionary listings all describe the same thing: supplementary, unwanted, unneeded, extraneous, non-essential, useless, unconnected, detached, divided, and confused (Haidar 21). Zeida's name thus functions as a framework for Zeida's identity. It strengthens her feeling of being unwanted in the two societies, and her rather unneeded and confused existence. She feels detached from her parents and Belgium, and foreign to her extended family and culture back in Morocco and divided between Fez and Brussels. Last but not the least, Zeida is confused about her identity, who she is and how to define herself and intrinsic values. She feels disconnected and she feels if

her friend Watani could hold her, grasp her inside his breath, and rebirth her by making love to her, she could finally be desired, wanted, and finally longed for; she could become the opposite of her name. Therefore, the name is not simply a name; it also shapes and constructs her identity.

The narrative switch in autobiographical memory remains to be considered. When the narrator uses the first-person perspective, he or she is presenting the memory, or the story based on his/her point of view. Thus, they are part of the story and the whole narrative heavily relies on their own experience. In the third perspective narrative, on the other hand, the narrator has plentiful room to express him or her self. The space grants several privileges: a) The narrator becomes distant from the memory and thus less emotionally attached; b) The narrator looks at the event as an outsider more than an insider, thereby providing "an outsider perspective"; c) The observer's point of view helps the unresolved memory get closure, since the emotions attached to the memory are not as intense and binding as when it first occurred. As a result, the onlooker becomes distant from the event and cognitively won't be as impacted as when using the first-person perspective. Therefore, one can claim that the dissociation, by the use of 3rd person, is used as a way to put Zeida's life at a distance. Further, narrating a story in a third person allows for greater freedom of expression since the narrator can feel emotionally disconnected to the extent that whatever happened is not about him or her anymore; the narrator is not taking part in the memory. Thus, there is less sense of shame and vulnerability for narrators in the way they perceive themselves. They also don't feel as judged by the society and the community they are members of.

From an autobiographical narrative perspective, Lejeune explains in *Autobiography in the Third Person* that the transformation between two pronouns is often perceived as an indication of distancing. For Lejuene, the shift between a first person 'I' to a third person 'he' or 'she' serves as a tool for the narrator to distance him/herself (35). Therefore, one could claim that, distancing

herself (here I mean Zeida), provides a means of survival whenever she cannot   deal with any of the difficult situations she faces in her life. She would prefer to stay in a dreamlike state, some sort of an escape. She accentuates "C'était sa façon à elle de rester avec la réalité ; trop souvent elle s'absentait de ce monde qu'elle ne voulait pas regarder dans les yeux" (Houari 30). By doing so, she becomes not an active actor of her life story but rather an observer.[28]

Lejeune differentiates between two distinctive types of distancing that exists in the autobiographical discourse. One occurs when the narrator becomes a double in the narrative and the second arises when the narrator changes positions by shifting between first person and third person pronouns. For instance, when the 'I' of "I think that", "I remember that" and so forth changes into a third person pronoun 'he' or 'she', part of the narration then becomes what Lejeune calls "a reported statement." He describes this as a report, or a description of a certain event produced in free indirect discourse. In this instance "a new narrator" then has been introduced (35). This narrator positions himself or herself between the initial narrator of the account and the reader. The autobiographer then becomes a "double narrator" as he or she splits into two narrators instead of being one (35). However, when the narrator expresses his or her thoughts, they then create a distancing effect which could provide a self-protective and a safe place. In other words, if the 'I' solely replaces the 'she' then this exchange doesn't create a double narrator but rather a switch of the narrator's position. The storyteller is still expressing himself or herself, yet now at a distance, as he or she acts as translator of the main character's feelings, emotions, and deep thoughts (35, 36).

Meanwhile, recent studies show that talking to the self in the third person, while evoking difficult or distressing autobiographical memory, helps regulate one's emotions. This way of

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[28] She uses an I to refer to herself in her life story account, while in other occasions the "I" transfers to a "she". In those cases, the main character's voice is confused with that of the narrator.

communicating with the self helps establish a distance between the self and its own feelings. Thus, one thinks and talks to him/herself as if they are a different person, simply an 'other'. This method proves its significance as it dissociates one from his/her "psychological self" and creates a psychological distance which assists in the process of self-control (Moser et al 1). Studies highlight the fact that when the individual constructs an inner monologue in which he or she uses their own name instead of an "I", it strengthens the capacity to manage feelings, reasoning, and in turn demeanor. The emotional, limbic brain adopts this cognitive technique to regulate and control different emotional responses (Powers & La Bar 155-56). This emphasizes the importance of words and linguistic shifts of pronouns in shaping emotional and introspective experience. In the act of self-distancing the individual takes one step back in order to better reflect and comprehend his or her own experience without any emotional attachment. This process, in a sense, is similar to asking a friend for opinion on a difficult matter. Since they are not part of the issue, they can provide more constructive and objective perspectives about the subject in question (Kross & Ayduk 84). Aaron Beck, pioneer and founder of cognitive theory, defined psychological distancing as an effective and necessary step in cognitive therapy. By contemplating negative experience in an autobiographical narrative form while psychologically distancing oneself, the individual can think about the experience in a more constructive light (Kross & Ayduk 85). More importantly, when individuals remember past negative or troubling emotional experiences from an "I" perspective, the autobiographical recall tends to be egotistical–since they visualize the incidents through their own eyes, and thus relive the same events as if they are occurring all over again. However, if the same recall takes place from a third person perspective, they are then able to maintain a self-distance from their feelings and their own point of view; they are able to separate themselves from the experience and reflect on it from a far. This approach becomes meaningful

since "cueing people to analyze their negative experiences from a self-distanced perspective (rather than a self-immersed perspective) should lead them to focus less on recounting the emotionally arousing features of their past experience and focus more on reconstruing it in ways that provide them with a sense of insight and closure" (85). People adopt the self-distancing technique while recounting their own experience for multiple reasons and to attain different ends. In some cases, it may be a way to shun their feelings and keep them out of the recounted experiences. It could also be a deliberate choice to help embrace and accept one's own feelings. Whatever their objective, it highlights different indications of how the individual feels, thinks, and acts accordingly (86). One then can conclude that the shifts in pronouns and different voices help Zeida, and perhaps the author herself, to obtain some sense of closure.

Finally, this chapter has discussed Leila Houari's fictional auto/biography *Zeida de nulle part*. We have seen that shifts of first and third perspective provide both Zeida and Houari not only with a place to express themselves but also a place in which they can find their own sense of closure. No doubt, Houari's tendency to shift between 'I' and 'she', and in turn between the two genres of autobiography and biography may render any overview of the work quite complex. Houari's work may be seen as offering a close authentic experience of the oscillating, undetermined, constantly changing, never-ending experience of a beurette's identity. The shifts between pronouns and the blend between voices deliver an impression of multiple selves contained in one's individual experience. It promotes a concept of identity that cannot be unified, but instead one that combines past, present, future, and imaginary territories, hopes, and desires. To some extent Houari's writing succeeds in capturing a convoluted narrative of the self, a narrative that swiftly and unexpectedly shifts between different selves but and resists unification.

CHAPTER 2. *IN POP CULTURE WE TRUST*: MEDIA'S INFLUENCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN *KIFFE KIFFE DEMAIN*

On identity, narratives, and places Norman Denzin writes, "We live in stories, and do things because of the characters we become in our tales of self. This narrated self which is who I am, is a map. It gives me something to hang on to, a way to get from point A to point B in my daily life. But we need larger narratives, stories that connect us to others, to community, to morality and the moral self" (Andrews et al xiii). No doubt stories help us define who we are, understand the world we live in and belong to, all in relationship with the broader community we are part of. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, and as the previous quote shows, "we are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell" (McAdams et al.3). Who we are is mainly shaped by narratives and our lives are constructed as stories. This section considers the question of identity in the French context by covering the two major works of the French-Beur author Faiza Guène. This current chapter focuses on her first novel *Kiffe kiffe demai*n, while the next chapter examines closely her second fictional autobiographical work, *Du rêve pour les oufs.* In the previous chapter I argued the importance of narrative ecology and demonstrated the significance of the stories constructed around us to understand our own sense of identity. As McLean *et al.* emphasize, "personal stories develop through the narrative ecology of the self — the rich, multilayered world of stories one encounters through interactions with family and others in one's social-cultural context" (243). With this perspective in mind I consider Faiza Guène's first autobiographical novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain,* and examine the influence stories told through media have on narratives of the self. I argue that pop culture gives Doria, Guène's main character, a sense of both individual and collective identity. I claim that the character's reliance on pop culture in narrating her life and in some cases

envisioning her future provides her with a sense of self. I conclude with how pop culture gives her a safe space into which she can escape and cope with her feelings of parental and social exclusion. At the same time, I show how the strategy of coping through pop culture emerges due to the failure of a social and political system to include her, whether due to her race, ethnicity, gender, or simply what she represents. This conclusion echoes the study conducted by psychologist Kate McLean, in which she asserts that pop culture and media contribute in the formation and development of identity and the sense of self (243). In the section that follows, I shed light on Beur literature, and the special argot known as Verlan language before moving to a discussion of the two novels. This framework helps to establish a useful background that will help in better understanding the complexity of the question of identity and its relationship to the spatial in the French context.

La 'littérature Beur' or Beur Literature has prospered in the last few decades, since it furnishes the Beur generation with a platform in which they can express themselves (Hargreaves 1). As Kathryn Lay-Chenchabi argues in her article "Breaking the Silence: Beur Writers Impose Their Voice", the term 'Beur' has paved the way to the rise of the Beur literary work (98). Mainly describing children and grandchildren of North African immigrants, the term was meant to liberate members of the Beur generation from the pressure of having to choose between their French or Arabe identity (Chenchabi 98). Of this label Hargreaves remarks, "as most of those concerned were born in France, this is something of a misnomer, for they have never migrated from one country to another" (Hargreaves 1). Nonetheless, their experience of immigrationi definitely takes the form of their constant travel back and forth between two different sets of cultures and traditions. This never-ending transition between a 'laical' French culture on the one hand and an Arabic-Islamic tradition inherited from their parents on the other is extensively expressed in their writings. After all, as Hargreaves confirms, "Like it or not, every Beur has a foot in two cultures, and this is

a situation with which he or she must learn to live. Historically, legally, and logically those two cultures are in many respects at odds with each other" (26).

Yet, mounting concerns over the question of personal identity and its relationship to national identity among the French political and scholastic class have been growing side by side with Beur writings (1). The ongoing political debate about 'what it means to be French' always portrays immigrants and their descendants as a "threat" to the very essence of national identity. This argument is well demonstrated in the citation that follows: "Jean-Marie Le Pen's extreme right-wing party, the Front National, has scored a series of spectacular electoral successes by playing on fears that immigrants of 'Maghrébien', i.e. North African, origin constitute a threat to French National identity" (Hargreaves 1). For Jean Le Pen, immigrants with European backgrounds and origins don't need assimilation since they are already compatible with French identity and laical morality "thanks to shared Christian traditions and secular values" (Hargreaves and Mahdjoub 460).

This is unlike the case of Muslim immigrants who, according to Hargreaves, are harder to assimilate since they come in greater numbers and have a "cultural and religious specificity" (460). He emphasizes that those two factors prompt their dissimilation "under the influence of fundamentalists or advice issued by governments in their countries of origins" (460; Le Pen 112). No doubt, Le Pen's disputable 'electoral' ideology has gained him a large number of followers. More recently, his daughter Marine Le Pen, who made it through the top for the first round of the 2017 French presidential election, equates "immigration = insécurité = islam = terrorisme" ('immigration = insecurity = Islam = terrorism'). Daughter and father chime in together: "Our values and identities are under threat."Polls show that the majority of the French public thinks that

immigration puts national identity at risk (Hargreaves and Mahdjoub 460). Moreover, minorities of Muslim background are perceived as "the most troubling element" (460).

It is important here to note a characteristically French perception of cross-culturalism. For the Republic, cross-culturalism is seen as a foreign "Anglo-Saxon" concept, an "American invention" that is incompatible with the French secular values (460).[29] A good example is GAP's back-to-school "Commencez l'année du bon pied" or the "Hijab Ad". In 2018 the American retail brand ran a Back to School campaign ad featuring a group of kids from one of the elementary schools in Harlem. The advertisement poster showed a diverse group of students including a young girl wearing a hijab. The campaign got a very warm reception in the United States. Although the retail company had no intention to release the same ad in France, that didn't stop French politicians from voicing their dismay with the campaign. Aurore Bergé, a member of the French national assembly, tweeted on August 11th, 2018: "Commencer l'année du bon pied consiste à ne plus en mettre un chez Gap. Rien n'autorise ni ne justifie qu'on voile des petites filles: où est leur liberté ? Où est leur libre arbitre ? Où est leur choix ? Que ce soit un argument commercial m'écœure", 'Starting the year off on the right foot means not putting one in Gap anymore. Nothing justifies or authorizes the veiling of little girls! And today, Gap makes it a commercial argument under the pretext of an ode to diversity'. Moreover, Lydia Guirous, representative of the conservative central right party, went further by accusing the brand of "pursuing its submission to Islamism with their posters of young veiled girls". Guirous argues that "Gap poursuit sa soumission à l'islamisme avec

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[29] It is important to emphasize that the landscape and themes I work on are very contemporary. That being said, recently there has been a shift in French public opinion, with thousands of French participating in the March Against Islamophobia to denounce discrimination. At the same time, the United States policies towards Muslim Americans have shifted with the election of the 45th president. For more on the French March, see the following articles: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/en-direct-marche-controversee-contre-l-islamophobie-ce-dimanche-a-paris_2106518.html; https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/manifestation-contre-l-islamophobie-la-marche-controversee-prevue-ce-dimanche-a-paris-10-11-2019-2346290_23.php.

ses affiches de petites filles voilées. J'ai dénoncé à plusieurs reprises cette montée en puissance du voile imposée aux petites filles qui est une maltraitante et un piétinement de nos valeurs d'égalité, de liberté et de laïcité!", 'I have denounced several times the rise in power of the veil imposed on little girls, which is a form of abuse and a trampling of our values of equality, freedom, and secularism'.[30]

However, mounting calls for a homogenous society where everyone is identical raise the question of whether and how any culture or society could attain such state. How could this goal be achieved in a world as diverse and different as the one we live in? Moreover, if the individual is compelled to choose among or reject aspects or elements considered important to who he/she is, then what are the repercussions of such coercion? How can the "I" of a first- or second-generation individual fit together the different parts that constitute her or his diverse background and experience? These sets of intriguing questions are at the core of Beur writings. The uncertain and unresolved sense of identity and belonging predominately reveals itself as a main theme in their works (*Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction* 2). In this sense, the artistic works created by Beur authors and artists could be perceived as an attempt to reconcile not only two different cultures, French-North African, and not only two different languages, French and Arabic, but also two different ideologies and worlds, secular and Muslim. This instead amounts to an effort to bridge the rupture and contradictions of the two hyphenated worlds they live in (Ireland 1027). As the Beur author Sakina Boukhedenna expresses it, "Algérie-France, France-Algérie, Algérie-France" (125) The hyphen between the two words, or rather worlds, embodies simultaneously connection and division, unification and opposition.

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[30] The Quartz's translation: https://qz.com/1354629/a-gap-ad-showing-a-girl-in-a-hijab-is-infuriating-french-politicians/

To understand the depth of the Beur experience in France, it becomes pertinent to look more closely into the origin and evolution of the word. *'Beur'* comes from the actively spoken French slang, *Verlan*, which refers to a colloquial language originally created and practiced by the Arab-French unprivileged suburban youth. It initially functioned as what Francophone scholar Hargreaves calls a protective language, a "code". The suburban youth would use this code language to talk about suspicious activities away from the eyes of those in authority (*Immigration and Identity in Beur fiction* 29). At the same time, it was used as a way to create and promote a sense of unification and belonging among the socially unseen and marginalized groups (29). 'Verlan' in turn derives from the French word 'l'envers' which means the 'reverse'. It works by dividing the word into two syllables, reversing their order such that the last part is moved to the front and the front becomes the ending, then bringing them together as one word [l'envers --> l'en vers --> vers l'en --> versl'en --> verslen --> verlen --> *verlan*] (Lawless). In the same manner, the word 'Beur' emerged as the result of a similar set of transpositions. It was born in the context of "Radio Beur," which started its first broadcast towards the end of 1981 in Paris; it amounts to the inversion of the term 'Arabe'. As Nacer Kettane, the founder and president of Radio Beur, points out, "Beur vient du mot 'arabe' inverse: arabe donne rebe, qui, à l'envers, donne ber et s'écrit beur. Mais il n'a rien à voir avec la signification académique du mot 'arabe'. Beur renvoie à la fois à un espace géographique et culturel, le Maghreb, et à un espace social, celui de la banlieue et du proletariat de France" (Kettane 21).

By the time the Algerian War ended in 1962, and due to the painful scars it left on the French collective memory, the word 'Arabe' started to inherit a negative/ pejorative connotation. Public polls have shown a consistent general disfavor among respondents regarding Arabs and North African immigrants, more precisely Algerians (*Immigration and identity in Beur Fiction* 30).

Hargreaves confirms that as a consequence, "by inventing an alternative form of self-designation, young members of the immigrant community were able to expunge from their own discourse the stigma attached to the term 'Arabe'" (30). Thus, one can conclude that *Beur* literature as well as *Le verlan* have emerged as a tool with which immigrant youth construct a communal identity and a shared sense of belonging. They also underline the critical role the community plays in the construction and development of identity within the multicultural and multiracial population of youth (McEntee-Atalianis 94). In her article "Urban Youth Language in Multicultural Sweden," Marie-Noëlle Godin explores the influence of the urban youth language on the construction of identities among Swedish teenagers of immigrant descent. Godin asserts "The urban youth language is revealed to be more than just an immigrant dialect; rather it is an important tool in the creation of solidarity among the young population of suburbs who are touched by segregation and discrimination" (Godin 120). One then could argue that Beurs find comfort, relief, and familiarity within the diversity that exists in the language since it is a mix of French and, in some cases, Arabic. In that sense, and in an attempt to construct a unified identity, the language becomes another representation of the hyphen [Algérie- France, France-Algérie]. To put it in Susan Ireland words, the term is "a symbol of dual but unified self rather than a barrier separating two conflicting identities" (Ireland 1024).

