

## **Diasporic Community of the Berber in France: Recreating Home and Harem from Exile in Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du chaâba* and Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés***

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**Abstract:** The exodus of Maghrebian citizens towards France was premised mainly on the high demand for unskilled labour for the reconstruction of postwar France. With a flexible French immigration policy that facilitated integration of immigrants' families, the growth of Maghrebian Diaspora became evident in peripheral settlements or French cities' suburbs. Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du chaâba* and Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés* chronicle the life of Maghrebian Berbers in Diasporic communities where cultural dispossession and unhomeliness stimulate the re-creation and transplantation of home and harem. This work adopts Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybrid identity" and "third space". In reading both narratives as a migrant text that depicts the role of memory and nostalgia in constructing exilic identities and consciousness, this work underscores the fluidity of Diasporic communities. These communities deconstruct exilic identities that they seek to construct, being an "imagined community" whose foundations are laid with bricks of nationalistic sentiments and whose socialization is defeatist, however producing cultural occupants of third space.

**Keywords:** Ben Jelloun, Azouz Begag, Hybrid identity, Third space, Diasporic community, Maghrebian literature, Migrant texts

### **1. Introduction**

Popular reference is often made to exilic or diasporic experiences of the Biblical Israelites in Babylon in an attempt to historicize exile. It is reported that the decline of the trans-Atlantic slave trade broadly coincides with the rise of 'legitimate' trade in African agricultural produce and migration of indentured labor from North Africa to Western Europe, especially after the Second World War when unskilled labor was needed for the reconstruction of Postwar France (Law, 1995:6). Before the Second World War and during French occupation of the Maghreb, there was a minimal Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian

movement to France. In Morocco during the period of bilateral labor agreements of the 1960s and 70s, migration of unskilled workers generally operated through official channels (World Bank, 2010:18). These indentured migrant workers soon constituted Moroccan transnational labor and Diaspora whose cultural homogeneity and nationalistic consciousness grew to be problematic, becoming "one of the most dispersed migrant communities in Western Europe." (de Hass & Plug, 2006:609). Such migratory opportunities were available in Algeria that was hub of French colonization of the Maghreb. It should not be forgotten that the growth of

Maghrebian Diaspora was premised on a flexible French immigration policy that facilitated the integration of immigrants' families. With close to 1,300,000 North-Africans whose census was taken in the 1970s, North-African colony, including undocumented immigrants and its strong internal demographic explosion, headed, in 1985, towards the population of 1,500,000 (Ageron, 1985:59). However, this singular opportunity for Maghrebian migrants now suffers a setback through national controls of European borders and they include those of France.

North-Africa is popularly referred to as the Maghreb. Dictionnaire universel (1995:722) defines the Maghreb as "ensemble des pays d'Afrique du Nord: Tunisie, Algerie, Maroc, auxquels on adjoit parfois la Libye et la Mauritanie" whose languages are majorly Berber and Arabic. In Morocco, spoken Berber is spread into three large dialectical areas that cover the totality of the mountainous regions and in Algeria; the principal Berber-speaking region is Kabylia, according to Chaker (2003). Majority of Maghrebian Diaspora in France originated from the Berber-speaking regions, thereby justifying why Chaker calls Berber "a long-forgotten" language of France and why migrant writers such as Azouz Begag and Tahar Ben Jelloun represent Diasporic communities where Berber

language coexist with French in their migrant writing. However, these communities deconstruct exilic identities that they seek to construct, being an "imagined community" whose foundations are laid with bricks of nationalistic sentiments and whose socialization is defeatist, thereby producing cultural occupants of third space, a liminal space of the margin not only the centre. This phenomenon remains characteristic of migrant texts.

Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du chaâba* relates the life of a young boy, named Azouz who resides with his immigrant parents, Bouzid and Emma, in a Diasporic community of Villeurbanne, located at the bank of River Rhone, in France. All Maghrebian immigrants live in this French ghetto where there is apparent lack of social amenities such as schools, electricity and potable water. This novel describes the transition of the protagonist, Azouz from childhood to adolescence, overcoming the social vices of his immediate "Chaâba" and the xenophobic manifestations of the urban centers of France. In Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés*, the transition of a young girl Fathma is narrated. Her displacement from a Moroccan village to France opens her eyes to the "new world" of Paris, though Fathma and her parents reside in a Diasporic community ironically called "la Goutte d'or" as members of Berber

community in France. It is her rite of passage in France that inaugurates a cultural predicament that defines her subjective identity in the text. To agree with Robert Kenedy et al (2012: viii) in their *Diasporic Identities*, such transitions and migrations produce geographical-psycho-social impact that influences the formation of hybrid identities in Diasporic communities because, according to Bhabha (1994:177), cultural difference emerges at the point of social crises and identity is claimed either from the position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre.