When examining the writings of female Beur authors and the overlap between the different components of their identities as French, Arab, women, and Muslim who more often live in spatially segregated areas, the issue of integration becomes pertinent. Gino Raymond notes:

> Whereas the process of political socialization in other democracies like the United States and Great Britain could admit the possibility that the action of the citizen in the public space could be partly determined by factors like traditional family or community loyalties, in France such determinisms were unacceptable. The republic could only accommodate the action of the individual in the public space as a citizen

possessed of the same universal rights as all others, and not as an actor also identified by particularities such as color, race or religion. (482)

Yet after 1789, and as part of the various stages of "nation-building", France formed what Raymond calls "collective consciousness as a national community" (483). A significant part of this process was what can be called "othering," in which the more the individual is different from the established homogeneous national identification, the more he or she is *othered:* "The more that sense, the sense of national community was threatened the more imperative it became to safeguard it by stigmatizing those outside of it by underlying their otherness" (483). Therefore, Muslims in France have become a representation of the "ethno-racial outsiders". The term is the coinage of Erik Bleich, according to whom it is mainly used to describe immigrant groups based on the color of their skin, the countries they are originally coming from, and their immigration status. However, Bleich emphasizes that during the last three decades, due to the rise of Muslim immigration to Europe, the use of the term has shifted to include religious identities, more precisely "Muslims as co-equal, quintessential, ethno-racial outsiders" (1). As a result, they are portrayed in political discourse as an example of disintegration and exclusion (Beaman 41). Moreover, the way Islam functions in France along with different Western European countries is contextualized in Islamophobia (42). Sociologist Jean Beaman comments in her article, "As French as Anyone Else: Islam and the North African Second Generation in France":

> In a society hesitant to openly acknowledge race and ethnicity as meaningful categories, religion distinguishes inclusion versus exclusion (Scott 2007). French and North African, or Maghrébien, are often placed on opposing ends of an ethnonational identity continuum in larger society, and being French and Muslim are therefore seen as incongruent. Regardless of the degree to which they personally identified as Muslim, Maghéribien-origin individuals are often categorized as Muslim in media and popular culture at least partially because Islam is the major religion of the Maghreb. (42)

It is important here to emphasize that when examining fictional written work produced by second generation French women of Arab- Muslim descent, a distinction between religion and culture

becomes necessary. It is essential to differentiate between the two since large numbers of second and third generation would identify themselves with Muslim culture (*As French as Anyone Else* 54) without necessarily adhering to any of the practices or pillars of the religion. Embracing the culture is a way to connect with the cultural heritage of their parents (*Citizen Outsiders* 51). Nadia, a French of Algerian origin in her twenties, is a good example, as she explains eloquently in her interview with Beaman:

> So, I have the tendency to say that I am a cultural Muslim, which means that in terms of culture I am Muslim, because I was raised that way, even though my father was not Muslim […] Algerian culture is anchored in the Muslim religion, so the foundation of the education I received had a religious foundation. So I have a tendency to say that I am Muslim in a cultural sense, because I observe Ramadan, I don't eat Pork. I only eat Halal meat, […] but apart from that I do not do anything. (*As French as Anyone Else* 54)

Since the Mahgrebi culture relies heavily on religion, some of the second and third generations eventually wind up practicing it as a way to stay connected with their parents, despite the fact that they feel deeply detached from Islam (54). As a result, Beaman concludes, "Negotiating religious practices is part of how they [second generation of Arab- Muslim descends] construct their overall identity. [Some of them] do not just have an ethnic or religious identity, but also an ethnoreligious identity, in which their Maghrébien origin and Muslim religion are inextricably linked" (59). These continued attempts to create and establish a unified identity from the multiple traditions and cultures they encounter and live in is a persistent subject in nearly all Beur women writings (Ireland 1023). Faiza Guène's main female protagonists are no different. Her two works *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Du rêve pour les oufs* highlight the experience, and in some cases complications, Beur women encounter while engaging in what Aïcha Benaïssa calls "une véritable course à la recherche d'une identité", 'A real race in the search for identity'.[31] Ireland notes:

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[31] My translation.

As members of the so called "second generation", Beur women live between two cultures that have traditionally been set up as opposites and described in terms of their differences –North Africa and Europe, Orient and Occident, Muslim and Christian, colonized and colonizer. The two cultures are thus associated with a series of mutually exclusively binary opposites. (Ireland 1023)

The present chapter focuses on Guène's first fictional autobiography, *Kiffe kiffe demain.* Born in Boginy to Algerian parents and herself a member of the second generation, Guène became a phenomenon in the world of female Beur authors (Gibson 2). About her success, she argues: "Je suis arrivée comme un phénomène de foire[32]", in that her writings epitomize the challenges that appear when one's society turns its back on one's disparity. Faiza Guene's novels and court métrage[33] deal with immigrants and the problems that they face in the banlieue. Growing up herself in housing projects, her views than give a different dimension to the experiences lived in there. That, beside her talent, may have been a contributing factor to why her works are often very well received and are considered socially and politically relevant (Mehta 176). Published when she was nineteen, her first novel *Kiffe kiffe demain* was considered a big hit and was translated into twenty-two languages. The story is written in Verlan and takes the form of a private intimate journal. Guène admits that working with actor and movie director Boris Seguin encouraged her to use Verlan the language as part of embracing her identity: "He made us realize that it was an interesting language, that it was creative and rich, and that we should use it instead of trying to change the way we speak. It could be our strength" (Adams).

The story revolves around fifteen-year-old Doria, a French-born teenager and a daughter of Moroccan immigrant parents. She lives with her illiterate mother in Livry-Gargan, one of the Parisian housing projects. The father, having hoped for a son who would safeguard his lineage,

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[32] An interview with hip hop radio Mouv – www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yEhpvdUYIA

[33] Short film.

has ditched them both and gone back to Morocco for a younger, more fertile wife. As Doria reveals "papa, il voulait un fils. Pour sa fierté, son nom, l'honneur de la famille, et je suppose encore plein d'autres raisons stupides" (Guène 10), 'dad, he wanted a son. For his pride, his reputation, the family honor and I am sure lots of other stupid reasons' (Adams 2). They are both left to fend for themselves, and struggle with the persistent racism and inclusion that exists in society. Although the mother's name is Yasmina, at her work everyone stereotypes her and calls her by the common ethnic name 'the Fatma':

> Maman a commencé à travailler. Elle fait le ménage dans un hôtel Formule 1 à Bagnlolet […] au formule 1 de Bagnolet, tout le monde l'appelle "la Fatma". On lui crie après sans arrêt; et on la surveille pour vérifier qu'elle pique rien dans les chambers (Guène14). 'Not very long ago mom started working. She cleans rooms at the Formula 1 Motel in Bagnolet […] Everyone calls her "Fatma" at the Formula 1.

They shout at her all the time, and they keep close watch on her to make sure she doesn't steal anything from the rooms' (Adams 5). Her mother is always under observation since she is assumed to be a thief due to her ethnicity and race. Doria has a strong bond with Hamoudi, a 28 year-old neighbor from the banlieue. Although high on drugs most of the time, Hamoudi always talks about and quotes famous canonical French writers and poets. Their closeness is drawn from the fact that he listens to her, and they both dislike the reality they live in (*Kiffe kiffe* 27). Doria even reaches the point where she admits that she would have loved to have him as a father, had he been bit older in age (28). She eventually will become interested in Nabil, another neighbor, who has been tutoring her for her math and other classes.

Doria unfolds her story as a movie, and considers fate, or 'maktoub', in which she and her mother believe, responsible for their misery. She calls the predestination a "Scenario" and likens herself and her mom to actors, while the 'ultimate agency' which predisposes the course of their lives' events becomes an untalented 'scenarist'.

Quel destin de merde. Le destin, c'est la misère parce que tu ne peux rien. Ça veut dire que quoi tu fasses, tu te feras toujours couiller. Ma mère, elle dit que si mon père nous a abondonnées, c'est parce que c'était écrit. Chez nous, on appelle ça le mektoub. C'est comme le scénario d'un film dont on est les acteurs. Le problème c'est que notre sénariste à nous, il a aucun talent. Il sait pas raconteur des belles histoires. (*Kiffe kiffe*19)

What shitty destiny. Fate is all trial and misery and you can't do anything about it. Basically no matter what you do you will always get screwed over. My mom says my dad walked out on us because it was written that way. Around here, we call it *mektoub.* It's like a film script and we're the actors. Trouble is, our scriptwriter's got no talent. And he's never heard of happily ever after. (Adams 10)

The reader gets access to Doria's voice and her life story solely through an interior monologue as she opens herself up. Throughout the autobiography, Doria constantly relies on pop culture to narrate her life story, express her opinions, or think about her future. She builds her story out of famous shows, reportage in a famous channel, or soap operas, which serve as a foundation upon which she relies to describe her life, feelings, and people around her. This type of narration clearly helps create a virtual safe 'space' in which she is able to narrate her story. According to recent research on the impact of movies and books on writing the self and the construction of identity, narrative psychologists have found that media stories (including books) help in providing a better understanding of the past, present, and future self (Breen, McLean., et al 243). Research further shows that people who are exposed, through books and movies, to other individuals' stories demonstrate identity development and personal growth (243). Applying the same findings to Doria's autobiography, we can see how her reliance on pop culture in narrating her own life, and in some cases envisioning her future, provides her with a sense of self and collective identity.

Shakespeare's famous insight into the intersection of life and theatre helps illuminate the framework of McLean's study, on which the present analysis is based:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;

> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages. (*As You Like It,* Act II, Scene VII)

Undoubtedly, sociologist and social psychologist Erving Goffman took those words to heart when he affirmed that all individuals are social actors performing an "established social role[s]" on the stage of life (18). For Goffman, humans display themselves to others through an array of masks. We create scripts, then follow them; we act roles, then switch between them depending on the audience. This audience keeps changing based on the surroundings (18). In his article "The psychological self as actor, agent, and author," psychologist Dan McAdams divides the self to three elements or components: First, the *actor self*, which is the self of the present and includes aspects of the self that are in charge of social functions, for example personal talents, skills, and traits. Second is the *agent self,* which deals with the present and future self. It is responsible for morals, values, goals, self-development, and personal growth. Third is the *autobiographical author*, defined as "the storyteller." This self's role is to combine past, present, and future to produce a narrative that provides a sense of identity (273-74).

For Doria, media stories grant her a sense of identification. Moreover, pop culture not only serves her but her mother as well, by giving both a means of self-development. This echoes the study conducted by cLean in which she asserts that pop culture and media contribute in the formation and development of identity and the sense of self. She indicates that "traits may be refined through interaction with imagined others encountered through media stories" (Breen, Andrea V., et al 247). The work of Breen, McLean et al. helps establish a more specific framework for this relationship. In "Movies, books, and Identity: Exploring the Narrative Ecology of the Self," the authors examine the influence stories experienced through various media has on the construction of individual identity and its own development (McLean et al 243). Further, they build on McAdams's multilateral scheme, with its tripartite division of the self (actor, agent, and

author) to demonstrate the impact pop culture has on that model. The influence of pop culture on the first aspect, developing the actor, emerges as pop culture impacts individual personality, and thus in turn, individual traits and performance in different situations. In that sense, it provides a number of especially critical things: (a) guidance, as it shows one the kind of person they would want to be and become (247); (b) a role model to emulate (247); (c) an example of how one should act and behave; and (d) identification with similar or opposite characters. The similar characters illustrate personal traits that either one already possesses or wants to imitate. Pop culture can also portray and represent dissimilar personal traits that one wouldn't want to exhibit. Further, popular media can also provide (e) relatability, as one establishes a connection due to similarities to oneself or one's own experiences (247). It also represents (f) a tool of self-discovery and exploration of the self; this in turn (g) exerts influence on one's behavior, opinions, or decisions (248).

The second element of the self in McAdams' model, the developing agent, is also engaged here. The developing agent is mainly future oriented as it is concerned with the individual's growth and values. Consequently, the stories presented in media become important since one relates them to their own values (248). Since media stories help personal development, they also encourage people to attain the expectations they set for themselves. The third and the last component of the self is the developing author. As previously mentioned, media stories provide individuals with the opportunity to reflect on their current lives by furnishing them with a tool to help their future growth. Therefore, it would be only reasonable that people "would actively seek out media stories that can help them to understand and prepare for the next developmental stage" (249).

With this theoretical perspective in mind, I shall now analyze how the three components of the self are influenced by media stories in Doria's narrative from *Kiffe kiffe demain*. The autobiography opens with Doria sitting at the office of Madame Burlot, the psychiatrist to whom

Doria's school has sent her to as she appears indifferent and has shut herself off from her surroundings. Through the narrative, in fact, the reader gets to know that Doria doesn't talk much or express her thoughts or feelings. For example, she explains how her mother's friend's kids, Tant Zohra's kids, compare her to the deaf and mute Bernardo from Zorro:

> Les garçons, je les connais depuis toute petite mais je parle plus beaucoup maintenant. Alors c'était un peu tendu, on savait pas trop quoi se dire. Ils se sont même foutus de ma gueule à cause de ça. Ils me comparaient à Bernardo dans *Zorro*, le petit qui avait trop l'air con et qui faisait deviner les dangers à Zorro par un système de signes. Il était muet le pauvre type. (*Kiffe kiffe* 35)

> I have known these boys since we were little, but I don't really talk to them anymore. So it was a little intense, no one really knew what to say. They made so much fun of me for that. They kept comparing me to Bernardo in *Zorro*, the short guy who looked like a dumbass and who warns Zorro of danger through a system of gestures. He was mute, poor guy. (Adams 27)

The reader gets a peek into the extent of the neglect Doria experiences not only from her father and mother, who are distant, but also from the system presented in school. She explains that the school had sent her to the psychiatrist only when "[l]es profs, entre deux grèves, se sont dit que j'avais besoin de voir quelqu'un parcequ'ils me trouvaient renfermée, je m'en fous. J'y vais, c'est remboursé par la sécu" (*Kiffe kiffe* 9). 'The teachers, in between strikes for once, figured I'd better see someone because I seemed closed or something. Maybe they are right. I don't give a shit. It's covered by welfare' (Adams 1-2). She then recounts how her dad had abandoned her and her mom one day without a word and that the only thing she remembers was watching an episode of a science fiction series on television:

> Alors un jour le barbu, il a dû se rendre compte que ça servait à rien d'essayer avec ma mère et il s'est cassé. Comme ça, sans prévenir. Tout ce dont je me souviens, c'est que je regardais un épiosde de la saison 4 de X-Files […] La porte à claqué. À la fenêtre, j'ai vu un taxi gris qui s'en allait. C'est tout. Ça fait plus de six mois maintenant. (*Kiffe Kiffe* 10)

> So one day the beard must have realized there was no point trying anymore with my mom and he took off. Just like that, no warning. All I remember is that I was watching an episode from the fourth season of *The X Files* […] The door banged

shut. From the window, I saw a gray taxi pulling away. That's all. It's been over six months. (Adams 2)

It must be pointed out that she never calls him 'dad' except at the beginning of the autobiography when introducing him to the reader; the rest of the time she mainly calls him "le barbu" 'the beard' (10), "le vieux" 'the old' (17), "un connard de paternel" 'an asshole of a father' (42),"le barbu de père" 'the beard of a father' (102). Thus, we can see how she tries to emotionally distance herself and numb all feelings towards her father. Doria never makes peace with the fact that she was abandoned by him: "Sauf que moi, j'ai plus de famille, on est plus qu'une demi famille maintenant" (28), 'Except me, I don't really have a family anymore. We are half family now' (Adams 20). When she hears her mother talking about her father to Aunt Zohra, she makes the following comment:

> Un moment, j'ai entendu des bouts de conversations entre Maman et Tante Zohra sur mon père. Maman lui disait qu'il ira pas au paradis pour ce qu'il a fait à sa petite fille. À mon avis, il ira pas non plus pour ce qu'il a fait à Maman. Le videur de paradis, il le laissera pas entrer. Il va le dégager direct. Et puis ça m'énerve qu'on reparle encore de lui. Il est plus là maintenant. On a qu'à l'oublier c'est tout. (35)

> At one point, I caught the end of a conversation about my dad between mom and Aunt Zohra. Mom was telling her he wouldn't go to heaven because of what he'd done to his daughter. The way I see it, he won't be going because of what he's done to Mom. Heaven's bouncer just won't let him in. He'll send him packing, straight out. And you know it bugs me they're still talking about him. He's not here anymore. The only thing to do is forget about him. (Adams 28)

Doria's contradictory feelings of longing and resentment for her father keep surfacing throughout the course of the novel. She is lost as she feels left out by him, yet still misses him, and the reader sees how these complete feelings daunt her whole narrative. Further, even though her mother might not have left physically, she has checked out mentally and emotionally; Doria mentions the lack of any real mother-daughter bond and relationship:

> Quand madame Burlaud me demande si mon père me manque, je réponds "non" mais elle me croit pas. Elle est perspicace comme meuf. De toute façon, c'est pas

grave, ma mère et là. Enfin, elle est présente physiquement. Parce que dans sa tête, elle est ailleurs, encore plus loin que mon père". (*Kiffe kiffe* 11)

'When Madame Burlaud asks me if I miss my dad, I say "no", but she doesn't believe me. She's pretty smart like that, for a chick. Whatever it's no big deal, my mom's here physically. Because in her head, she's somewhere else. Somewhere even further away than my father". (Adams 3)

The mother's responsibility to provide care for her daughter, along with her unexpressed feelings about her husband having walked away from the family, have made her detached and lost in her own world. In an attempt to help her mother financially Doria decides to babysit which makes Yasmina feels incapacitated since she cannot provide as much for her daughter (*Kiffe kiffe* 61-62). This situation, in turn, has contributed to restrain the mother-daughter relationship. This is evident when Doria tells her mother that she will work: "à table, on s'est pas dit un mot. Là, c'était pas comme dans les films. Mais comme dans la vraie vie. Et même si à la fin elle m'a dit d'accord, je sentais que ça lui foutait les boules" (62), 'At dinner neither of us said a word. And it wasn't like it always seems in the movies, but like real life. And even if in the end she said it was OK, I knew she was still pissed' (Adams 53).

Doria's mother's struggle with being abandoned by her husband is further complicated by the fact that she and her daughter are never considered full citizens of the country, even though Doria was born and raised there. Their marginalization has resulted in their state of invisibility: they are only seen as 'othered'. At the same time, their life in the slum is presented in contradiction to the government worker who pays monthly visits to them as she carries a "vieuthon" bag and constantly complains about the smell and the deteriorated conditions they live in. It emphasizes the two different realities the *gouvernement* and the residents of the slum inhabit: "elle a fait au moins dix fois le tour de l'appartement comme si elle visitait les catacombes" (67), 'she went around our apartment at least ten times like she was visiting the catacombs or something' (Adams 58). This social status and hierarchy deepen Doria's feelings of exclusion and invisibility, which

contributes to her self-perception that she is good for nothing. For instance, when Doria gets to

know that Hamoudi is in love with Lyla, she describes her life and feelings as if it were a news

report: "j'ai eu l'impression de me retrouver dans un reportage de la une, dans l'émission 'Sept à

huit' présentée par les Ken et Barbie intelligents de la télé" (*Kiffe kiffe* 135); 'I felt I was in a TF1

report, on that show *Seven to Eight* presented by TV's own Brainy Ken and smart Barbie' (Adams

127). She continues by describing how the reportage starts:

> Quinze and et déjà désenchantée. Pour elle la vie n'est qu'une brève illusion. Dès la naissance, elle est une énorme déception pour ses parents, particulièrement pour son père qui s'attendait voir sortir du bidon de sa femme un petit mâle de 3 kilos 500 et 51 centimètres pourvu d'un zizi de taille moyenne, peut être pour se rassurer sur sa propre virtilité.
>
> Hélas, c'est le drame, il met bien au monde une petite fille qui se demande déjà ce qu'elle fout là.
>
> Là, on me voit apparaître à l'écran, le visage flouté et la voix déguisée, genre dessins animés. Je me tourne vers le caméra et je commence à tout déballer […]. (*Kiffe kiffe* 135-136)
>
> Fifteen and disenchanted already. For her, life is just a brief illusion. From Birth, she is an enormous disappointment to her parents, particularly her father, who was expecting a little boy to come out of his wife's belly, weighing in at seven and a half pounds, measuring twenty inches, equipped with a dick of average size, perhaps he wanted a boy to reinforce his own virility.
>
> Alas, so goes life's drama, he bought into the world a little girl already wondering what the hell she was doing there.
>
> Then you see me appear on the screen, my face blurred out and my voice disguised, like a cartoon. I turn to the camera and start pouring my heart out […]. (Adams 128)

Doria feels invisible to her father and everyone around her. Her invisibility gets more

intertwined with the fact that she is the girl/daughter her father didn't want: "[papa] … n'y a eu

qu'un enfant et c'était une fille. Moi. Disons que je correspondais pas tout à fait au désir du client.