## **2. Explosion of Maghrebian Migrant and Travel Writing in France**

The phenomenon of writers in exile never started today, but it has succeeded in qualifying literatures with “world” and writers with “diasporic”, “migrant” or now “hyphenated” thereby constructing a new space of writers without borders. In world literature in English, at the heart of this effervescence are Kazuo Ishiguro, Ben Okri, Hanif Kureishi, Michael Ondaatje and Salman Rushdie, who explored with acuity the upsurge of those that can be called “translated men”: those who, born in England, no longer lived in the nostalgia of a homeland forever lost but, finding themselves between two worlds, astride a chasm, valiantly attempted to draft a new world out of this

telescoping condition (Simon, 2010:115). France has been a country of migrant texts where exotic writers live and write their transcultural experiences thereby producing classics in French literary scene. From Samuel Beckett’s *En Attendant Godot* (1952) to what can be called today the forerunners of “World literature in French” that chronicles names of transcultural and transnational writers such as Nancy Huston, Ben Jelloun, Maryse Condé, Anna Moï, Dai Sitje, Brina Svit, and many others (*World Literature Today*, 2007:55), it can be understood that France has become a melting-pot of hyphenated writers of African, European, Asian and Caribbean origins. In his “Emigration and the Deconstruction of Global Geographies in Selected Works of Ben Jelloun”, Ajah (2012) defines a hyphenate(d) writer as the person who moves from the margin to the mainstream, possessing intellectual and cultural heritage of dominant and dominated cultures which he shares in his hybrid narrative. Such migrant writer as Wilson (2008:101) puts it, “promotes the value of deconstructive as opposed to descriptive, representation of experiences of displacement.” A corpus of this type is now studied under the rubric of emigration or travel writing.

Bonn (2006:551) underlines the emergence of literature of the Maghreb in France which is a

product of Maghrebian immigration becoming a rallying point of different cultures and literatures, though generic classification of such literatures remains a postcolonial problem. The preoccupation of this literature is emigration and exile with its increasing byproduct of the Beur phenomenon that shows the cultural liminality and subjectivity of Maghrebian exiles in France. Azouz Begag represents this transnational reality as a Beur, being born in France of Algerian parents. In France among critics, this corpus of migrant writing is known as *littérature "beur"* from the 1980s where migrant writers started making waves in French literary atmosphere. This group of writers is part of French's *littérature monde*; Khaïr-Eddine's *Agadir*, Mehdi Charef's *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983), Nina Bouraoui's *La Voyeuse interdite* (1991), Hédi Kaddour's *Waltenberg* (2005) and other works from Nacer Kettane, Farida Belghoul, Akli Tadjer are byproducts of emigration or writing without borders. All these writers including Ben Jelloun, Assia Djebar are migrants whose experiences produce a subgenre that can be categorized into and read as travel literature.

### **3. Representation of Diasporic Communities in Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés* and Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du chaâba***

Although Diasporic subjects are uprooted from homelands and remold their life and identity with the 'clays' of exotic cultures, they do not break off the suffering from nostalgia and 'rootlessness'. The panacea for exilic melancholy is the creation of imagined Diasporic communities which, being a simulacrum of homeland, has a psychotherapeutic significance to members of the community. To paraphrase Anderson (2001:8), this community is imagined because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. In the course of this study, we have categorized the feeling of unsettlement of Maghrebian emigrants in their varying degrees depending on generation. The old generation of emigrants, mostly illiterates, are more attached to homeland than new generation of emigrants which include the Beurs. Diasporic communities are mostly creations of the first generation of emigrants who, remaining attached to home cultures in exile, remain attached to homeland. However, such migrant communities constitute Bhabha's "ambivalent space" or "third space" that "opens up a cultural space of tension for the negotiation of incommensurable differences" (Johnson & George, 2012:122).

In Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1986), Azouz's

Shantytown located close to Lyon is an “imaginary” Diasporic community which remains a perfect simulation of Algerian homeland. Bouzid, the father of Azouz, is the chief of Chaâba who oversees the running of this immigrant community. Bouzid’s home remains a replica of a North-African family where Azouz lives with his wife Emma, his brother Moustef and three sisters (Aïcha, Zohra and Fatia). The ghetto has its abattoir, market, potable water, playground and a school that is located outside the shantytown. After school, the Chaaba children like Rabah and his brothers, Azouz’s cousins, engage in different recreational activities such as hunting, seeking of treasures from dumps, etc. except Azouz who says that “L’idée de vendre des olives les jours où il n’y a pas d’école ne m’enthousiasme pas du tout.” (p.22) [The idea of selling fruits on days when there is no school, does not excite me] It is a community where Berber language is generally spoken, used as a means of communication and where interpersonal disputes abound. For example, Zidouma, wife of Saïd who is the brother of Bouzid, is used to quarrelling with neighbors. Look at this scenario as Azouz Begag (1986:8) paints it:

Et la voisine patiente  
toujours, elle partit...non,  
elle ne

patiente plus. Laissant  
tomber son seau, elle  
charge, tel un bouc, sur sa  
rivale. Le choc est terrible.  
Les deux  
femmes s’empoignent dans  
des cris de guerre sortis du  
tréfonds des gorges.

While the neighbor is still  
waiting, she leaves...no,  
she is no longer waiting.  
Dropping her bucket, she  
charges like a goat on her  
rival. The shock is terrible.  
The two women grapple in  
war cries out from the  
depth of their gorges. (Our  
Translations)

Quarrels, conflicts, fighting are  
normal lives of dwellers of Chaâba.  
What causes this fight between  
Zidouma and a neighbor is the lack  
of potable water in this community  
whose leader is used to settling  
matrimonial and interfamilial  
conflicts of all inhabitants of the  
Berber community in France. As  
the Chief, Bouzid shouts at,  
disciplines, cries at his adults and  
children of his little kingdom. It is  
evident that his assault of Saïd’s  
wife worsens his relationship with  
his brother. During the bike episode  
where some children rode on the  
major highways outside the  
community without parental  
consent, the text presents his  
reaction, analogous to that of a  
king:

Bouزيد s'est alors emparé de tous les vélos, les a entassés au milieu de la cour du Chaâba sous nos regards incrédules, a saisi une masse qu'il avait préparé, l'a soulevé au dessus de sa tête dans un mouvement sur et tranquille... (p.116)

Bouزيد then seized all the bikes, piled them up in the middle of the courtyard of Chaâba before our incredulous eyes, grabbed a mass he had prepared, raised above his head in a sure and quiet movement...

Bouزيد's prompt response to the children's misdemeanor unveils the traditional means of control and leadership employed in this Diasporic community, emblematic of Africa where discipline and training of children is envisaged as a collective rather than individual responsibility. The Chief's actions can be misrepresented as tyrannical and severe, but inhabitants such as Bouchaoui do recognize Bouزيد as the founder of Chaâba and his leadership qualities. Before departing from Chaâba, Bouchaoui said to him: "Je te dois quelque chose. Tu m'as accueilli ici avec ma famille pendant des années. Tu m'as trouvé un travail chez ton patron" (p.138). [I owe you something. you accepted me here with my family all these years. You

found work for me in your director's place] It can be said that this settlement has affinities with homeland. Unlike Diasporic communities in Ben Jelloun's writing, Chaâba is well organized, but it is eventually abandoned after the illegal abattoir saga. Bouزيد, the last occupant to leave the marginal community to mainstream, belongs to the generation of Fathma's father in Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés* who went to France before independence of Maghrebian countries.

Fathma and her parents live at Barbès, la Goutte-d'Or, which is considered as "quartier d'émigrés" (Immigrants' quarters) as members of Berbers community in France. Fathma explains to the French police who wanted to know if her house is located in a quarter: "Non, c'est notre village" (Ben Jelloun, 1991:84). This Diasporic settlement symbolizes reminiscences from homeland by its Moroccan settlers; Berber language, Maghrebian couscous, and religion and community life which constitute the "collective memory" and "Diasporic consciousness" of subjects (Cheran) are in existence. As Muslim brothers in this community who are united by religious consciousness, El Hadji, an Algerian immigrant and self-appointed imam, spearheads a launching for the construction of mosque at Barbès; all dwellers are obliged to contribute for the