Et le problème, c'est que ça se passe pas comme à carrefour: y a pas se service après-vente" (*Kiffe*

kiffe 10), '[dad] … he only got one kid and it was a girl. Me. You could say I didn't exactly meet

customer specifications. Trouble is, it's not like at the supermarket: There's no customer-satisfaction guarantee' (Adams 2). This perception contributes to her thinking about her own death. In a dream about her own funeral, she describes how her father was absent and barely anybody else was there except Leonardo DiCaprio. DiCaprio has then become as close as a family member, which strongly indicates that her sense of belonging derives somehow from pop culture; it likewise provides a sense of identity:

> Une nuit, j'assisstais à mon enterrement. Y avait presque persone. Just ma mère, Mme Burlaud, Carla, la Portugaise qui nettoie les ascenseurs de la tour, Leonardo Di Caprio de *Titanic*, et ma copine sarah qui a déménagé à Trappes quand j'avais douze ans. Mon père, il était pas là. Il devait s'occuper de sa paysanne enceinte de son future Momo pendant que moi, eh ben j'étais morte. (*Kiffe kiffe* 23)

> One night I was at my own funeral. Hardly anyone there. Just my mom; Mme Burlaud; Carla, the Portuguese lady who cleans the elevators in our tower; Leonardo Di Caprio from *Titanic*; and my friend Sarah, who moved to that suburb Trappes, South of Paris, when I was twelve. My dad wasn't there. He must have been busy with his peasant woman who was pregnant with his Momo-to-be, while I was, well, dead. (Adams13-14)

Thus, as previously shown she dreams about her death or experiencing an 'out of body' dreams. A good example of the previous is what her therapist calls "L'épisode de L'Atlas", 'The episode with the Atlas' (73-74). In that she dreams that her soul leaves her body in Livry Gargan and flies out to the world. The dream ends with her "smack-bash[ing]" her arm into the wall and bruising it severely.

No doubt, the fact that Doria's father abandons her due to her gender identity is not the only factor contributing to her sense of uselessness and low self-esteem. Abandonment may have also resulted in her own rejection of his culture and in turn her Moroccan heritage (23). At school, her physics and chemistry teacher Madame Nadine Benbarchiche is no different. Doria reveals her frustration with her teacher's comments on her report card, as Madame de Benbarchiche writes harsh comments describing Doria as "affligeant, désespérant, élève qui incite à la démission ou au

suicide …" (45), 'exasperating, hopeless, the kind of student who makes you want to resign or commit suicide' (Adams 36). Her feelings of worthlessness and dissatisfaction with herself and the fact that being a girl is part of her misery culminates at her sixteenth birthday. She laments how no one has remembered her birthday, which raises her invisibility to its peak:

> …franchement, je comprends. Je suis pas quelqu'un d'extraordinaire […] moi, je suis personne. Et je sais pas faire grande chose. Enfin si, je sais faire quelques trucs, mais rien de rare quoi: faire craquer les os de mes doigts de pied, faire couler un filet de salive de ma bouche et le remonter, faire l'accent italien devant le miroir de la salle de bain le matin … Ouais, je me débrouille pas trop mal quand même sûrement différent. Mais si j'étais un garçon, ce serait peut-être différent … ce serait même sûrement différent. (169-170)

> To be honest I understand. I'm no one special […] me, I am nobody. And I do not know how to do anything big. Well, yeah, I can do a few things, but nothing special, really: I can crack my toes, send a string of saliva out of my mouth and suck it back in again, do an Italian accent in front of the bathroom mirror in the morning … yeah I can get by without much trouble in the end. But if I was a boy, maybe it would be different … It would definitely be different. (Adams 161)

Doria thinks that had she been a boy, her father would have stayed in the first place (170). She deeply believes that her life would have been much better had she been a male. It is important here to note the overlap between two identities. In addition to gender, we also deal here with a failure of national identity, which still sees her as "le bon a rien" 'good for nothing' immigrant. This complicates her sense of belonging since, again and again, the system and her own country fail to acknowledge her citizenship as a second generation born and raised in France. At the same time, her gender identity as a woman hasn't brought her any good either but rather misfortune and more oppression, as she believes she would have been better off had she been a boy. As a result, the two identities have contributed to deepen her sense of exclusion, repression, and loss.

This intuitive insight into her own reality, on her sixteenth birthday, demonstrates how she intrinsically believes that she has nothing valuable to offer. These feelings of worthlessness along with the false assumption she is good for nothing conform to the consistent message her society

has fed her on; along with her abandonment, this makes Doria feel more invisible and voiceless. We rarely see her express her opinions to other people. The reader is introduced to her voice only through her thoughts, which are revealed and exposed through the autobiographical narration. Her feminine identity seems restrictive as she is endlessly trying to adjust to her status as a female and the limitation that comes with it. We see her dismay with her female identity at the store when her need to buy sanitary pads gives her another reason not to want to be a girl. Doria grows bitter about her gender; it reminds her of her low societal status and the lack of cultural privilege she has since her father left her because of her gender. She states that she was reading Tahar Ben Jalloun's *L'enfant du sable,* and we can perceive a resemblance between her story and that of the main character in Ben Jalloun's novel. In *L'enfant du sable* the plot revolves around Ahmed/Zahra, a girl who is born in a Moroccan family and brought up as a boy, then a man. The novel explores the notion of shame in Morocco which accompanies families who have only daughters. As part of understanding how privileged men are in her society, Ben Jalloun's Zahra decides willingly to stick to the male identity. Similarly, Doria understands the 'misfortune' or rather limitation that accompanies her gender. Her frustration can be seen reflected in her dolls:

> Quand j'étais petite, je coupais les cheveux des Barbie parce qu'elle étaient blondes, et je leur coupais aussi les seins parce que j'en avais pas. En plus, c'étaient même pas de vraies Barbie. C'étaient des poupées de pauvres que ma mère m'achetait à Giga Store. Des poupées toutes Nazes. Tu jouais avec deux jours, elles devenaient mutilées de guerre. Même leur prénom. C'était de la merde: Françoise. C'est un prénom pour les filles qui rêvent pas. (*Kiffe kiffe* 40-41)

> When I was little, I used to cut the hair off Barbie dolls because they were blond, and I chopped off their boobs too because I didn't have any. And they weren't even real Barbie dolls. They were like poor people's dolls, the kind my mom bought me at that cheapo discount store Giga. Crappy dolls. You played with them for two days and they looked like land mine victims. Even their first name was total shit: Françoise. Not exactly the kind of name that little girls' dreams are made of! Françoise — that's the name of a doll for little girls who don't even dare to dream. (Adams 33)

Noticeably, the doll's name and her long blonde hair and breasts add a political aspect to her feelings of frustration and resentment. She renounces not only the doll's gender but also its ethnicity and French heritage. The doll becomes a reminder of Doria's disadvantage and where she belongs in the society. Hence, the doll is nothing but another representation, an embodiment of everything she doesn't possess. It reminds her of her socioeconomic place. At the same time, Françoise is a vivid symbol of France. After all, France and Françoise are both by nature some sort of myth, an illusion that does not exist. Or even if they do, they are fraudulent, a fake copy different from what they appear to be. This is well demonstrated in Yasmina's first reaction when she finally makes it to France. Her mother's expectations of France are similar to most immigrants' expectations of Europe and the West in general: "Ma mère, elle s'imaginait que la France, c'était comme dans les films en noir et blanc des années soixante" (21), 'My mom always dreamed France was like in those black-and-white films from the sixties' (Adams 11). Yet she was then hit by reality: "Alors quand elle est arrivée avec mon père à Liry-Gargan en février 1984, elle a cru qu'ils avaient pris le mauvais bateau et qu'ils étaient trompés de pays" (*Kiffe kiffe* 21). Yasmina then threw up upon her arrival, leading Doria to wonder if it only had to due to sea sickness or a prediction of her future life in France (Adams 12).

Another moment of invisibility and resentment towards herself and her gender identity occurs when when Doria expresses her shock to see so many pictures of Sarah, the little girl she babysits. She mentions that there are no pictures of her before three years old (102-103), and adds "ça me rend triste de repenser à ça, j'ai l'impression de pas exister complètement. Je suis sûre que si j'avais eu un zizi, j'aurais une grosse pile d'albums photo" (103); 'It makes me sad to think about, feels like kind of I don't completely exist. Bet if I'd had a dick, I'd have a big fat pile of photo albums, filled with pictures of me' (Adams 94). This feeling of 'nonexistence' reaches a climactic

point as she looks at herself in the mirror and instead of seeing her own reflection, she sees her father reflected in her. The psychiatrist tells her she will be cured when she stops seeing him. This adds to her invisibility, as no one sees her and even she is unable to see herself (157). Doria's loss of identity complicates as she, from one side, is not recognized as an equal and full citizen of the country. Moreover, this loss of identity is deeply triggered by seeing her father's face in the mirror instead of her own. She had identified herself with her father, as someone she loves and misses, yet by whom she feels distant, abandoned, neglected, and silenced. As young as she is, she is obliged to take care of her parents instead of them taking care of her. This obligation invokes her inability to see herself as holding value of her own and having any right to exist as a fully alive and independent human being. This is why the psychologist links her cure to the moment she starts seeing herself in the mirror (175); Doria can re-identify herself only if she 'de-identifies' with her father. The episode is a symbol of her neglect by both father and society and of her loss of self. Psychologist Eva Dubska Papiasvili argues "the development of trust and safety in the relational context of early development […] is a prerequisite for safe self-object differentiation and the full development of the symbolic function which makes it possible to use words instead of more diffuse and regressive means of communication by one's means and actions" (132). Doria clearly has no control over her choices since everyone around her has already decided what she is able and not able to achieve. On how victims of trauma identify themselves with the aggressor Roberto D'Angelo explains "(t)he patient's defensive maneuvers or identification with her traumatizer may significantly contribute to ongoing experiences of alienation and relationship dysfunction" (28). Doria has no agency over her future and what she wants to do.

It is important here to highlight the gap media stories fill in the individual's life, especially when an ecology narrative is lacking, since its absence opens the space for media narrative as a

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replacement (Breen, McLean, et al 249). That is to say, in order to compensate for some narrative produced by parents and friends in Doria's life, the connection with the media and its narratives becomes deeper. Media narrative is in fact more accessible and to some extent can be controlled more easily (Breen, McLean, et al 249). Since one can choose the movies or shows they want to watch and the books they prefer to read, pop culture gives someone a sense of agency since it grants the authority to look for what he or she wants and to shun of what isn't desirable. This agency is limited, though, since some stories sometimes may not be sought but are still unavoidable (249). One then can argue that pop culture has a considerable weight as an "important source of information, perhaps especially as books and movies showcase a life path in a more condensed manner than individuals" (249). On its salient role Doria compares TV to religion. She brilliantly comments that "quand on a étudié la période médievale, il nous a dit que l'église, les dessins des vitraux, c'était la Bible du pauvre, pour les gens qui savaient pas lire. Pour moi, la télé aujourd'hui, c'est le Coran du pauvre" (*Kiffe kiffe* 151); 'When we studied Middle Ages with M. Werbert, my geography teacher, he told us the church used stained-glass windows as the poor person's bible, for people who couldn't read. For me, TV today is like the poor person's Koran' (Adams 141). In that sense pop culture becomes a religion since it provides one with guidance, defines a practice of 'faith', a sense of belonging. For Doria, the exploration of her actor self provides her with a compelling opportunity to "try on" numerous selves, to see bits of herself in different characters, in an attempt to understand her life and her cultural and social circumstances. It also gives her a sense of self-importance since she constantly feels unimportant to her parents, teachers, and society alike. In Doria's experience pop culture, movies, and TV provide a refuge from her daily struggle and from a society incapable of accepting her the way she is.

The analogy between pop culture and religion is worth exploring further. In order to attract youth who are disinterested in religion, for example, Japanese Buddhist institutions have begun using pop culture in order to sound more appealing (Porcu 157). By the same token, media could be perceived as a religion in itself, first because it offers a sense of collective identity. Since it based on how easily accessible it is to everyone regardless of who or where they are, media can function as a means by which to learn about morals and values (Breen, Andrea V., et al 248). Finally, it matches one's values. In some cases, media can even unintentionally endorse a certain standard or "path," which impacts people's perception of how they should live their lives. In this way, media establishes generalized standards and expectations for and of people (249). Movies, books, shows, and the like then reinforce important values: "such stories may also provide an important source of connection both to one's salient personal relationships and to the self across time and, as such, may be important for the ongoing authorship of a life story" (250). Movies then can function as a replacement of ecology narrative because they give one the opportunity to immerse in the story "it can be seen as "a family story, as well as a personal identity story" (250).

Recent research has shown the significant role media stories play in reinforcing bonding over TV. Watching certain shows or movies with family members or friends helps strengthen connections with others (Breen, Andrea V., et al 250). This is based on the claim that the act of watching certain shows or movies together with family renders these stories symbolic, or rather a representation of a certain familial connection at the same time as it reminds one of what they cherish the most and one's childhood (250). Therefore, movies and shows carry significant familial, and in its turn emotional, value. If these arguments are accepted, movies then "influence both the author and the agent self" (250). This is clearly demonstrated in Doria's autobiography. She relates how her] mother likes to watch the weather segment on the news, and how that encourages

conversations between the two. This engaging activity with her mother becomes a valuable

bounding time as, according to her, it opens for both an opportunity "to have deep and interesting

discussions" (*Kiffe kiffe* 81; Adams 73). TV then serves in improving and maintain a connection

with her mother. As Breen, Andrea V., et al argue, "stor[ies] about watching movies with family

[are stories] about a memory of engagement with a media story, as well as a personal identity story"

(250). Media stories could be considered a good tool "to raise consciousness" and "foster the

development of a critical lens" (251). Further implications of the power media stories possess

include its ability to provide a temporary escape and offer a coping mechanism to endure the

difficulties and complications of life (Breen, Andrea V., et al 252). The degree to which Doria uses

pop culture as a means of escape is evident throughout her autobiography, as when she overtly

wishes she could be a character in one of her shows:

> Des fois, j'aimerais trop être quelqu'un d'autre, ailleurs et peut-être même à une autre époque. Souvent, je m'imagine que je fais partie de la famille Ingalls dans *La Petite Maison dans la prairie*. J'explique le plan:
>
> Le papa, la maman, les enfants, le chien qui mord pas, la grange et les rubans dans les cheveux pour aller à l'église le dimanche matin […] Ce que j'aime bien chez eux, c'est que dès qu'il arrive un drame, il font le signe de croix, pleurent un bon petit coup, et à l'épisode d'après on a tout oublié ... c'est du pur cinéma. (*Kiffe kiffe* 73)
>
> Sometimes I just really would like to be someone else, somewhere else, and maybe in a whole different time. Often I imagine I'm part of the Ingalls family from *The Little House on the Prairie*. Here's the way it works:
>
> Dad, mom, kids, dog that doesn't bite, barn, and ribbons in your hair for going to church on Sunday mornings […] The thing I like about them is that as soon as some big drama starts up, they make the sign of the cross, have a good little crying session, and by the next episode everybody's forgotten all about it … it's pure movie magic. (Adams 65)

It is important here to note the formatting of the narrative and how it is constructed in a

way that comes across in the reader's mind as cinematic narration. Doria bluntly expresses how

much she would want to escape her reality by being a member of the Ingalls family, which also

works well as a form of diversion from her struggle in life. Such an escape makes much sense when Doria's life becomes unbearable; pop culture then provides her a refuge since it offers a virtual space in which the individual can become immersed. It is easier to get lost in other people's stories and lives when one doesn't want to deal with one's own. One can escape from one life by burring oneself in another's.

Doria's political awareness emerges in the form of a 'reportage' narrating style titled "l'abstention, pourquoi". In 'l'abstention, pourquoi' she details her conversation with Nabil, one of the neighbors who is helping her with her studies. Nabil wonders why a guy from the Paradise projects would "give a shit about voting" (Adams 88). Doria defends her opinion of why is it important to vote, especially if one lives in the slums and marginalized areas; her replies show an understanding of her citizenship duties and a deep comprehension of her collective identities: "Je me dis que c'est peut être pour ça que les cités sont laissés à l'abandon, parce que ici peu de gens votent. On est d'aucune utilité politique si on vote pas. Moi à dix-huit ans, j'irai voter. Ici, on n'a jamais la parole. Alors quand on nous la donne, il faut la prender" (*Kiffe kiffe* 98); 'I wonder if this is why these housing developments are left to decay, because so few people around here vote. You have no political usefulness if you don't vote. Me, when I'm eighteen, I'll go vote. Here, a person never gets a chance to be heard. So when we get a chance, we have to take it' (Adams 89). Breen, Andrea V., et al (252) confirms that media stories teach and raise political awareness while also strengthening the sense of collective identity by providing an awareness of political issues (252). This is clear at the very end of the novel, when Doria starts thinking that one day she "will lead an uprising in the Paradise Estate" (Adams 179). According to her, that revolution will be different from "*La Haine*" '*Hate*', a film that explores the socio-economic segregation between urban

cosmopolitan Paris and the suburban housing projects. Doria's version won't be as violent and will have a more optimistic ending (*Kiffe kiffe* 189; Adams 179).

When one suffers exclusion and social segregation it becomes only normal to sustain a collective identity through media stories. Doria describes how la cité de Paradis is socially segregated from Paris. We see her marginalization in society through the building and the neighborhood she lives in, reflecting her life as an immigrant and her social exclusion in Doria's narrative. For example, the building she lives in is in a very deteriorated state (37), and a history of hostile relations embodies through the building supervisor, who is French (she describes him as racist) and fought in the Algerian War. He stands as a good representation of the deep scar between France and its earlier colony: "Pour lui, la guerre elle doit pas être encore tout à fait terminée, et je crois que c'est aussi le cas de plein d'autres gens dans ce pays" (37), 'I don't think the war's fully over for him yet, and I think the same goes for plenty of other people in this country too' (Adams 30).

Throughout the novel the two spaces, Paris and the suburbs, appear as two separate realities: "il y a quand même une séparation marquée entre la cité du Paradis où j'habite et la zone pavillonnaire Rousseau. Des grillages immenses qui sentent la rouille tellement ils sont vieux et un mur de pierre tout le long" (Guène 89), 'there's still such a well-drawn line between the Paradise Estate where I live and the Rousseau housing development. Massive wire fencing that stinks of rust it's so old and a stone wall that runs the whole length of the divide' (Adams 82). The difference reinforces not only physical distance but also socio-economic segregation. This segregation is easily perceived in the interaction between Doria and her teacher, who doesn't hide her contempt for immigrants. Doria mentions how Madame Jacque once shouted at her for mispronouncing "Job" for "Jahb". Doria elaborates: "elle m'accusée de "souiller notre belle langue" et d'autres trucs aussi

débiles […] 'Par votrrre faute, le patrrrimoine frrrançaise est dans le coma'" (Guène 152), "she accused me of 'sullying our beautiful language' and other stuff just as stupid […] 'It's the faaaaultt of people like yooouu that our Frrrench herrrrrittage is in a coma!'" (Adams 142, 43).

Finally, this chapter has explored how pop culture provided Doria with a sense of self and collective identity. I have argued the influence of the stories that individuals experience through various media as it shapes the construction of individual identity and its own development. It also examined how media stories fill an individual's life, especially when an ecology narrative is lacking, since its absence opens the space for media narrative as a replacement. At the same time, in order to compensate for a narrative produced by parents and friends (an ecology narrative), the connection with the media and its narratives becomes more profound. I have argued that pop culture's influence equates that of a religion since it provides one with guidance, defines a practice of 'faith, and a sense of belonging. In comparison with Chapter 1, this space has considered how when one suffers exclusion and social segregation, it becomes only normal to sustain a collective identity through media stories. The chapter has shown the powerful influence that media stories have on the individual as it provides a temporary escape and offers a coping mechanism to endure the difficulties and complications of life. Such an escape makes much sense when one's life becomes unbearable; pop culture then provides a refuge since it offers a virtual space in which one can become immersed.

CHAPTER 3. "FLÂNEUSE-ING[34]" THE CITY: ECO-AUTOBIOGRAPHY, PLACE, AND SELF IN *DU RÊVE POUR LES OUFS*

At the end of the last chapter we briefly discussed spatial segregation and the contrast between urban, cosmopolitan Paris and its housing projects. This chapter will examine in more detail the impact of space on the construction of identity narratives by focusing on Faïza Guène's second novel, *Du rêve pour les oufs*. The novel was published in 2006, two years after *Kiffe kiffe demain*, and one year after the eruption of the 2005 major riots which broke out in Parisian suburbs before spreading across France.

The fictional autobiography revolves around Ahlème, a 24 year-old immigrant of Algerian background who lives in one of the shanty towns. She is the sole breadwinner of her family who takes care of a disabled father and a younger brother. In this chapter, I look into the question of identity in the spatial context. I examine the varied ways in which the main character, Ahlème, experiences space. I argue that place plays a significant role in the creation of self-narrative. I also discuss how spaces are perceived and produced through the autobiographical genre presented in *Du rêve pour les oufs,* and I argue that the human ability to create oneself arises first and foremost from its ability to locate the self in its surrounding space. I explore gender spatial segregation and its impact on women's bodily experience of place — more importantly, how spatial perception and its social construction can be privileging for men, yet disadvantageous for women. In addition, this presentation examines the importance of narrative and writing as a therapeutic tool.

Ahlème in *Du rêve pour les oufs* offers a different experience than that of Doria which emphasizes the heterogeneity of experience among Arab French women of Muslim background,

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[34] This part of the title is taken from Lauren Elkin's book *Flâneuse*.

living in France. Ahlème's narrational journey begins with her wandering in Paris's streets. Her roaming through the streets opens the door for another journey inside her inner self and thoughts, some sort of 'voyage' of a self -searching nature. The self-searching journey is a standard archetype of both the autobiographical and the bildungsroman[35] narrative in which the protagonist embarks on a journey of self-exploration and discovery (Killian & Hope 1). The journey usually calls for the main character to "leave home" and begin "an uncertain exploration of social space … through travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost" (Moretti 4). In *Du rêve pour les oufs*, Paris and its cold set up the departure point of Ahlème's autobiography.

In the opening lines she describes Paris, and how cold it is: "ça caille dans ce bled, le vent fait pleurer mes yeux et je cavale pour me rechauffer. Je me dis que je ne vis pas au bon endroit, que ce climat-là n'est pas pour moi, parce que au fond, ce n'est qu'une question de climat, et ce matin le froid ouf de France me paralyze" (Guène 7); 'It's freezing in this bled[36], the wind makes my eyes water and I have to run in place to get warm. I tell myself that I am not living in the right place, that the climate around here isn't for me, because in the end, climate is the only thing that counts and this morning the crazy French cold paralyzes me' (Johnson 1). No doubt, the feeling of cold here does not only reflect a mere description of the temperature, and the weather, but also the coldness and the distant treatment the country and the people has been displaying towards her. The word *caille* "freezing" could very well describe her socioeconomic status and her experience as an immigrant in France and how she has been treated, or how people have thought of her. Meanwhile, "parce qu' au fond, ce n'est qu'une question de climat […] et ce climat-là n'est

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[35] A German term initially introduced by philologist Karl Morgenstern during the 19th century. It focuses mainly on the psychological and moral growth the main characters go through in any given story.

[36] Adapted from the Arabic word *Blad* which means country, city, village or The Maghreb.

pas pour moi", 'because at the end it is a question of climate […] and this climate is not for me".[37]

Ahlème, then, evidently has a problem of 'acclimatization' that makes it hard for her to physically and emotionally conform to the atmosphere in its environmental, social, and political meanings. Hence, it would be only logical to claim that the spatial setting and the surrounding environment facilitate the psychological process of her opening herself up and allowing the surge of her deeper feelings. This mirroring between inside and outside creates a secure foundation for the self-narrative to form and develop.[38] Psychologist Stephanie Tyler argues that a place narrative often starts by describing the place from which the introduction of the self flows (Tyler 10; 40). In writing about autobiographies in which nature stimulates writers to explore the "self in nature," Peter F. Perreten elucidates that by combining the "place portrait" and all its significant histories and sceneries with the "literary self portrait," the author constructs a new self (6, 7). Janet Gunn distinguishes this new self shaped through the merger between the account of a person's life and the place in which it unfolds:

> The self that comes to life [in autobiography] is not [...] the self which, like Narcissus, grasped for its mirror-image and drowned in certainty; rather it is the self which, like Antaeus, has its life in groundedness. As long as the mythical giant remained in contact with earth, his mother, he remained invincible [....] Understood as the story of Antaeus, the real question of the autobiographical self then becomes where do I belong? not, who am I? The question of the self's identity becomes the question of the self in a world. (Gunn 23).

Undoubtedly, Ahlème's narrational voice is formed by the natural surrounding and landscape with which it interacts. This interaction establishes an intricate connection between her internal reflections and thoughts and the external environment. It achieves what Perreten calls an intertextuality between the inward and the outward ("Eco-autobiography: Portrait of Place/ Self

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[37] Translation has been adapted from Johnson, as I disagree with Johnson's "climate's the only thing that counts" (1), which I think does not deliver the meaning as precisely.

[38] An evolution of Romanticism.

Portrait" 6-7). In other words, there is a continuum (circle/ spiral) in which the inside is out and the outside is reflected in. Without this looping the self portrait wouldn't be complete; the stage on which we portray ourselves to one another wouldn't exist (Gunn 21). Ahlème carries on with the autobiographical narration by introducing her-social status, conditions, and her invisibility/and /or marginalization as an immigrant; and the invisibility and marginalization of her generation, in society. All of that is done by describing the people around her

> Je m'appelle Ahlème et je marche au milieu des gens, ceux qui courent, se cognent, sont en retard, se disputent, se téléphonent, ne sourient pas, et je vois mes frères, qui comme moi, ont beaucoup froid. Ceux-là, je les reconnais toujours, ils ont quelque chose dans les yeux qui n'est pas pareil, on dirait qu'ils aimeraient être invisible, être ailleurs, mais ils sont ici. (Guène 7)

> My name is Ahlème and I roam around in the middle of everybody, the ones who run, the ones who beat each other up, are late, argue, make phone calls, the one who don't smile, and I see my brothers who, like me, are very cold. I always recognize them, they have something in their eyes that isn't the same as everybody else, like they want to be invisible, or be somewhere else. But they're here. (Johnson 1)

Ahlème walking through the city is part of a larger culture and history: it is an act of "flaneuse-ing." Lauren Elkin defines the word: "Flâneuse, noun from the French. Feminine form of Flâneur, an idler, a dawdling observer, usually found in the city" (*Flâneuse* 7). According to Elkin, the word flâneur rarely makes an appearance in most French dictionaries, and the act of 'flâneur-ing' has been mostly seen as "a male and not female" (13) activity. For Elkin, a flâneuse (feminine form) "voyages out and goes where she is not supposed to; she forces us to confront the ways in which words like "home" and "belonging" are used against women" (22). The concept of *flâneur* first appeared in nineteenth century's poem *Le vin des chiffonniers* by Charles Baudelaire published in *Les fleurs du mal*. For Baudelaire, a *flâneur* roams freely and gets lost in the city;

Walter Benjamin emphasizes that this wanderer is mainly an observer, thus his role is more of the investigator who examines thoroughly the metropolis.[39]

Interestingly Ahlème —in the previous quote— highlights her existence in space as she describes how she passes by unnoticed. She wanders through the streets of Paris, lost among the masses. She is part of the crowd, yet she is lost in the crowd. She stands out since she is different, and yet only the sight of her "brothers." blends her in. Thus, in this one stance she is an insider at best, an outsider at most. After all, she and her brothers want to be invisible or to be anywhere else, yet being visible and yet invisible is all they can achieve. And as conflicting as the two states are, she and her brothers cannot be one without being the other. Ahlème explains how she doesn't complain to her father even when the government cuts off the heating, because, as he dismissively insists, her cold is never comparable to that of winter of 1963.[40] Ahlème doesn't answer the father but emphasizes that she wasn't even born in 63. She then goes out and roams again: "j'avance et je glisse sur les rues lisses de France" (8), 'So I head out and wander around the smooth streets of France[41]' (Johnson 2), as she heads to her appointment with Monsieur Miloudi, the adviser for the "Insurrection Housing Project" at an unemployment agency. As she starts filling out the competency assessment document, she feels blocked and unable to write anything except her name and date of birth. Like Doria in *Kiffe kiffe demain,* Ahlème doesn't know what to make of her life

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[39] For more on this check Shaya, Gregory. "The Flaneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 109, no. 1, 2004, pp. 41–77. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/530151.

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BIELECKI, EMMA M. "'Un Artiste En Matière De Chiffons': The Rag-Picker as a Figure for the Artist in Champfleury's 'La Mascarade De La Vie Parisienne.'" *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3/4, 2009, pp. 262–275. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23538869

[40] In 1963 Europe was hit by a wave of cold that was considered one of the worst in the whole century.

[41] Translation adapted from Johnson, as Johnson's original translation includes the word "wonderfully," which I omitted since it does not exist in Guène's original text and its inclusion would have delivered a different meaning.

and the second she sees the 'life project' check box on her competency assessment document she becomes baffled. When M. Miloudi returns to her few minutes later, he is surprised to see that she hasn't completed the form and asks her what is taking so long. She answers, "J'ai pas eu le temps. […] Je sais pas quoi mettre dans la case "projet de vie" (10), 'I haven't had enough time […] I don't know what to put in the box marked 'life objective' (Johnson 4). Metaphorically, her conversation with the advisor summarizes her life and challenges as an immigrant woman and a child of a North African immigrant in France. Again, one could see how she fell out of the system as her potentials are not fully utilized within French society since she is being limited and tied to certain jobs. The rest of her conversation with M. Miloudi illustrates meticulously this argument.

> — Je sais pas quoi mettre dans la case de "Projet de vie" …
>
> — Tu as bien une idée?
>
> — Non.
>
> — Mais dans ton CV, il est indiqué que tu as beaucoup d'éxpériences professionnelles, il doit bien y avoir quelque chose qui te plaît dans tout ça.
>
> — C'étaient des petits jobs de serveuse ou de vendeuse que j'ai faits. C'est pour gagner de l'argent, monsieur c'est pas mon projet de vie. (Guène 10-11)
>
> "I don't know what to put in the box market 'life objective'—"
>
> "Do you have ideas?"
>
> "No".
>
> "But on your résumé, it's clear that you have a lot of work experience, there has to be something that you liked in all of that."
>
> "I have only had little jobs as waitress or salesperson. Just to make money, sir, not as part of my life objective." (Johnson 4-5)

In *Citizen Outsider*, sociologist Jean Beaman remarks that children of Maghrebi immigrants often wind up holding jobs below their educational level (14). Beaman argues,

> Being incorporated into French society and being accepted as French by others is not a question of professional success, educational attainment, or adhering to

Republican ideology. Rather, France has a growing group of citizens who, despite doing everything right, can not achieve full membership in French society. This demonstrates the limitations of citizenship within a democratic context, wherein difference based on ethnic status reveals a more dynamic notion of who is included in the Republic and who is not. (14)

While trying to fill out the questionnaires Ahlème establishes an intertwined yet separate comparison between herself and her father whom she and her brother Foued call "Le Patron," 'the boss' She remarks that her hands are so frozen that she is unable to loosen them, which reminds her of the boss after he used to return home from work. The questionnaire, no different than the competency assessment document, provokes another existential crisis for Ahlème as she tries to write down her information on the job application. She vents:

> tout est minuscule sur leur formulaire et leurs questions sont presque vexantes. Non, je ne suis pas mariée, je n'ai pas d'enfants, je ne suis pas titulaire du permis B, je n'ai pas fait des études supérieures, je ne suis pas reconnue invalide par la Cotorep, je ne suis pas française. À la rigueur, où se trouve la case "Ma vie est un échec"? Comme ça je coche directement oui, et on n'en parle plus. (Guène 12)

> Everything is minuscule on their form and their questions are kind of annoying. No, I am not married, I don't have children, I am not a B-permit cardholder, I haven't done any higher education, I am not Cotorep-verified disabled person, I am not French. Where do I find the box marked "My life is a complete failure"? At least with that I could just immediately check, and we wouldn't have to talk about anything else. (Johnson 5)

An intricate relationship between Ahlème inner feelings, movements, status in society, and the spatial surroundings recurswhile she is waiting for the train to Ivry, the housing project where she lives. The manifestation of this multilayered dynamic between self, place, and politics attests itself in the following lines:

> Le quai est noir de monde, il y a des perturbations sur la ligne. Un train sur quatre je crois, c'est ce qu'ils ont dit à la radio. Je suis donc forcée d'éteindre la barre du wagon. Il manque d'air ce RER, on me pousse, on m'oppresse. Le train transpire et moi, je me sens étouffée par toutes ses silhouettes tristes qui cherchent un peu de couleurs. On dirait que le souffle de toute l'Afrique ne leur suffirait pas. Ce sont des fântomes ils sont tous malade, contaminés par la tristesse. (Guène 20)

> The platform is black with the crowds, there are service disruptions on the line. One train in four, I think, at least that's what they said on the radio. So I am forced up against the pole in the car. There is no air in the RER, everyone's pushing me, blocking me in. The trains sweats and me, I feel smothered by all these silhouettes, all looking for a little color. You could say that all the air in Africa wouldn't be enough. They're phantoms, they're sick, contaminated by sadness. (Johnson 11)

Ahlème describes not only her bodily preoccupation in relationship to the space she inhabits but rather an in-depth look at how she feels inwardly, and how her environment makes her feel. The train experience invokes different meanings. It is shaped by her whole experience and not exclusively by feeling cornered and trapped in the train. The suffocation and limitation is not only tied to her clutching the train pole. It doesn't only come from the fact that they are all crammed into the train car like sardines in a can, but rather the weight of her feelings as a 'second citizen' never fully integrated, incorporated, or accepted. She is also burdened by the responsibility of taking care of her family while fighting for a place in society. The fact is that she, as a daughter, is fathering her own father while parenting her younger brother to whom she is both father and mother, all while taking care of herself. In that sense she is a mother and a father before being a daughter. She feels the only validation of her existence is to look after others, or at least it is how she plainly puts it: "Parfois j'ai l'impression d'être née pour m'occuper des autres" (Guène 40), 'Sometimes I have the feeling that I was born to take care of others' (Johnson 27-28). The push in the train is coming not only from the other commuters but also from a society which marginalizes and ignores her needs, pressuring her forcefully until she can no longer breathe. It is the cold that never eases, the living between two cultures that never ever fully accept her: the future that may look no different than the present, nor the previously lived past. It is the fear, the deep wish of running away from responsibility and from what has happened, what is happening, and what is yet still to come. Again, place becomes important as it reflects the inside out, or the outside that is reflected in. It provokes the feelings and thoughts which trigger the narrative and the creation of

self by writing the feelings and experiencing the self. Killian and Hope emphasize that "Movement decentres places, just as it decentres selves and their place related identities. Hence mobility initiates a dynamic of (re)creation and recreation of self, one that is […] intimately linked to the ideological forces inherent in spaces as well as places and the subject's ability to engage with, and resist them" (4).

Ahlème's asthmatic episode diminishes once she reaches Ivry: " Mon RER asthmatique me crache dans ma zone où il fait plus froid encore. Il y a des jours comme ça où on ne sait plus où on va, on se dit qu'on n'a pas de chance, et tant pis" (Guène 20), 'My asthmatic RER will cough me up in my zone where it's even colder. There are some days like that where you don't know anymore where you' re going, you tell yourself you don't have any luck [42] at all, and that's just too bad' (Johnson 11). The poor living conditions and the high concentration of immigrants in the *banlieue* where she lives have deepened her feelings of marginalization, frustration, and displacement. The reader gets a glimpse of the Uprising Estate, the name of the building in which Ahlème resides with her father and brother. Mary Ann Singleton once wrote: "in the work of some writers is a scene, or a composite of several scenes, that crystallizes the essential problems from which most of the writing springs" (17). For Guène's Ahlème, the description of the decaying building and the striking contradiction between the famousvision of Paris as the magical city of beauty, fashion, and romance and its ghetto, captures the essence of those "essential problems". In that sense Paris could easily be seen as what Singleton describes in *The City and the Veld* as the "ideal" of the *city*: "One City is all too recognizable in its division into slums and mansions and unhappiness and strife to its citizen. Behind it, like a mirage, shimmers the image of another city that never was, except in the Utopian imagination" (17). Just as in *Kiffe kiffe demain,* in *Du rêve*

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[42] Translation adapted from Johnson. Johnson original's translation is "you feel like you don't have any luck at all" (11), which I have changed to "you tell yourself."

pour les oufs, Paris and its slums symbolize the two ends of the spectrum. Ahlème paints a vision of the physically segregated *bidonville* slum: "Je suis entourée par tous ces immeubles aux aspects loufoques qui renferment nos bruits et nos odeurs, notre vie d'ici. Je me tiens là, seule, au milieu de leur architecture excentrique de leurs couleurs criardes, de leurs formes inconscientes qui ont si longtemps bercé nos illusions" (36), 'I am surrounded by all these buildings with all their crazy sides that hold in our noises, our odors, our lives here. I stand there, alone, in the middle of their strange architecture, their gaudy colors, their unconscious forms that have cradled our illusions for so long' (Johnson 24). Thus, the *bidonville* is a marginal place, a "space" beyond the Parisian border. It is surrounded by high decaying buildings, standing tall as solid walls to protect urban Paris from its suburban chaos. Jacob Paskins explains how shanty towns became a point of attraction for the foreign workers brought to France as a labor force to rebuild the economy[43]. They mostly worked in factories or on construction sites in and around Paris, but due to the high cost of living in the City of Light, their low wages and the lack of better alternatives, the shanty town emerged as an affordable solution (1):

> Located on unused land and among derelict industrial sites, bidonvilles usually comprised temporary housing made from salvaged wood and corrugated iron. General living conditions were terrible: rats abounded and space was overcrowded, with as many as eight people sharing two tiny rooms. Few huts had basic sanitary facilities: there were no waste disposal facilities, no drainage or running water, and no toilets. (2)

Water shortages pushed people to stand in queues for hours in order to fill in their *bidon* —bucket or container— since there were only two water pipes. The *bidon* then earned the slums its infamous name as bidonville (2). The bidonville comes to represent the spatial paradox of Paris since "Paris pensé comme un mythe a tendance à être représentée comme un tout homogène" (Sabjo & Zardu

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[43] Check Weaver p. 2.