building, but the French Government refuses to grant them authorization. Tribal and religious solidarity appears more pronounced during Ramadan period. Fathma reports that “ce que j’aimais le plus, durant ce mois, c’étaient les soirées où la Goutte-d’Or se transformait en médina.” (p.109). The transformation which this Diasporic community undergoes represents homeland in exile. Except for criminalities, Barbès is paradigmatic of Ramblas, an imaginary and marginal Diasporic community in Barcelona, represented in Ben Jelloun’s *Partir* (2006). It is a shantytown, at the entrance of Barrio Gótico where there is a high concentration of Moroccan illegal immigrants, traffickers, and idlers who daily hang about in streets in search of new tricks and adventures, which has their own language, customs and world. The narrator acknowledges that “en bas des Ramblas, des ruelles rappelant tantôt la médina de Fès” (Ben Jelloun, 2006:255) [at the bottom of Ramblas, alleys reminding of rather Medina of Fes], thereby showing how memories of homeland are recalled and processed in exile, shaping other exotic cultures that help to produce new identities.

#### **4. Memory, Nostalgia and Exilic Identity**

In *Le Gone du Chaâba*, Bouzid as a chief organizes festivals like male

circumcision and initiation, performed by Tahar and accompanied with pageantry and traditional cuisine like couscous. The narrator, Azouz narrates his experience of traditional circumcision in exile in these words:

Quatre hommes se sont alors emparés de moi. En une fraction de seconde, j’étais hissé sur la potence, les membres immobilisés. Des torrents de larmes de principe jaillissaient de mes yeux, et l’eau de colonne que me lançait ma mère sur les cheveux et le front attisait ma douleur. Des invités se sont approchés de moi, ont glissés furtivement des billets dans le nœud de mon foulard vert, en criant des encouragements pour être entendus (Begag, 1986 :111)

Four men then grabbed me. In a split second, I was hoisted onto the gallows, my members immobilized. Torrents of tears practically gushing out from my eyes, and the water that my mother was pouring on the forehead and hair reduced my pain. Guests approached me, crept stealthily some notes in the bow of my green

scarf, with loud shouts of encouragement.

Azouz describes a sequence of events that is a replica of homeland thereby showing the paradigmatic relationship between memory, nostalgia, and exilic identity. Among exiles, memory appears to be the last heritage to evaporate into a new life; it is reproduced through a nostalgic consciousness. In this male circumcision, reminiscences of homeland are represented; displaying the fact that memory enables the recreation of home in exile as experienced by Bouzid and other immigrant occupants of Chaâba in France. Azouz's suffering goes unnoticed to Berber immigrant elders who carry out this crude operation; the tears flowing from his eyes are like sacrifices placed on the altar of nationalistic consciousness. The victim is blessed with material resources. However, spectators' gifts of money to the sufferer are intended to encourage the endurance of pain, creating the theatre of the absurd. Racism and xenophobia are twins, responsible for triggering off the feeling of nostalgia and memories of homeland. Bouchaoui narrates to Bouzid his shameful encounter with the French police: "Regarde, moi, en rentrant du travail, sur le chemin, la police m'a arrêté : contrôle de papiers. J'ai donné ma carte. Ils ont ri de moi, m'ont traité de bikou." (p.135) Such an

experience demonstrates the notion of unhomeliness of Bouzid and other Algerian migrants who "ont fui la misère algérienne" (p.12). With the head that stores present incidents and the memory that replays like a video past events from home, the immigrant engages in comparative analysis of his past and present, and seeks ways to relieve his past through the agency of memories.

In Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés*, such xenophobic experiences are also rampant in the Diasporic community of La Goutte-d'Or where the French police make life unbearable to all immigrants. Police's incessant raids of immigrant communities have created a culture of fear for the Berber Diaspora in France. Fathma witnesses such behavioral syndrome and reports:

Au passage de la voiture de police, les gens réagissaient différemment dans ce quartier d'émigrés. Certains couraient, d'autres se cachaient. Les gens avaient peur. Je me demandais bien pourquoi cette panique (Ben Jelloun, 1991 :85).

At the passage of the police car, people reacted differently in this immigrant community. Some ran; others were



hiding. People were afraid.  
I wondered why this panic.

Fathma who has just arrived in France is not aware of what her parents are passing through in the hands of the French security agents. She has mistakenly brought in police officers to “spy their liberty” and has succeeded in causing a pandemonium. Shortly after, Fathma witnesses the oppression of her immigrant community in a raid, that turns occupants’ belongings upside down. The police also trample upon the Holy Quran, an action that a devoted Muslim describes as sacrilegious by shouting: “*Sacrilège! Sacrilège!*” (p.101). This individual goes further to see this oppression as Allah’s punishment for their exile. It is after this incident that Fathma realizes that Paris is not her home and France will never be her country.