8), 'Paris is thought of as a myth tends to be represented as a homogeneity.[44]' Thus the shanty town epitomizes the heterogeneity of the city and its suburbs.

Ahlème's satiric description of their apartment's door key reveals the rundown condition of the age-old Uprising Estate building and its radical need for a makeover: "me voilà donc face à une situation que je n'aime pas: ouvrir la porte sans faire de bruit, ce qui n'est vraiement pas évident avec le type de clé que nous avons, les clés "sans soucis", c'est marqué dessus. Elles sont ÉNORME, trente centimètres de long, huit de largeur pour un poids de quatorze kilos elles ressemblent aux clés des cachots du temps de l'Empire romain" (Guène 51), 'So now I am stuck with a situation I don't much like: open the door without making any noise, something that's not so simple with the kind of keys we have, keys with CARE FREE marked on them. They're ENORMOUS, twelve inches long, eight wide, all for a weight of about thirty pounds, they look like the keys to the dungeons from the time of the Roman Empire' (Johnson 34). It is important here to note that the name of the building references the 2005 riots. The unrest erupted when two teenagers Zyed Benna of Maghrebien origin and Bouna Traoré of West African origin died of what the law enforcement described as "an accidental electrocution" (Crampton). The incident took place in the banlieues 93, Seine-Saint-Denis, as the two teenagers finished a soccer game and were hurrying to their respective homes; they then ran into police officers who were patrolling the area. Since it was the holy month of fasting, and close to the time of breaking fast, out of fear of being aimlessly interrogated for long hours, the teenagers took refuge inside an electrical substation. Their death triggered large riots all over France, which lead then Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin to declare a state of emergency, the first in forty years since the end of the French-Algerian War 40 years earlier (Marlowe). The event had significant socio-economical and political

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[44] My translation.

repercussions on recent French history. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Guène, through

Ahlème, mentions the event and describes its atmosphere in general:

> Il est révolu le temps où l'eau courante et l'éléctricité suffisait à camoufler les injustices, ils sont loin maintenant les bidonvilles. Je suis digne et debout et je pense à tout un tas de choses. Les événements qu'il y a eu par chez nous ces dernières semaines ont agité la presse du mondé entier après quelques affrontements jeunes-police, tout s'est calmé à nouveau. Mais qu'est ce que nos trois carcasses de caisses calcinées peuvent changer quand une armée de forcenés cherchent à nous faire taire? (36)

> The time has passed when running water and electricity were enough to camouflage injustices, the slums are far off now. I am dignified and standing tall and I'm thinking about a whole mess of things. The events that took place in our neighborhood during these last few weeks have stirred up the press around the world, and after some face-offs between the police and the kids, everything is newly settled down. But what can our three burned-out cars change when an army of maniacs are trying to make us shut up? (Johnson 24)

This comes as both a nod to the riots and an explanation of what pushed the youth to protest.

Furthermore, Ahlème alludes to the curfew imposed following the riots: "le seul couvre-feu

valable est celui que moi, citoyenne non française, j'impose ce soir à mon petit frère de quinze ans"

(Guène 37), 'The only curfew worth minding is the one I, non-French citizen, will impose this

evening on my fifteen-year-old brother' (Johnson 24). Ahlème understands, early on, how her

"citoyenne non française" status causes her troubles and that the best way to get around it is by

being assertive. In her opinion, this has rendered her the 'perfect model of integration':

> Quand je suis arrivée sur cette terre de Mépris, j'étais une petite fille enthousiaste et polie, et en moins de temps […] je suis devenue une vraie teigne. J'ai vite laissé tomber mes bons vieux réflexes, le truc de se lever pour s'addresser au professeur par exemple […] J'ai très vite compris qu'il fallait que je m'impose et c'est ce que j'ai fait. Depuis, j'ai pas mal progressé. Comme dirait l'autre, je suis devenue un parfait modèle d'intégration. (Guène 61)

> When I arrived in this cold, scornful land I was a little girl, enthusiastic and polite, and in less time […] I became a true parasite. I quickly let my old habits slide, like standing up to speak to the teacher, for example […] I quickly understood that I had to take control of myself and that's just what I did. Ever since, I haven't made bad progress. Like they say, I've become a perfect model of integration. (Johnson 41)

However, she laments how she is "presque française" 'almost French' since she does not have "ce stupid bout de papier bleu ciel", 'this stupid piece of laminated sky-blue paper'. Ahlème understands that her permanent French residency card is the only obstacle between her and her full integration. She details how this blue card would make her life easier and save her from the agonizing process she goes through to maintain her French identity papers: "cette petite chose […] me dispenserait de me lever à trois heures du matin chaque trimestre pour aller faire la queue devant la préfecture, dans le froid, pour obtenir un énième renouvellement de séjour" (Guène 61), 'this little thing […] would get me out of waking up at three o'clock in the morning every trimester in order to go to the line in front of the prefecture, in the cold, to obtain for the umpteenth time a renewal for my residency permit' (Johnson 41). She documents how the police and the clerks at the French office for immigration and integration treat immigrants with no regard for their humanity: "En général, des flics nous gèrent comme si nous étions des animaux. Les connasses, derrière cette putain de vitre qui les maintient loin de nos réalités, nous parlent comme à des deumeurés, bien souvent sans même nous regarder dans les yeux" (Guène 62), 'In general the cops deal with us like we're animals. The bitches behind this fucking window that keeps them far from our realities, talk to us about our residencies, more often than not without even looking us in the eyes' (Johnson 42). Ahlème describes the overly punitive policy against immigrants *sans papier:* "Depuis la circulaire du mois de février 2006 et son objectif de vingt-cinq mille expulsions dans l'année, il y a comme une odeur de gaz dans les files d'attente devant la préfecture" (Guène 64), 'Ever since the February 2006 circular and its goal of 25,000 explosions in a year, there's a gas-like odor around the lines in front of the prefecture' (Johnson 43). The latter refers to President Nicolas Sarkozy's hardline position on immigration and his policy of deporting the children of undocumented immigrants (Freedman 614; Egré). In 2007 Sarkozy, who was aiming to gain right

wing voters for the following year's presidential election, adopted a hard-nosed policy toward illegal immigrants. Undocumented parents were not the only ones targeted by this policy, but in some cases, children of *sans papiers* would find the police waiting for them after they were done at school (Benoit et al 21). Sarkozy was forced to back down after teachers, parents, and spiritual and religious officials started to hide the children and move them every night from one house to another (Benoit et al 24; Chrisafis). The policy contributed to the emergence of the RESF (Réseau Éducation Sans Frontières), a "collective action" aimed at preventing children of undocumented immigrants from getting arrested and deported. RESF rose out of moral and emotional obligation and the "ethical concerns about children's welfare" (Freedman 614-16). Moreover, the "gas-like odor" Ahlème refers to is the inflammatory and hostile climate towards immigrants. She recounts how the immigration services are teaming up with immigration enforcement agents by identifying immigrants who are eligible for deportation. She herself reveals her fears of being separated from her family and being sent off to Algeria, which adds extra layers of difficulty to Ahlème's debilitating responsibilities: "quand je suis assise sur une des chaises dures et uncomfortable de la préfecture, j'imagine des hommes à petites moustaches dans des bureaux qui n'ont qu'à appuyer sur un bouton pour que cela devienne un siège ejectable et que je me retrouve au village" (Guène 64), 'when I am sitting on one of those hard, uncomfortable chairs at the perfecture, I imagine men with little mustaches in the offices who only have to push a button for it to become an ejector seat and for me to find myself back in the village' (Johnson 44). The constant fear of being deported adds extra layers of difficulty to Ahlème's debilitating responsibilities.

As in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the topic of "reverse parenting" surges again in *Du rêve pour les oufs*. Doria in *Kiffe kiffe demain* takes care of her mother after her father abandons them, and at times becomes not only a daughter but rather a mother and a father figure for the mother. The

constant anxieties and attempts to look after her mother her mother compel Doria to parent her mother. In the same way, Ahlème is the caregiver of her father and brother after the death of her mother. Hence, she also parents her father and brother as she becomes responsible for their financial, domestic, and emotional care. Consequently, the reader notices a shift in gender roles. On female migrations and how it has entirely changed gender norms, research finds that

> Female migration produces a change of the role of women in their families and communities of origin. As women are increasingly migrating on their own […] they assume the role of main economic providers and heads of households. Women also play an important role in different stages of migration, as caregivers for those left behind, as managers of remittances, and as emotional supporters of migrants in different circumstances. Women play a key role as recipients and managers of remittances. Data reveals that women use remittances primarily for food and education […] that the greater women's control over the household's monetary resources (whether it is as remitters which maintain strict supervision over the use of the remittances they send, or as administrators of remittances received), the greater the tendency to invest in the overall well being of the household. (*The Female Face of immigration* 10)

For Ahlème, this shift in gender roles is well demonstrated in the dynamic of the father-daughter relationship. The presence of the absent-minded dad has a pivotal significance in the novel. Undoubtedly, he is not the 'standard' patriarchal figure who provides for the family and goes out to work to earn his family's living. Instead, he mainly stays in the apartment they live in after an accident at work and gradually succumbs to confusion and memory loss. His dementia and her journey as a caregiver child haven't been easy: "c'est vrai que c'était dur au début mais après on s'y faits" (35), 'It's true it was hard at first but afterwards we managed' (Johnson 23). She recounts how her father has lost contact with reality in the first few months following the accident, and how he would some days dress as if he were going to work before Ahlème intervened and reminded him that he cannot go. She emphasizes how heartbreaking the process was: "Lorsque je me rendais compte qu'il était debout, je devais me lever et lui expliquer qu'il n'allait pas travailler et ça me faisait mal au coeur parcequ'il me répondait, confus: "Oui, c'est vrai, tu as

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raison, j'avais oublié qu'on est dimanche" (35), 'When I realized that he was standing, I had to get myself up and explain to him that he wasn't going to work and it broke my heart because he answered me confused: "Yes, it's true, you're right, I had forgotten , it's Sunday"' (Johnson 23). Ironically her father's forgetfulness could be perceived in a positive light as he cannot remember the accident; all he could remember is that it is a Sunday and he cannot work on a Sunday. His lack of awareness of his mental conditions and his struggles with dementia render him more of a toddler, rather than an authoritarian figure. For example, when she comes home from work and finds that her brother has left their father alone, she confirms "Papa ne doit pas être jamais seul à la maison, c'est la règle numéro un" (Guène 41), 'dad should never be alone in the house, that's rule number one' (Johnson 27). Furthermore, in another incident, she mentions how she would sing him to sleep (Guène 160). The devaluation of the patriarchal figure persists throughout the novel. Ironically, the children call their ailing and incompetent father, the "Boss". Interestingly, Guène portrays him as a character worthy of pity, yet one who still produces laughter. For instance, when Ahlème decides to take her father and brother Foued on a vacation to visit their family in Algeria, she breaks the news to Foued who in turn asks if their father already aware of the plan, to which she replies "Ouais, je lui ai dit tout à l'heure. Demande-lui, tu verras, tu vas rigoler" (Guène 180), 'Yeah, I just told him. Ask him, you'll see, you will get a laugh out of it' (Johnson 131). Foued asks "Papa?" 'Dad?' To which the father replies "C'est moi. Qui me demande?" 'It's me. Who is asking about me?'[45] The Boss' answer asserts his figurative and literal disconnection. As a matter of fact, the rest of the conversation attests to how their father clearly has a hard time following and always ends up providing an answer that is unrelatable to the question that has been asked. Ahlème then declares "Avec Foued, on se marre. Le Patron est imprévisible", 'Foued and

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[45] Translation adapted from Johnson. Johnson's translation is "who wants me." However, Guène uses "demande," which I translate as "ask."

me, we cut up at that. The boss is unpredictable'. It is important here to note that the French word "imprévisible" could mean unpredictable as well as unreliable. This unreliability underlines the representation of the absent power rendering their father a symbol of an inept, feeble, and non-existent authority. A second example comes near the end of the novel, after they arrive in Algeria and the taxi parks in front of the family house. Ahlème says, "[l]e Patron décide de faire une arrivée fracassante. Je ne sais pas ce qui lui a pris mais il est sorti de la voiture en bouledé et s'est mis à crier de joie, à lever les bras, à applaudir et à siffler" (Guène 196), 'The Boss then decides to make a real entrance. I don't know what came over him, but he burst out of the car and set himself crying with joy, raising his arms, clapping and whistling' (Johnson 144). The scene turns more farcical when the Boss makes things worse and absurdly starts shouting "Vive l'Algérie! Le peuple d'Algérie est libre! On a gagné! L'Algérie est à nous! Istiqlal! Istiqlal!" (Guène 196), 'Long live Algeria! The people of Algeria are free! We won! Algeria is ours! Istiglal! Istiqlal![46]' (Johnson 144). The metaphorical significance of the father struggling with dementia and its equation to a symbol of dissolving power culminates when the Boss accidentally shaves his Mustache. This key incident announces in a very comedic, yet tragically powerful moment the death of the patriarchy. Interestingly enough the chapter is titled "L'honneur du Patron" 'The Boss's honor':

> Aujourd'hui mon père n'est plus un homme. Tout s'effondre. Le Patron a voulu raser sa grande et généreuse moustache, il a mal calculé son coup […] Quand je suis rentrée à la maison, j'ai trouvé cet imbécile de Foued qui rigolait à s'en taper le cul par terre. Quant au pauvre Patron, il était dans son lit, allongé sur le dos avec un morceau de moustache à la main. Au dessus de ses lèvres il ne restait qu'un bout sans forme. Il m'a fait trop pitié, entendu comme ça, on aurait dit un vieux cancéreux sur son lit de mort. (Guène 102)

> Today my father is no longer a man. Our world is collapsing. The boss wanted to trim his generous mustache, he miscalculated his stroke […] and he missed it up. When I got home I found that imbecile Foued rolling around on the ground laughing his ass off. As for the poor boss, he was in his bed lying on his back with a piece of

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[46] An Arabic word which means "independence." Commonly used in protests when the Arab world was under colonization.

his mustache in his hand. Above his lips there remained only a formless patch. He was too pitiful, stretched out like that, you could say he looked like an old cancer patient on his deathbed. (Johnson 72)

The conversation that follows between Ahlème and her father signals the emasculation of the patriarchy. Between the high-pitched laughs of the son ridiculing his father in the background and the latter's utter devastation over his absent mustache, his daughter then suggests shaving it all off: "Papa, viens, je rase tout, comme ça elle repoussera bien comme il faut" (Guène 102), 'Papa, come here, and I will shave it all, that way it will grow back as it should'.[47] Patriarchy is struggling to assert its manhood, while his daughter's suggestion to shave whatever is left of the mustache represents the matriarchy that will erase whatever is left in order for the patriarchy to rise and emerge the way it should. By that same token womanhood is needed to reconstruct and restore manhood; both literally and allegorically masculinity cannot be established and 'arise' without the help of femininity. It could also signify the replacement of manhood with womanhood. I may have to digress a little to explain this premise.

A moustache, within his culture, has long been considered a representation of manliness and manhood, a masculinity code as is clear from the father's claim that "Je suis plus un homme, moi! Mon fils, il a plus de moustache que moi ! Je ne sors plus dehors, je ne vais plus travailler" (Guène 102), 'I am no longer a man ! My son has more of a mustache than I do. I am never going outside again and I am not going to work anymore' (Johnson 73). The mustache then is a symbol of manhood, potency, and competency. It displays anability to do things, an identity, a representation of who he is, a guide of how a man he should be; it is his stamp of approval in the manhood world. Consequently, without it, he confirms that "J'ai perdu l'honneur ! Moi j'avais un honneur ! J'ai porté le drapeau tout en haut ! J'étais fier et je regardais le ciel" (Guène 102), 'I

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[47] My translation.

have lost my honor ! All I had was honor! I carried the flag high! I was proud and looked toward the sky' (Johnson 73). Therefore, it is not merely an identity but rather a symbol of pride, dignity, and respect. Without the mustache his masculinity is contested; he is robbed of his power; he is overthrown and no longer able to govern. As a result, the dissolution of one power gives rise to another, and matriarchy becomes a rising alternative to patriarchy.

It is equally important to consider how Ahlème throughout the course of the novel establishes comparisons between herself and her father. When thirteen and fourteen years old, she struggled with her gender identity and tried to hide it. Ahlème emphasizes she was "un vrai petit mec" (Guène 55) 'I was a real young guy'.[48] Her boyish appearance didn't get Auntie Maritou's approval: "Tantie a en horreur tous mes sweatshirts larges, baggies et autres joggings, alors quand j'ai le malheur de porter une casquette, on n'en parlons même pas, je l'exaspère" (Guène 55), 'Auntie's horrified by my big sweatshirts, long shorts, and tracksuits, so when I have misfortune of wearing a cap, we don't even speak of it, I exasperate her' (Johnson 37). Auntie Maritou is Ahlème's neighbor and Ahlème considers her as a second mother, she is also the one who helped Ahlème gain her self-confidence. She also compelled Ahlème to reconnect with her feminine identity or rather conform to the traditional idea and standard representation of femininity. Ahlème stresses that "elle m'a fait découvrir les magasins de filles, les chaussures à talons et le maquillage. J'ai mis du temps à adhérer" (Guène 56), 'she introduced me to women's clothing stores[49], high heels, and make-up. It took me a while to stick to it'.[50] Ahlème's experience gets more complex as she attempts to navigate between the feminine and masculine worlds: "À seize ou dix sept ans,

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[48] My translation.

[49] My translation.

[50] Translation adapted from Johnson's. Johnson used the present tense instead of Guène's past tense "J'ai mis du temps."

quand des garçons ont commencé à s'intéresser à moi parce que je ressemblais enfin à une jeune femme et moins à un loubard, je croyais qu'ils n'étaient pas sincères, qu'il se moquaient de moi" (Guène 56), 'At sixteen or seventeen, when boys started to get interested in me because I finally resembled a young women more than a thug, I thought they weren't sincere, that they were making fun of me' (Johnson 38). Her complex feelings intensify as she reveals how her spatial experience shapes her life and her perception of the self, indicating the limitation that comes with the female body while being restricted to the domestic sphere:

> Je devais avoir dix ou onze ans lorsque j'ai perdu maman et que j'ai quitté l'Algérie […] Là-bas, c'était tout le contraire, je ne voyais jamais d'hommes […] Je pouvais prendre quinze claques pour une seule et même bêtise. Je vivais parmi toutes ces femmes qui passaient leur vie à se cacher des hommes […] Je restais enfermé dans la baraque. Heureusement il y avait l'école, où je pouvais parler aux autres enfants […] mon temps libre […] je regardais la rue à travers le grillage. (Guène 56-57)

> I must have been ten or eleven when I lost my mama and left Algeria […] Over there it was the complete reverse, I never saw men […] I could get fifteen different smacks for one single mistake. I lived among a crew of women who spent their lives hiding themselves from men […] I stayed shut up in the hut. Luckily there was school […] I passed my free time […] watching the street on the other side of the chain link fence. (Johnson 38)

From the previous example one can clearly see the social construction of space in terms of gender. At the same time this construction supports and reinforces lesser status for women than men. In her article "Gendered Spaces and Women's Status," Daphine Spain argues that the spatial segregation between men and women contributes to the limitation of women in certain spatial contexts (137). According to Spain, the more the spatial segregation, the more constriction women suffer and the more women's status is devalued next to men. Further, this forces women to conform to their status according to place (137). However, once Ahlème moves to France she notices her experience turned to the complete opposite: "Arrivée à Livry, avec le Patron, ça a été le choc de la grande liberté, l'air frais. Il me laissait toujours m'amuser dehors seule et souvent il m'emmenait au bar-PMU" (Guène 57), 'Settled in Ivry with the Boss, I was shocked by the immense liberty,

the fresh air. He always left me alone to play outside and often took me to the OTB bar' (Johnson

39). Accordingly, Ahlème confirms that this freedom has rendered her invincible (Guène 57). It is

important here to emphasize that her experience in its cultural meaning reflects her multilayered

character. Her conclusion echoes that of geographer Hille Koskela in the assertion that the more

spaces are opened for women, the less they are socially and economically subjugated to male

power and dominance (121).

By gaining more access to masculine spaces, Ahlème eventually began adopting masculine

roles. She points out how she started playing soccer with the boys in the housing project, and how

she became like one of them. She embraces their activities and behaviors and exercised power and

oppression against girls: " je tirais les cheveux des filles et leurs piquais leur corde à sauter pour

les goutter avec. Je suis passé sans escale d'un univers exclusivement féminin au monde des

hommes" (Guène 57), 'I pulled the girls' hair and stole their jump-ropes to whip them. I went

nonstop, no layover from an exclusively feminine universe to a world of men' (Johnson 39). One

notices here the shift in power dynamic which coincides with her adaptation not only to male

behavior but rather their aggression and toxic masculinity. Her embrace of the tomboy identity and

her embodiment of masculine behaviors became complicated once she reached puberty and started

menstruating. She describes this realization as her "premier vrai traumatisme" 'first true trauma'

of which she humorously describes how she felt she was about to die and started writing goodbye

letters to her loved ones (58). In this context, Craig and Lacroix suggest that

> Tomboy identity can gain women limited privilege to spaces for which masculinity
> is an unspoken requirement […] The use of tomboy is not only for those who
> choose to enact masculinity, but also those who choose to dismiss femininity (Carr,
> 2005, 121). A girl or a woman may not reject heels and skirts because they are
> barriers to play or movement, but because they are symbols of femininity and, as
> such, are reminders of gender inequality. By rejecting feminine-typed clothing,
> girls and women may be attempting to deflect negative stereotypes including the
> notion that women are weaker and less competent than men. On the other hand,

girls may actually believe that women are the weaker sex and therefore may try to distance themselves from femininity. (Craig and Lacrox 452)

Trying to navigate the complexity of her experience and the intersectionality of her multilayered identity and different binaries, Ahlème finds solace in writing and fiction. She starts frequenting the Café des Histoires [Stories Coffee House]. The Café, in both its figurative and literal meaning, grants her not only a safe virtual and physical territory to express herself but also a refuge. On the subject of writing and expressing our opinions as a kind of space, bell hooks discusses the concept of writing as a perspective or standpoint in which marginalized women can locate themselves, since for hooks "[l]anguage is also a place of a struggle" ("Choosing the Margin as a space of Radical Openness" 15). Realizing how age and dementia have taken over her father, Ahlème savors all her memories with him and patiently waits for him to nap in order to "fuir au café des Histoire et noter tous ses petits récits" (Guène160), 'run off to the Café des Histoires to write down all his little tales'(Johnson 118). She recounts how the Café becomes a healing space that enables her to invent stories: "J'y suis entrée tout bêtement parce que le nom me plaisait bien. J'ai pris avec moi mon carnet à spirale […] Je préfère inventer des histoires, au moins c'est marrant à relire" (Guène 114), 'I stupidly come here because I liked the name. I set out with my little spiral notebook […] I prefer inventing stories at least they are fun to read' (Johnson 82). It also helps her create a new identity, as in the scene in which she chats with Josiane the waitress. Josiane asks Ahlème who she is and what she is writing, to which Ahlème replies: "Alors, je me suis imaginé être quelqu'un d'important, pour voir ce que ça faisait dans les yeux d'une personne que je ne connaissais pas. Je voulais simplement savoir ce que ça parcurait comme sentiment d'intriguer les autres" (Guène 114-115), 'So I invented a whole life for myself, I imagined I was someone important, to see what that would make me in the eyes of a person I didn't know. I just wanted to know what kind of feeling it would stir in others' (Johnson 82).

Yet, even after creating this new identity as the magazine writer Stéphanie Jacquet, her imaginary identity becomes more multilayered and complex as well. So, when introducing herself, the waitress simply says "mais tu peux me tutoyer et m'appeler Josiane! Je m'appelle Josiane Vittani (Guène 116), 'Oh! But you can call me Josiane! My name's Josiane Vittani' (Johnson 83), to which Ahlème ironically replies "Moi c'est Stéphanie Jacquet, mais je signe tous mes articles Jacquet Stéphanet, c'est pour garder l'anonymat" (Guène 116), 'I'm Stephanie Jacquet, but I sign all my articles Jacqueline Stephanet, just to keep myself anonymous' (Johnson 83). However, Ahlème still can't separate her imagined new self from her actual one. Thus, when Joisane inquires what type of stories she writes about, Ahlème bitterly answers with her own real story: "c'est plutôt des nouvelles sociales […] Des histories de gens qui galèrent parfois parce que la société ne leur a pas donné le choix, qui essaient de s'en sortir et de connaître un peu le bonheur" (116), 'They're more like social stories […] Stories about people who struggle sometimes because society hasn't given them the choice, who try to pull themselves through and find a little bit of happiness' (Johnson 83). Ahlème's act of writing could be perceived as a statement about immigrant women's presence in public space, since she chooses to invent her identity as a writer in a coffee shop and journalism as a profession. Thus, she spatializes the narrative inside the space and vice versa.[51]

The two become an important component of each other's existence, and only in Café des Histoires can one write all the 'histoires'. One should emphasize the importance of the name, since *histoire* has loaded meanings. It could simply mean story tale from a collective standpoint. The Centre National de Resources textuelles et Lexicales defines it as the general search, knowledge, and reconstruction of past experiences and events in relation to human experience.[52] It could also

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[51] She makes the narrative specific to a certain space and the space (café des histoires) becomes literary. In other words, the space becomes narrative and the narrative becomes specific to the space.

[52] My translation of La Langue Française online dictionary French: « Recherche, connaissance, reconstruction du passé de l'humanité sous son aspect général ou sous des aspects particuliers, selon le lieu, l'époque, le point de vue

mean biography and life experience. The implication of the name then is significantly symbolic and influential. By writing in the café as a public space while inventing her identity, Ahlème asserts the presence of the feminine experience in the public sphere. In this space she controls where she comes from and how to represent herself; it is no longer French culture telling her who she is or should be, since she is in a place of stories and histories where she has gotten control of the narrative. Undeniably, the Café des Histoires is one of the most important spaces in the autobiography. In this space Ahlème gains autonomy over her own narrative and story in that she constructs an identity that is not stolen or made up for her. She actively creates an identity of which she is the author and exercises autonomy over this story. This puts her in a place of power as she is owning her voice and who she is. By doing so Ahlème actively dismantles the predominantly hegemonic narrative that is projected on her and falsely identifies who she is. Her writing practice could be categorized as what hooks calls "the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision" (15), because Ahlème challenges the already constructed narrative of who she is. Since she invents herself, she challenges the status quo, and writing symbolizes to some extent some sort of a resistance.

However, her stories are similar to her lived experience and her lost love for the blue-eyed Eastern European expat Tonislav whom she met while renewing her residency. The reader gets a glimpse of the story she writes along with her feelings while she pens them in the spiral notebook

> C'est l'histoire de cette fille qui avait grandi trop vite et qui était souvent triste […] Ce qui la sauvait de ces tracas quotidiens, c'est que la moindre chose agréable la rendait folle de joie […] Un jour […] elle rencontra un violoniste étranger qu'elle aima en accéléré […] Elle y a cru, à leur histoire […] Hélas ! Juste au moment où elle croyait atteindre le Nirvana […] il a fallu que le violoniste disparaisse sans laisser de traces […] Elle était tellement triste et elle s'est promis de l'oublier pour toujours. (Guène 164)

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choisi; ensemble des faits, déroulement de ce passé. »https://www.lalanguefrancaise.com/dictionnaire/definition-histoire-chronique/

This is the story of a girl who grew up too fast and who was often sad. The littlest pleasant things were what saved her from her everyday worries […] they made her cry with joy […] one day […] she met a foreigner violinist whom she liked in fast-forward […] She believed in him, in their story […] Alas, just when she thought she was waiting for Nirvana […] it happened that the violinist disappeared without a trace. She was so sad that she discovered it didn't even do any good to be sad and she promised herself to forget him forever. (Johnson 121)

As a result, in the space of the café she is able to navigate other gendered spaces. For example, when Ahlème gets to know that her young brother Foued is a street runner for a gang in the banlieue and that he keeps and stores stolen items in his room, she decides to go and talk to the gang leaders. These are the so-called "olders" who are never seen or known by the rest of the members which puts her in a precarious position to get access to them. Fully aware of the danger that exists in such space she fearlessly defies it: "Je me rends directement au bloc 30, le lieu à haut risqué du quartier, là où les gens on peur d'aller normalement, là où même la BAC redoute de passer quand il y a du monde qui traîne" (Guène 140), 'I went directly to block 30, the most high risk spot in the neighborhood, the place where people are usually afraid to go out, the place where even the special anticrime brigade dreads going when they have to train someone' (Johnson 102). She even takes part in the conversation when she feels that the gang members —who turned out to be childhood friends — are not addressing her properly: "je déteste qu'on il me parle à la troisième personne quand je suis là." (Guène,142), 'I hate it when people talk about me in the third person when I am standing right there' (Johnson 104). This scene raises issues we addressed before concerning gender and space, as we have seen in previous chapters other characters that are entering a space that is gendered. However, this specific gendered space appears to be a motif in the narrative since based on her ability and the fact that she is in control of her own narrative makes her able to navigate the male spaces. Therefore, The Café des Histoires is a therapeutic space that empowers her to wander into what is the most inappropriate or dangerous space, as a female only dressed in a "light robe and a pajama torn at the thigh" (Johnson 102) in a male space. The Café heals in some

sense and transforms her in a way and lets her enter a completely male space where no woman should be. Consequently, it can be considered as a transformative space and the narrative she creates renders her a woman who is in control of her narrative, fear, and finally destiny.

To conclude, this chapter has examined the vital role of space in the creation of self narrative. It also discussed how spaces are perceived and produced through the autobiographical genre presented in *Du rêve pour les oufs,* and I have argued that the human ability to create oneself arises first and foremost from its ability to locate the self in its surrounding space. We have also explored gender spatial segregation and its impact on women's bodily experience of place — more importantly, how spatial perception and its social construction could be privileging for men, yet disadvantageous for women. In addition, this chapter has examined the importance of narrative and writing as a therapeutic tool. It looked closely at how stories could be exclusive to certain spaces, since in those spaces (i.e. Café des Histoires) literary and the spatial create reciprocal intertextual spaces in which stories become a space and space becomes literary. Finally, we have demonstrated that writing enables one to own their voice and story, which in turn empowers women to defy the social and cultural construction of gendered spaces. This is a different space from the ones we have been in before. Compared with the spaces we have discussed in Chapter 3 this novel offers more genuine, liberating, and empowering spaces. In a sense it is more progressive since from what has been demonstrated it has influenced the main character's sense of identity and who she is.

CHAPTER 4.   IN THE NAME OF RELIGION: SPATIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGION AND IDENTITY IN *THE GIRL WITH THE TANGERINE SCARF*

In the last chapter I discussed the significance of place in the creation of narrative identity in the French context. More precisely, how one's capability to narrate their life story relies on one's ability to (re)locate the self within the space (Killian &Wolf 1). In this chapter, I explore the relationship between life writing, memory, and the physical environment[53] in the Arab-American context. I underline the importance of memory for the construction of identity and how memory intersects with narrative and space in Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf.* At the same time, I investigate the relationship between religion and space by conducting a spatial analysis of the main spaces presented in the novel and their impact on the construction of the identity of the main character, Khadra. I provide an analysis for the four spaces she experiences throughout the course of the novel, starting from Indiana —where the story begins— to[54] Mecca, Damascus, Philadelphia, and lastly back to Indiana again where the biography ends. As she engages with these different spaces, she deconstructs and reconstructs her sense of self.

The literature of Arab-America is considered a fairly new genre (Salaita 3). The literary work produced by Americans of Arab background begins in the twentieth century (3), but has been increasingly flourishing and developing as an important field of study (Fadda-Conrey 1). The interest in studying this literature across the United States is expanding with a surge in publication for Arab-American writers nationally and internationally (1). However, attraction to Arab-American studies is nothing but complex. Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that the "increased interest

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[53] In terms of space and surroundings.

[54] See Fadda-Conrey.

in the current production and circulation of Arab-American literary texts is ironically paralleled by a prevalent and tenacious bias against Arabs and Muslims, one that often erroneously portrays their long presence in the U.S not only as a recent phenomenon but as a dangerous and unwelcome one to boot" (1). This bias has long been visible in domestic and international American politics and immigration laws (1). Then, with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, which consequently resulted in the "war on terror" launched by the U.S., Arab-Americans — regardless of their religious affiliation — find themselves in a difficult position. As Legal scholar Leti Volpp argues, "September 11 facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category that groups together persons who appear "Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim". This consolidation reflects a racialization wherein members of this group are identified as terrorists, and are disidentified as citizens" (1576). Consequently, Arab-Americans find themselves branded as the *Other*, a definition which captures the opposite of "a hegemonic *US*" (Fadda-Conrey 1). It is important here to emphasize that the term Arab-American encompasses different religions and is not specific to religious identity such as that of Arab-American Muslims. The term Arab-American describes a cultural and national identity, While Arab-American Muslim puts emphasis on the religious identity which is an important component of identification. On the distinction between Arab-American identities and other hyphenated American Identities, Hossam Aboul-Ela underlines the extent to which American foreign policy influences the construction of Arab-American identities (Aboul-Ela 15). Establishing his conclusion, Aboul-Ela relies on Salah Hassan's study, which focuses on the legal history of prejudice against Arabs in the United States (Hassan).

> Although Arabs and other people from the Middle East have been classified racially as white[55] since the 1960s, according to the U.S Census and on most

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[55] The 2020 Census requires participants to provide race and ethnicity information. For more check: https://2020census.gov/en/about-questions/2020-census-questions-race.html.

affirmative action forms, the US government has unofficially, [since the beginning of the twenty-first century], constituted them as a distinct racial group by associating Arabs with terrorism and threats to national security. Unlike other racial constructs, such as blackness, or Asian-ness, which are defined officially in opposition to whiteness, the contemporary racialization of Arabs appears to be linked to US foreign policy in the middle East and its translation into the domestic context. (qtd. in Aboul-Ela 22)

Consequently, Arab-American writings cover different and varied issues and themes, such as living between two worlds, gender and national identity, assimilation, racism, and the concept of home, among others (Salaita 7). Thus, it seems logical to see some of these topics appearing in Mohja Kahf's writings, more precisely in her fictional biography *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf*. The novel was published in 2006 after the Iraqi war and it mainly explores religion through the life of Arab-American Muslims in the United States. Literary critic Steven Salaita explains that for Kahf "Islam is the primary theme, one that she explores as a highly diverse set of beliefs and customs" (Salaita 32). By doing so Kahf aims to provide a counter-narrative to challenge the predominant monologic discourse about Arab-American Muslims developing and gaining traction after 9/11 and during the Iraqi war. This discourse is diffused by different political powers and media outlets perceived to instigate religious and cultural divides (Taylor & Zane 247). Kahf, then, provides an example of the Arab-American literature which has emerged alongside, and in response to, political and ideological reformulations of the Arab-American post 9/11. In analyzing the juxtaposition of space, religion and identity in *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf*, it is important to recognize this novel, and the genre to which it belongs, as a counter-narrative challenge to the dominant American, institutional, political, legal, monologic discourse about Arab-Americans. Kahf argues:

In my upbringing, the foremost factor in bringing me to my voice was religion, and the religion of Islam as manifested in my family which had a modern, political Islamist orientation. Whether I agree or disagree with that worldview today, I am dismayed that it is being painted as extremist and terroristic, not only in Western

media but by secular Arabs, Arab feminists, and others in the Arab world who consider themselves 'progressive'. (247)

In the fictional biography, Khadra, the female protagonist, turns to religion to construct a sense of collective and individual identity. The plot mainly covers Khadra's childhood and her upbringing in the United States, then her transition into early adulthood, and ends with the present time. Raised in a Syrian immigrant family which settled in the States during the 70s, she and her siblings were brought up by her family to be observant of Islam and its practice. The biography sheds light on Khadra's experience as a young, veiled woman and her attempt to navigate significant questions such as identity, place, religion, and racism. The story begins with Khadra Shamy, a photographer who lives in Philadelphia, driving back to Indiana for a short visit. She is returning after a long period of being away to visit her parents and the community she grew up in. The reader then gets to know that the visit is part of a current article she is working on for the *Alternative Americas* magazine about religious minorities living in the United States. During this road trip, Khadra revisits not only the place in which she was raised with her practicing, devoted parents, but also the memories of who she was and who she has become. The second Khadra passes a highway sign that reads "The People of Indiana Welcome You" she falls into great apprehension and dismay. She observes, "Out here seems to be nothing for the eye to see. Strip malls, cornfields, small town main street, Kmart, Kroger, Kraft's gas […] all blending into one flat sameness. There are silver silos and pole barns, tufts of goldthread on the meridian […] But it is not mine […] this blue and gold Indiana morning. None of it for me" (Kahf 2). Thus, her act of traversing and crossing into Indiana creates an interaction with her environment as these surroundings trigger in her feelings of alienation and unbelonging. The narration is triggered by the act of passing through the physical space around her. The movement then becomes a necessary step to shape the narrative. Khadra expresses her invisibility and seclusion as some sort of ghostly experience as she describes how

" between the flat land and the broad sky she feels ground down to the grain, erased" and that if "she to scream in this place, some Indiana mute button would be on, and no one would hear" (2). This emphasizes not only an awareness of the space around her but also an understanding of its dynamic and the restrictions that come along with it. Additionally, the "unbearable flatness of Indiana" provokes her feelings "that the world has been left behind her somewhere," and epitomizes the daunting isolation and prejudice that both Khadra and her Muslim community experienced through Indiana's white supremacist's group (Fadda-Conrey 70). When she glances at another sign on the highway, this time an advertisement of grain drying business ("100% American"), Khadra thinks how it represents what she is not (Kahf 3). Although Khadra spent her early years and young adulthood in Indiana, she still feels detachment from the place. She has stronger ties to her small Muslim community in the Dawah Islamic center than to the state in which she grew up.