Fathma’s departure from Morocco and arrival in France show the place of dream for the exotic in her life, yet her curiosity cannot heal her nostalgia for her homeland. She remembers “*le chant des oiseaux, les cris des enfants sortant de l’école coranique, le rythme de la moissonneuse, l’appel des paysannes et leurs chansons nostalgiques*” (p.74) and keeps dreaming of her role of shepherdess in her home community. Fathma’s rites of passage are eventually characterized by nostalgic consciousness and imaginary

battles in dreams where she fights with mystical French alphabets, witnesses a battle between Berber words and French letters and suffers migraines. Ben Jelloun uses this episode to narrate how new French culture attempts to displace the indigenous culture from home to create exilic identity. Although all Berber immigrants in both novels attempt to use their memory to recreate homes in exile, the identity still reveals the interrelatedness of hybrid cultures, emblematic of exilic subjects.

Memories of mythologized homeland in the lives of immigrants are cognitive legitimation and nostalgic authentication of Diasporic identity. Imagined Diasporic communities in Ben Jelloun’s travel narratives are analogous to Golob’s Slovenian Diasporic communities. These communities often make conscious efforts to preserve Slovenian identity, cultural heritage and memories of the homeland and try to transfer the accumulation of these efforts onto their descendants (Golob, 2009:69). Like their first set of Slovenian migrants, Ben Jelloun’s and Azouz Begag’s old generation which is represented by Fathma’s father in *Les Yeux* and Bouzid in *Le Gone du Chaâba* consciously and intentionally retains only one ethnic identity which is not the same among their hybridized descendants. However, the essentialist cultural purity of

these old generation migrants remains only a myth in a transnational social space. There are preconditions for cultural consumption which typically problematizes the transcultural accessibility of the uneducated migrants in a liminal space or Bhabha's "third space" that engenders new possibility and new forms of cultural meaning (Bhabha 1994). This old generation of Maghrebian factory workers in France is not ignorant of this social lacuna that gives birth to their Diasporic eccentricity, though they yearn for the cultural sanctity of their "Maghrebianness".

The old generation formulates strong essentialist conceptions of collective Moroccan and Algerian identity in exile which allows no room for individual variation or divergence. In all fairness, identity is something founded precisely on the anticipation of its disallows; it is formulated after and in response to awareness of the threat of extermination (Bowman, 2002: 448). That explains why exile and identity co-form each other, and both concepts must be considered since the essentialist definition of identity has been highly contested and is being reconceptualized at present (Liquete, 1998:84). Fathma's father's and Bouzid's identities have been fixed by their homeland and its tradition, so cannot be molded and constructed in exile. To consume French

cultures amounts to corruption of their treasured Moroccanness or Algerianness, and a compromise of their paternalistic and nationalistic spirit. Acceptance of cultural difference appears then illusory and unrealistic to these uneducated immigrants whose social marginality interprets their collective cultural solidarity and exilic consciousness towards homeland. From such marginalized zone, marginal selves are constructed and cannot "free themselves from the heavy weight that essentialism has imposed upon them to seek an answer to the difficult question of the construction of their gendered subjectivity within a historical framework" (Liquete, 1998:5). In such cases, cultures –dominant versus dominated, mainstream versus marginal –hardly clash, denoting no-victor no-vanquished imaginary phenomenon, manifesting cultural homogeneity or what Bhabha (1990:304) calls "profound cultural undecidability"; however, such a phenomenon shows the ambiguity of communal Diasporism. Unlike their fathers, Beur children have an experience of dispossession and multiple allegiances, thereby occupying a third space where they become hybridized and hyphenated in their identities, formed from what McRobbie (1994:27) calls present-day fragmented subjectivity, expressed in "postmodern cultural

forms, a kind of superficial pick-and-mix of style”.

### **5. Dispossession, Unhomeliness and Allegiances**

Exilic identity or consciousness involves a process of loss and gain, though old generation immigrants such as Azouz Begag's Bouzid and Ben Jelloun's Fathma's father attempt to maintain a “profound cultural undecidability”, in the words of Bhabha. Their efforts are purely unrealistic and amount to what I call “ambiguity of communal Diasporism”. In *Le Gone du Chaâba* and *Les Yeux baissés*, Bouzid and Fathma's fathers are illiterate parents who are determined to send their children (Azouz and Fathma) to French schools to acquire Western education. These children are sacrificed on the altar of parental desire for acquiring Western knowledge to overcome social limitations of an exotic space or a place Pratt (2008:8) calls “contact zones”, that is a “space of imperial [postcolonial] encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come in contact with each other and establish ongoing relations”. In *Les Yeux baissés*, Fathma's gradual heterogeneity reinforces her father's cultural homogeneity since she acts as his father's unofficial reader and writer of mails while Zohra, Azouz's sister is Chaâba's community reader of documents or letters.