Concerning the significance of physical movements within space, Michel De Certeau equates spatial mobility to writing a text. This perception renders the landscape structure equivalent to a written text and the act of movement equal to reading it (92-93). Furthermore, Eveline Kilian in "'The Mystery Magic of Foreignness'" argues that physical movement through certain spatial configurations enables "the construction of specific places as catalysts of displacement" (89). Khadra's driving through Indiana and its geographical space stimulates her deep feelings of displacement. This appears in her arrival at her parents' house as she "rolls the windows up, tamps her scarf down on her crinkly dark hair, and tries to calm the panic that coming back to Indiana brings to her gut" (Kahf 3). The feeling of panic demonstrates how the connection to the place causes emotional and mental distress. This becomes evident by the act of remembering all the adverse and unfavorable feelings and memories from her childhood. Khadra then sees

herself in memory in her mind's eye: "a little girl's face appeared, a girl with dark hair and high forehead. She peeked out from between the swaying bed linens —vined, striped, and flowered— alive on clotheslines. Tucked in the elbow between two buildings in the Fallen Timbers Townhouse Complex, the laundry corner was little Khadra's hideout" (3). This vivid vision of herself as a little girl opens the door to her past as it flashes before her eyes, and she is hit by an avalanche of memories which makes the construction of her past an important component of understanding her present. Khadra seeing her younger self represents a parallel between her years as a little girl and the house. It is important to emphasize the relationship between her going back to her childhood house and the act of remembering. Consequently, space has a significant role in her remembering and therefore constructing her life narrative.

The starting point of khadra's story is a flashback as she tells her life story within a frame. This frame develops as she travels back to her childhood home and the story progresses from there. Consequently, the fictional biography is constructed through an alternation between her present embodied in her return to visit her parents in Indianapolis, and her past that flashes in snapshots to establish her formative years in different places such as Indianapolis, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Philadelphia. Fadda-Conrey confirms: "Rather than being a homecoming, then, Khadra's returns to Indiana as an adult becomes an entryway into reassessing the trajectories of belonging to the places and homes to which she has been imaginatively and physically connected throughout her life" (70). Khadra's return "to this ground that didn't love her, tries to stave the panic in her gut that is entirely the fault of the state of Indiana and the lay of its flat, flat land, to which she had never asked to be brought" (Kahf 17), and eventually opens the door for her second transformative journey of self-discovery in Saudi.

The opening pages of the novel show Khadra's displacement, and her inability to feel attachment towards the state where she lived and grew up (Arami 44, 45). The emphasis on Indiana and its flat land over the course of the novel exemplifies the lack of Indiana's cultural and religious diversity. This antagonism appears to the reader in Khadra's remembering her young self innocently playing between the air-drying linen sheets on the clothesline, and being interrupted by

> a boy with heavy pink flushed cheeks on a dirt bike, tearing through the hung laundry, pulling down rope, soiling sheets with his tire tread. Khadra ran. Screamed and ran. Fell, scraped her cheekbone on the cracked asphalt. He wheeled and turned. Gunning for her. [...] "Fuck you raghead!" Brian shouted back. "We're gonna get all you fuckers!" He wheelied on "fuckers." (Kahf 4-5)

The hostile acts towards her and her community deepens her feelings of foreignness and unbelonging to America. The unwelcoming behavior towards her and her community is demonstrated over and over in the novel when the community is subjected to an act of vandalism "the struggling boxwood hedge at the entrance was slimed with rotten eggs and tomatoes. Toilet paper was everywhere. Markings in white spray paint were blazoned across the windowpanes of the clubhouse [...] FUCK YOU, RAGHEADS. DIE. They were signed KKK, 100% USA" (82). On the other hand, throughout Khadra's childhood, Americans have been positioned as the representation of "the ultimate other" (Arami 45), an example Khadra and her siblings shouldn't follow. For instance, their mother had constantly given them housework assignments so that the kids "didn't' turn into lazy American children" (Kahf 21). This distancing of American culture could easily be inferred from the fact that her parents apply for their American citizenship only when they couldn't renew their expired Syrian passports. Their inability to renew their Syrian passports is due to their opposition to the Syrian regime and its political party. Therefore, they had no choice but to apply for American citizenship, which Khadra sees as failure: "taking citizenship felt like giving up, giving in. After all she'd been through at school, defending her identity against the jeering kids who vaunted America's superiority as the clincher put-down to everything she

said, everything she was" (141). Hence, for Khadra, America symbolizes the contradiction of who she is.

The sense of alienation pushes her to find another space to which she could belong and paves the way to her second journey of self-discovery in Saudi. Halfway through the fictional biography Khadra's family goes to the Hajj.[56] During her journey, Khadra develops a mixture of connection and disconnection with the space. The significance of the pilgrimage depends on the fact that it gives her a completely different perspective on the distinction between Islam as a religion and Islam as a cultural practice. Prior to this, her understanding of Islam was very monolithic since she didn't establish a clear understanding of the difference between the three elements: theology, culture, and practice. Once the flight takes off from Indianapolis to Mecca, Khadra glued her face to the window and watched the city getting smaller beneath her. Despite the lump that she feels in her throat, she still claimed that she doesn't care if she never sees Indianapolis again. This complex relationship to the space paves the way for her to define herself through Meccan space since she anticipates it being a space of belonging. Her reasoning is that "a true Muslim feels at home wherever the call to prayer is sung" (157) and since Mecca, in her mind, is 'the home of Islam,' then as a Muslim she belongs there. Khadra confirms: "They landed. At last, Khadra thought, someplace where we really belong. It's the land of the Prophet. The land of all Muslims" (159). Hence, Khadra seeks religion as a way to feel part of a community to which she could belong and in which she can feel fully accepted. In this way, religion becomes a significant factor in the construction of her own identity. Given this context one can conclude that when the nation shuns members of the community, religion then becomes an important attractive force as individuals rely on it for belongingness and unification. When nationalism ostracizes and

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[56] Hajj, the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca.

fails to unify, it is then rather normal for people to look to religion for a sense of identification and a means of connection. Religious studies scholar, Reza Aslan, writes, "the self is composed of multiple markers of identity –nationalism, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and so on –if one of those starts to give way (say, nationality), it is only natural that another (religion, ethnicity) would come to fill the vacuum" (Aslan 19). For Khadra, the idea of home and religion are mixed together. Since she has no attachment to Syria and she feels she doesn't belong to America –and is not accepted there—religion has become her home.

Once Khadra arrives at the shrine and sees the *Kaaba*[57] she is overwhelmed with feelings and she repeats the *Talbiya*[58] *"Here I am, O my Lord, Here I am! Labbaik, allahumma, labbaik!"* (162). However, this moment of serenity becomes complicated as confusion adds up and the prayer keeps coming to her head mixed up with Phil Collins singing *In the Air Tonight: "I can feel it coming in the air tonight, oh Lord. And I've been waiting for this moment for all my life, oh Lord"* (162). Clearly the confusion represents an overlap between her religious and American identities.

The idealized perception of Saudi as a symbol of *Home* and a core city of belonging continues to be sabotaged through the course of different events. The first incident takes place when she is performing one of the pilgrimage rituals by touring the *Kaaba* and is "jabbed in the ribs" by a clan of Arab Gulf men who, through interlocked elbows, were protecting a group of women related to them by blood or marriage. They roughly pushed "everyone aside, barking 'we have womenfolk, make way for them! We have women!' What are we chopped liver? Khadra thought as she was pulled over to the right" (162-63). She then remembers her friend, Zuhura, who was raped and killed at the hands of white supremacists in Indiana: "a tall black teenaged girl,

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[57] Small sanctuary in the centre of the Great Mosque in Mecca.

[58] Prayer.

round-shouldered like Zuhura got pressed up against her . . . her face, up close to Khadra's and meeting her eye, was serene. 'Peace,' she whispered in Khadra's ear. '*Salamu. Yasalam*'" (163). Recalling her friend on the scene may be an acknowledgment of the universality of brutality and injustice everywhere and not only in America (Hasabelnaby 21). For Khadra, Mecca is ideally a secure space in which everyone is equally respected and humanly treated. However, to Khadra's surprise she unexpectedly recognizes the distinction between the faith and its religious principles and people's practice which culturally differs from one place to another. Adding to her disappointment is the realization that misogyny and discrimination in Saudi is not only as bad as in America but in actuality may be rather worse (Hasabelnaby 21). The clear signs of prejudice appear upon her arrival at the Saudi airport in the division of the customs lanes: "three lanes separated people for visa processing: Saudi and Gulf, U.S. and European passport holders, and 'Other'" (159), but she didn't notice them. The second incident takes place as she and her parents are staying with a friend of the family. Fascinated and thrilled by the Adhan (call for prayer), Khadra who has never heard a "real adhan before this trip, the kind the rang out over the rooftop" hurriedly and out of excitement runs out for the dawn prayer at the mosque. She is then brought home "escorted by two burly *matawwa*[59] policemen with big round black beards and billy clubs belted over their white caftans" (166). Further, to make matters worse, they add, "'is this one of your womenfolk? […] we found her trying to get into the mosque'. They said it as if she was a vagrant or something" (166). Ironically, Khadra is not aware that Saudi Arabian law does not allow women to pray in the mosque or go out without a specific dress code and a "*mahram*[60]". Through

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[59] Saudi Arabian religious police, the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice or *Mutawa.* According to the dictionary vocabulary.com, their: *"*duty is to ensure strict adherence to established codes of conduct; offenders may be detained indefinitely; foreigners are not excluded". "Mutawa – Dictionary Definition." *Vocabulary.com*, www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/Mutawa

[60] An un-marriageable family member.

an avalanche of tears Khadra insists that "everyone knows women go to the mosque. Women have always gone to the mosque. It's part of Islam" (168), to which her father disappointedly replies, "You're used to America, *binti* [61], […] in most of the Muslim world, it hasn't been the custom for hundreds of years" (168). Thus, Khadra realizes that the way she practices Islam in America differs from the Islam practiced in what she thought to be "the land of the prophet and all Muslims." Nevertheless, Kahf emphasizes in the novel the fact that it is not due to American liberty that Khadra is able to practice Islam the way the female companions of the prophet and his wife used to practice.[62] The third incident that completely ruins Khadra's perception of Saudi as home is when she goes out with her host's daughter Afaaf. Khadra was dragged to what she initially thought to be a visit to Afaaf's aunt, to discover that Afaaf has lied to her. She then finds herself getting pulled into a limo full of mixed gender Saudi teenagers and driven to the middle of the desert. Shortly after to Khadra's surprise Afaaf takes off her veil and abaya inside the car, she introduces Khadra to her friends as "my American cousin" while disregarding Khadra's insistence on her Arab identity. Afaaf's identification of Khadra as American is meant to signal an assumption of behavioral flexibility and sexual liberation as the reader sees once the scene progresses and the young Saudi man tries to take advantage of her. However, her Arabic identity is not fully recognized since she has a non-identifiable accent because it's a mix of different Arab accents spoken by the different members at the Indianapolis Islamic Dawah Center. Consequently, Ghazi — one of the young Saudis — insists on asking her "what kind of Arab?" she is, to which

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[61] My daughter.

[62] Fedda-Corney argues: The novel is quick to show that it is not the much-touted American freedom per se that allows Khadra to emulate the religious practices of the first Muslim women, including the Prophet's wife, Aisha. As Khadra realizes later on in the novel during her visit to Syria, she is in fact able to do so through her parents' insistence on forging a relatively non-patriarchal, non-hierarchal approach to the practice of Islam in Indiana (72).

she replies "The Muslim kind"[63] (176). Khadra's encounter with Ghazi escalates once left alone and the latter tugs at her headscarf and adds "surely you don't wear that thing in America". He then pulls her headscarf "down the back of her head" She then feels him "pushing his other hand up against her breasts and his mouth was grazing her now exposed neck" (177). As she attempts to push him away and escapes, he then says "you grew up in America — don't tell me you never do stuff like this in America" (178). Adding to her own confusion of who she really is, she yells in Arabic "I'm not American!", yet she angrily breaks into a spate of swearwords in English to express her anger. She tells Afaaf and the others "*I hate you*— you're FILTHY girl, with FILTHY friends— you take me home RIGHT NOW. You—you—you *goddamn bitch*" (178). Remarkedly, the home she means here is the United States and not anymore "*the* Muslim Country," and she concludes that "even though she was in a Muslim country at this moment, and not just any Muslim country but the Muslim country, where Islam started, she had never felt so far from home" (177). On the flight back to Indianapolis, Khadra obviously becomes more attached to her American identity and feels "glad to be going home" and declares it "'Home [...] without thinking" as "the sweet relief of her own clean bed awaited her there—and only there, of all the earth" (179). Khadra's spatial experience of Mecca eliminated any distinction between Saudi and America as opposites. Indeed as Wajdi, Khadra's father, declares in his famous Friday "citizenship Khutba,"[64] in America Islam is modeled on different traits and characters than in Muslim countries:

> Let's face it: here inside America, there are many good qualities. Law and order, cleanliness, democracy, freedom to work and honestly seek the provision of the Lord —heads nodded among immigrants — freedom to practice religion. These are

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[63] It is important to emphasize the different identities being mixed here. The Arab identity is used to define someone who is coming from an Arabic speaking country. Khadra then replies with her religious identity, which is different than her Arab identity. Thus, there is a confusion then between the cultural and linguistic identity and the religious identity. For Khadra, she still chooses to identify with her religious identity.

[64] The Friday sermon right after he applied to his citizenship.

Islamic qualities. America [...] is like Islam without Muslims. And our sick and corrupt Muslim home countries – they are Muslims without Islam. (144)

One can see how Khadra's identity evolves, or in some cases dissolves, by her experiencing different regions and topographies. Because of her physical mobility through these spaces, ofwhich some are not American and in which English is not the spoken language, the Saudi space made her decenter more by immersing her in a fairly foreign culture and different context than what she thought she knew. Her experience of the space shaped her definition and perception of the place and formed her spatial awareness. Her eager desire to leave Saudi and return to Indiana represents a shift in her spatial perception of that space. It indicates a rupture with the identity which has been created in this place and to which all connection has been broken. The spatial identification was based on the religion before it gets eradicated based on the experience. Saudi is a space in which religion becomes a spatial identification, yet for Khadra, her social and cultural experience within that space puts this mere identification into question. On how social relationships impact our spatial perception, Kim Knott writes: "Social relations exist in and through space, and 'the spatial is socially constituted'. Religion, then, which is inherently social must also exist and express itself in and through space, and must play its part in the constitution of spaces" (21). Thus, the perception of a specific space and its dynamic is also socially constructed. Knott emphasizes the importance of the connection or disconnection constructed in spaces, adding "by social relations I mean actual relations between people, but also between people and things, people and places, people and symbols, and the imagined relations between these" (21). Stephanie Taylor underscores the substantial influence people's experiences of different places have on their identities (61-66).

However, Khadra's return to Indianapolis and her perception of home is not be fully redefined until later when she visits the land of her ancestors, Syria. Undertaking a journey to discover who she is and better connect with her roots was what made Khadra able to find herself

while trying to understand her cultural heritage. Syria becomes the third journey of self-discovery in which Khadra gets to know more about her roots and her parents' history, which will help her embrace her hyphenated identities as an Arab-American-Muslim. Since she immigrated to the Unites States with her parents at an early age, Khadra didn't have much memory of Syria except when "she rubs a scar on her knees […] Sometimes she had a vague memory of having been on a mountain. Dry sunny days that had a certain smell made her think of Syria, and when she bit into a tart of plum or dark cherry, her mouth felt like Syria" (Kahf 15). These memories are provoked by images, tastes, and smells and even though she remembers them in bits and pieces, they are still a defining aspect of who she is and provide her with a substantial component of rootedness (Fadda-Conrey 72-3). For Khadra and her brother, Syria is rather "the adhan floating down from up in the air. Streets busy with people who spoke Arabic in the same rhythms as [the] father and mother [...], people whose faces bore [their] parents' features" (15). Syria represents a space of familiarity and belonging, contrary to "here in 'Mreeka [America], no one looked like them and they looked like no one" (16). Hence, the contradiction between the two spaces informs her conceptions and apprehension of them. Khadra's decision to embark on a much-needed self-searching journey comes after having an abortion and her divorce from her husband Juma. Later on, the novel shows how the trip helps her cultivate her own relationship with her faith while reconciling the different versions of Islam she has been exposed to in the Dawah center and at the hands of her parents. As previously demonstrated, Khadra has been relying on religion for a sense of groundedness, identification, and unification. Nonetheless, in the novel Kahf introduces not only different but also contradicting forms of Islam to which Khadra gets exposed through the Dawah's Muslim community and the other places she visits or lives in (Arami 47). At the same time, the reader sees how, through her parents, Christianity and Judaism are being *othered* while their adherents are

described by Ebthehaj Khadra's mother as "kuffar"—the Arabic term for disbeliever *(47)*. Furthermore, Khadra gets exposed to various experiences of Islam, such as Sufism, Shiism, and what is called African American Islam. The later is not even considered by Khadra's orthodox parents as a "real Islam." Teenage Khadra exclaims "all that Elijah Mohammad business was nonsense. The fake Muslims where it's only for black people? [...] it was a good thing Black Muslims like Aunt Khadija and Uncle Jamal converted to real Islam or they would be wandering astray" (Kahf 24). Throughout the novel Kahf attempts to debunk this concept of "real Muslim" which is perceived as very precarious. Religious studies Herbert Berg argues

> In the American context, especially with the diversity of the Muslim immigrants and Muslims in various African American movements, one must be careful not to advocate, explicitly or implicitly, a particular normative formulation of Islam. Usage of terms such as "orthodox Islam," "real Islam," "unIslamic," and perhaps even "traditional Islam" assumes that there is an easily identifiable set of characteristics or, more problematic, a continuous essence of Islam that runs from Muhammad to present Muslims. Rather, there appear to be many formulations of Islam, or "Islams," that are products of both their sociocultural context and their historical roots. ("African American Islam" 2)

Being exposed to these different variations of Islam has contributed to the growth of Khadra's identity. About these different variations Arami notes, "in having the narrator explore all these different versions of Islam, the author is representing something that Western readers most probably don't know much about. In this respect, the novel inevitably fulfills a didactic function" (Arami 47).

Other substantial events take place after Khadra's return back from pilgrimage and later which include a rocky marriage to the Kuwaiti graduate student, Juma — a friend of her brother— then an abortion. The marriage didn't last for long as Khadra realizes that she can no longer be with Juma "without changing who I am. Who I essentially deep-down am" (243). However, at this point of the story with her divorce and abortion, one could see that that Khadra's identity hasn't been fully reshaped yet. After her divorce, Khadra feels she is lost and that her life needs to be

anchored, and then wonders, "Where do you go when the first part of your life is coming to an end, and you don't know what is yet unborn inside you? Where do you go when you're in a free fall, unmoored, safety net gone, and nothing nothing to anchor you?" (Khaf 266). Her identification with Mecca hadn't served her and that leads to a journey "back where she came from: Syria" (266). Khadra's quest to Syria likewise influences the way she sees the world. The Syrian experience captures various meanings and reflections as a quest to connect with roots by knowing more about family history. It is also an opportunity to establish a connection to link the present with the past in order to create a solid ground that would align with the identity that is in the making.

Interestingly, Khadra's first experience of Syria appears through her interaction with surrounding nature. Upon her arrival in Damascus, she decides to explore the city through the lens of her camera. She ends up on Mount Qysyoon looking down on the city that is spread beneath. Observing the city through the lens of her camera Khadra becomes aware of two salient realizations. First, she notices that the modern city is merged with its ancient history and roots. The hybrid identity of Damascus manifests itself through the sight of "all religions as architecture layers of each other" that "all came together somehow in a way that made sense. All religions spokes on the same wheel. All connected to the hub" (297). In Damascus she gets to know what belonging means as it is reflected not in a notion of uniformity but rather in a recognition of, and respect for, all differences. For her Damascus is a place where everyone belongs. This melting pot effect paves the way for a later insightful understanding of who she is. Second, while holding her camera and looking through its lens she recognizes that "photography is her thing" and being a photographer is what she wants to do for a living (300). Both realizations are important as they prepare her for her next and last destination, which is Philadelphia.

While establishing this deep connection with Syrian nature, Khadra meets the poet —a friend of Téta, her paternal aunt. The latter smokes unfiltered Turkish cigarettes and "the smell of [his] cigarettes" suddenly "solves a puzzle [she] has been bothered by all [her] life" (301). Khadra instantly remembers that the smell reminds her of "'Indiana,' she laughed. That's the answer Indiana smells like Turkish cigarettes'" (301). By establishing a similarity between Damascus and the Midwest Khadra finds a connection between the two lands which in turn helps her to see Indiana as more of a home than a foreign country. It is important here to note that her relationship with nature, and especially experiencing it through the sense, makes this relationship possible. In her research on identity and place, Taylor argues that as humans have a tendency or rather a benefit to returning to place of origin and where their parents had lived to reinforce identity [65] and sense of belonging. That going back is usually a journey of memory and connection with roots. According to Taylor, it is a substantial process for the construction of self-identity (66-67). While in Syria Khadra stays with her Téta, the one who took care of her father after the death of his mother, and consequently she and her siblings consider her a grandmother. During her Syrian retreat, she learns more about her parents' history — that her mother was neither religious nor conservative during her youth and that she only started embracing stricter views after she got raped and her father married another woman. Meantime, Khadra also gets to know more about her Téta and builds a deeper connection with her. Her Téta tells her how she fell in love with a Circassian, a member of an ethnic minority group that Syrians considered inferior, and how they eloped and got married. Ultimately the husband was killed during the *Nakba*[66] in 1948 by the Zionist Militia, and due to the dire situation, the grandmother was not even able to bury him. At the same time,

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[65] Taylor's case studies give examples of women in particular, but her argument does not necessarily focus on women.

[66] This means "catastrophe." The Nakba is the day which marks the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Palestine by Israelis.

Khadra learns that her grandmother used to work in the telephone company Syrian *Centrale* where she met her two best friends. Hayat —who is Christian— and Iman —who is Jewish. Undoubtedly the author's choice for a telephone company in which the three friends meet and work is substantially symbolic (Hasabelnaby 26), since the telephone is a symbol of communication, connection, and closing the gaps. Téta explains to Khadra what they used to do in their job: "―Alô Centrale? Connect me, please – and we'd connect them. Strangers, neighbors, wasn't it marvelous" (271). Through conversations with her grandmother and connecting and learning more about her history, Khadra recognizes how much her grandmother and her friends did not see much *othering* but rather a deep human connection, which was more than what she has ever experienced herself (Arami 49). She also visits Jobar Kanees or "Iman's synagogue". Khadra instantly connects with the rabbi who warmly welcomes her and her Téta "with the deepest Damascene accent," such that she "could suddenly imagine being his granddaughter […] home, boiling coffee in the kitchen, puttering about in faded house slippers to find him dozing in his chair, his finger on a word in the holy book in his lap" (306). This imagination triggers a crisis in which she questions who she is, her sense of attachment, and her roots. She attempts to remind herself yet wonders what was "this name she wore like a badge?" Confused, she tries to "glance down, check it—What was it again? Had it changed? Was it always changing?" Then her quest gets more complicated as she struggles to define "who was she?" and what makes her who she is: "what was she, what cells of matter, sewn into this Khadra shape, this instar! Imagine!" (306). This inspirational moment of imagination and the closeness she felt towards the rabbi makes her realize that the essence of her faith and prayers are based on loving one another. As a result of this enlightenment she then "came to prayer. She felt as though she were praying now for the first time, as if all that long-ago praying,

rakat [67] after *rakat*, had been only the illusion of prayer, and this—what she began to do now—was the real thing. All that had been lost was returning. All that had been disconnected was connected again — *alô Centrale*?" (307). A new self then emerges from accepting others, connecting to her parent's history, and embracing herself. During her visit to Syria Khadra purchases a tangerine silk fabric that she cuts in half and makes out of it two scarves, she takes one and gives the other one to her Téta. The tangerine scarf, which is the title of the novel, becomes a representation of her transformation and self-growth within Syrian space.

Khadra's construction of identity witnesses another development on her trip to the Ghuta Orchid with Téta and her poet friend. This is reflected in her scarf, which keeps slipping off her head until she stopped pulling it back as she had no desire to stain it. The incident evokes another overwhelming spiritual awakening for Khadra as she "saw her Téta looking at her. Téta got it. Maybe she'd had such a moment in the Ghuta sunshine herself, ages ago; maybe she knew about *Kashf*, the unveiling of light. How vexing and unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are necessary; how both light and dark are connected moments in the development of the soul in its darkroom" (309). Along these lines, the writer recognizes veiling and unveiling as part of the same process instead of two ends of the spectrum (Arami 49). Initially the transition wasn't as smooth, since "without her life-long armor she felt wobbly, like a child on new legs. Her body felt off balance, carried differently" (310). Khadra embracing the two states of "covering and uncovering" marks the end of the Syrian journey. When finally, it was time for her to return back to the U.S and while on the plane Khadra puts on her tangerine scarf, she ties it differently: "not tightly the way Ebtehaj wore it. Loosely, so it moved and slipped about her face and slipped about

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[67] Prostration.

her face and touched her cheek, like the hand of a lover" (313). On the significance of Khadra's

decision to put on her hijab on her way back to the United States Fadda-Conery argues:

> such a reclamation of the hijab as an expression of Muslim belief is important for
> two reasons. First, it enables Khadra to assert her veiling as a personal choice rather
> than a communal or familial imposition. Second, it flies in the face of dominant US
> depictions of the hijab as a physical marker of a foreign and un-American religion.
> Thus, by reclaiming the hijab upon her returning to her "homeland America,"
> Khadra rejects the binary logics of belonging embedded in dominant understanding
> of US citizenship. (77)

Fadda-Conrey discloses that in one of the earlier versions of the novel, Khadra takes off the

headscarf and never puts it back on (78). In an interview with the *New York Times* Kahf explains

Khadra's choice to wear her headscarf loosely instead of removing it: "people would have read it

as 'we won! She is an escaped Muslim woman! … People think that all Arab women are dying to

uncover" (Macfarquhar).

Khadra's return to the United States marks the end of a self-exploratory journey in Syria

and a new journey to Philadelphia. Her decision to move originates in her full apprehension that

Indiana is not a suitable place for her anymore. She knew that there she would be always seen as

"Wajdy Shamy's daughter of the Dawah Center" and that she would have to deal with the

expectations of "carry[ing] the banner" (314). Moreover, her relationship with that space is

problematic, since "the flat land [of Indiana] felt like a trap" (315). Consequently, she chooses to

move to Philadelphia, a "big city where she knew no one," a city that would help her live a life

full of "gratitude, modesty, and love" (317). It is important here to mention that Kahf's choice of

Philadelphia is symbolic at its core. The word Philadelphia means the city of brotherly love in

Greek, which indeed used to be the city moniker.[68] However, later on, and as a way to appreciate

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[68] For more on this check: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/The+City+of+Brotherly+Love

the Women's Suffrage Movement, it was changed to "sisterly love." [69] Khadra's life in

Philadelphia helps her better connect with her parents, Syrian heritage, and, most importantly, her

created (*and* creative) self. There, paradoxically she felt that she belongs: "Here in Philadelphia,

America didn't seem so dead-against what Khadra was […] In Philly, it almost feels as if she,

Khadra Shamy, she and her kind, are just the latest in a series of Americans, instead of trespassers

on the homestead of the real Americans" (391). Yet, strangely enough she also feels like a Hoosier

(325). Philadelphia has one of largest African-American populations, along with various other

ethnicities including the Arab-American community; this provides Khadra with a stable ground

where she could position herself and establish some sort of continuity. She points out that:

> Philadelphia, unlike Indianapolis, had a diverse array of mosques to choose from. Besides the one with her father's friend,[70] there was the Black Sunni, the Shia center, the NOI[71] place, student enclaves at each university, and suburban mosques full of immigrant professionals. There was also a radical mosque in a little apartment over a shop on Chestnut Street, where a small colony was congealing around a Libyan sheikh and his Kuwaiti sidekick. There was even a gay/lesbian congregation that met in a secret location that changed every week […] there was a Circassian community center which gathered in a lot of Chechnyans, Turks, Bosnians and Albanians […] Then there was the Sufi lodge – the dergah. (327)

One remarks her growing awareness of how diverse the Muslim community is and how diverse

their practices are (Abdul Majid 61). This increasing awareness and meeting new friends, including

her Jewish friend Blu, has helped her to open herself up and broaden her mind to different opinions

and perceptions without imposing her own. The city also provides her with an opportunity to build

her new life as a single independent woman, trying to construct for herself a path that aligns with

her true self and inner wishes to be who she wants. She finds an apartment in a racially-mixed,

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[69] Philadelphia the city of sisterly love: https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/philadelphia-name-sisterly-love-trnd/index.html

[70] Arab/South Asian mosque.

[71] Nation Of Islam.

financially-challenged area. She meets Chrïf who "called himself Muslim, in the secular sense of claiming the historical heritage, but wasn't observant" (342). Their relationship did not last for long though as Khadra realizes that Chrïf's way of thinking was no different than her mother's. For them "Islam was rigid and homogenous. It's like, they both *wanted* Islam to be this monolith, only for her mother it was good, for him bad," and Khadra recognizes the danger of this one-sided vision. Growing up in a conservative family, Khadra had spent most of her life following "the Islamic lifestyle" defined by her parents' interpretations and standards. These created expectations with which she had to comply without any consideration of cultural background, tradition, or personal viewpoints (Haque 123). But after going through her developmental phases she concluded that she could not live her life within the same scope anymore.

Khadra's life in Philadelphia did not win the approval of her parents, as Ebtehaj considers it an indication of her daughter's Americanization. Thus, a final visit to her parents has to take place at the end of the novel. The fictional biography ends where it had started, in Indiana, except that Khadra has changed. She still needs to make amends with her parents, particularly her mother, who assumes that Khadra "didn't "keep Islam", or love God just as much, just because she had come to disagree with her parents' idea of Islam" (384). Khadra reassures her mother by "kiss[ing] her soft Nivea-scented cheek. I am not lost, 'she whispered. I'm right here'" (384). One last revisit has to take place before Khadra reconciles with her past and connects it to her future. She has to have closure and accept what happened to her friend Zuhura, which requires two experiences; the first one is at Zuhura's gravestone. As she is sitting there with her friend's mother, Aunt Ayesha, the latter admits that "we put a lot of weight on your shoulders […] all our children […] but especially you girls. You had a lot to measure up to" (404). Aunt Ayesha's confusion underlines the burden and pressure on girls and women within the community, as they have to deal with the

expectation to preserve the religious and cultural traditions while trying to maintain a sense of self. Aunt Ayesha summarizes the problem: "we wanted you to carry our identities" (405), and asks Khadra to "forgive us," which makes Khadra weep.

The second experience gives her a chance to mourn her friend's death for the first time. While driving on the highway she mistakenly takes the road which passes the place where the police had found Zuhura's body, a young African American Muslim girl who was murdered at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan. Khadra finally realizes that Zuhura is a figure of "the impossibi[le], contradictory hopes the Muslim community had for her, and the infuriating, confining assumptions the Americans put on her." However, Khadra understood that all Zuhura was looking for was "a way to be, just be, outside that tug-of-war" (358). With this realization, and only after she grieves her friend's death in the place where the body was found, Khadra is finally able to embrace her American identity: "She looks around at the white people, too – the Americans – no wait, she's American now – the other Americans. [...] Midwesterners – Hoosiers – set in their ways, hardworking, steady, valuing God and family. Suspicious of change. In a funny way, Khadra realizes suddenly, as she surveys the crowd: they're us, and we're them. Hah! My folks are the perfect Hoosiers!" (438)

This chapter has looked closely at the influence of religion on space and space on religion. It has conducted a spatial analysis of the four main spaces presented in the novel and its impact on the construction of the main character's identity. As I have demonstrated, the emotions linked to spatial existence signify how identity construction evolves, or, in some cases, dissolves through Khadra's experience of different regions and topographies. It has also shown how physical movement through these spaces shapes Khadra's definition and perception of place and forms her spatial awareness. Finally, the novel shows how individuals make different journeys within varied

spaces but more importantly trace inward trajectories of self-discovery. Finally, *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf* portrays the struggles of the different characters we have studied in this and previous chapters. Khadra's concluding statement summarizes the problem and its resolution: "I think I was trying to get to a place where I could reconnect the two [identities] and be a whole person" (Kahf 395). In that sense, Khadra is similar to other characters I have examined through this dissertation because they are all trying to connect the different components of who they are, while still being seen, and heard, individually in society. This being said, they have their own experiences, and their own world, not as part of a collective representation, but each of these characters represents her own identity.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have examined the negotiations between narrative, identity, and place in the fictional works produced by three major contemporary Muslim women descendants of Arab immigrants: Leila Houari, Faiza Guène, and Mohja Kahf. The study focused on four novels: *Zeida de nulle part, Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Du rêve pour les oufs*, and *The Girl with The Tangerine Scarf*. All the authors examined in this dissertation are still actively writing and publishing, and the fact that their fictional works still attract publishers highlights the significance of their works and their good reception among readers.

The study has offered an unexplored perspective on the perception of space in literature, from 1985 with *Zeida de nulle part* by Leila Houari, to the present with *Kiffe Kiffe demain* and *Du rêve pour les oufs* by Faiza Guène and *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf. The selection of these four novels was based on their having been well received by both readers and literary critics. Additionally, my analysis of these works provides different perspectives on Muslim women experiences based on various factors, including different backgrounds, socio-geographics, geopolitics, and family dynamics, among others. The connections made across these diverse works of literature provide a broader perception and representation of place within the main characters' respective societies.

Within the texts analyzed in this dissertation, there is a noticeable shift among the different characters. Starting with Leila Houari's novel, the reader notices the absence of any religious identification with the main character Zeida. The character is more adherent to ethnic and cultural practice rather than the Islamic faith. Moving on to Doria Faiza Guène's main character in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the reader gets a slight reference to the religion, yet neither the mother nor the daughter claimed any religious identification. For Ahlème, the main character analyzed in Chapter

3, one notices her sporadic practice of the faith and a certain adherence to a belief in divinity. Finally, with Khadra, religion becomes very central to her identification and an important element to who she is.

At the same time, throughout the study there is a noticeable progression in the representation of women. The family dynamic represented is not always consistent with the stereotypical patriarchy. For instance, Zeida's mother is a stay-at-home mother. She can be perceived as having accepted much of her life, but she does not have many resources available to change any of it, and she is very limited in what she has access to and what she can do. On the other hand, the father figure has much dominance over his wife and inside the household. Thus, the novel represents the standard masculine/patriarchal order in which the father is the authoritarian figure imposing limitations on the mother's resources and role. The mother must rely on the father when it comes to decisions and has no financial contribution to the household. Hence, the mother's status inside the household is unequal to the father.

There is an obvious shift in Chapter 2 with Doria; with a physically absent father, the daughter and mother take control of their own lives. In that sense, they are financially independent without any reliance on the father regarding finances or decision making. In the third chapter, rather than being a daughter figure, Ahlème represents a matriarchal figure with much power as the sole decision-maker in the family. She is also the only financial contributor, and the family dynamics presented in the novel challenge stereotypical conceptions of gender roles. Finally, in Chapter 4, Khadra's mother becomes the authoritative matriarchal figure and the one reinforcing the patriarchy and stereotypical gender roles.

Zeida de nulle part provides an insight into identity confusion in relation to the intergenerational narrative. It also underscores the cultural differences between the first generation

of immigrants and their children, which is considered an important theme in Beur's Literature. The shifting voices in Houari's work represents the different angles from which one sees one's life story unfold and the importance of using different perspectives to fully comprehend one's own experience.

With Faiza Guène's novels, this study has shown a shift from the identity confusion presented in Houari's work to the marginalized banlieue. The banlieue novels are popular and their authors attract huge media coverage since their writings are perceived to "contain politically charged plotlines," as their works "feature adolescent […] protagonists of North African heritage struggling with pervasive discrimination, ineffective educational resources, and little hope of future employment" (Kleppinger 235).

Despite the media's constant emphasis on the substantiality of these writings to understand the banlieue and its social and economical issues, the authors distanced themselves of such categorization. While being interviewed to discuss her then newly published novel *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Guène emphasizes that the novel is not an attempt to make any social or political statement about national identity nor immigration. Rather, she simply wishes that the reader enjoys her work without any expectation or preconception of what the work is or presents. She just wants the reader to enjoy the reading as much as she enjoyed the writing (Kleppinger 2).

Mohja Kahf's *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf* puts into question fixed identities and shows how the notion of home is constantly expanding and developing. Kahf also shows, through Khadra's challenges, the experience of being Muslim and American and how to embrace hyphenated identities as an Arab-American-Muslim.

The purpose of this study was to explore the notion of space in the narratives of Muslim women authors of Arabic background. The first chapter has demonstrated how places inhabited by

characters have similar spirits and natures to the ones who inhabit them. This spatial reflection shows a connection between the depiction of the surrounding place and the portrayal of the self.

In the second chapter, I have argued that pop culture's influence equals that of a religion since it provides one with sense of identification, guidance, defines a practice of faith, and offers a sense of belonging. In comparison with Chapter 1, the uses of this pop culture space show how when one suffers exclusion and social and spatial segregation, it becomes only normal to sustain a collective identity through media stories.

The third chapter looked closely at how stories could be exclusive to certain spaces, since in those spaces the literary and the spatial create reciprocal, intertextual spaces in which stories become a space and space becomes literary. Finally, we have demonstrated that writing enables one to own their voice and story, which in turn empowers women to defy the social and cultural construction of gendered spaces.

The fourth chapter demonstrated how the emotions linked to spatial existence signify how identity construction evolves, or, in some cases, dissolves. It also showed how individuals make different journeys within varied spaces, but more importantly trace inward trajectories of self-discovery.

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