Prior to her displacement, Fathma had suffered multiple disposessions, due to cultural and religious orders and her aunt's witchcraft in her homeland. Fathma vengefully graduates to be totally lost in French cultures while her indigenous identity is relegated to the background. Her rites of passage have left an indelible mark on her consciousness; she confesses: “je m'éloignais de mes parents, je me repliais sur moi-même, je ne parlais plus et lorsque j'ouvrais la bouche, c'était pour leur parler une langue étrangère.” (p.120). It is not only Berber language that is lost in Fathma's personality; her new culture replaces the old. She can no longer tolerate her mother's “épice”, imported from homeland because the aroma stimulates her abstract travels back to Morocco, especially “dans les premières années de [son] enfance”. Fathma also repudiates other cultural practices such as “les yeux baissés”, “les dents en or”, “le marquage” and periodic fasting of Muslims because she has just come to be part of what her father refers to as “c'est la civilization!” (p.55). The parents now see her as a stranger and the French society declines the total acceptability of her personality; she suffers from unhomeliness being neither here nor there.

Like Fathma, Azouz in *Le Gone du Chaâba* enters civilization through l'école Léo-Lagrange, situated very

close to her immigrant quarters, where his appetite for French education and life is fully satisfied. He takes no pleasure in engaging in children plays of other Berber kids or in sale of “des lilas”. The child-narrator gives a reason for dispossession: “J’ai honte de mon ignorance. Depuis quelques mois, j’ai décidé de changer de peau. Je n’aime pas être avec les pauvres, les faibles de la classe. Je veux être dans les premières places du classement, comme les Français.” (p.60) [I am ashamed of my ignorance. Some months ago, I decided to change the color of my skin. I don’t like to be with the poor, the weak of the class. I want to be among the first, like the French students]. Azouz is evidently reproached by his peers for being “toujours avec les Français” (p.95) who hadly accept his color and for confessing to be a Jew instead of an Arab as a means of avoiding xenophobic manifestations. Despite Azouz’s disassociation with his Berber peers in his immigrant community, he is not fully integrated into the French mainstream because of racial factors. His Arabic name already betrays his Frenchness because it aligns him with the Algerian periphery, an inheritance that he is not proud of and a society he cannot call his. Most of Exilic subjects occupy the liminal space, a third space where allegiances are polarized and deconstructed.

Azouz Begag’s *Le Gone du Chaâba* and Ben Jelloun’s *Les Yeux baissés* are seen as Bildungsroman which is characteristically postcolonial, showing the progressive, intercultural and transcultural development of Azouz and Fathma as protagonists. Jussawalla (2003:25) ambiguously declares that a postcolonial Bildungsroman transforms to a narrative strategy aimed at redefining postcoloniality or national rebirth because postcolonial writers use it to show the development of anti-colonial or nationalistic sentiment of a protagonist or who rejects hybridity for nationalism (Jussawalla, 1997:35). Yet neither Azouz nor Fathma possesses such a nationalistic spirit for homeland.

In *Le Gone du Chaâba*, Azouz hardly identifies with his Berber culture and rather considers himself as a French even though his teacher, M. Loubon had mischievously told him point blank: “En bien, vous voyez: moi je suis français et je suis né en Algérie, et vous, vous êtes né à Lyon mais vous êtes algérien.” (Begag, 1986:210) [Of course, you see; myself, I am French and was born in Algeria and you, you were born in Lyon but you are an Algerian] M. Loubon’s statement summarizes the impossibility of Azouz’s belonging to the French mainstream, though he is born and bred in France and desires French life. Jussawalla’s paradigms are

problematic in the sense that Azouz cannot be considered to be nationalistic like his father even as he celebrates their relocation from Chaâba that aligns them to Berber and Algerian heritage. He is not yet disillusioned by the fact that he can never be seen as French; Azouz might not be seen as an occupant of the third space like Fathma. Ben Jelloun's Bildungsroman transgresses the conventional gendered Eurocentric model of formation novel, thereby opening a new perspective of a subjective identity of a postcolonial female subject who narrates her proper tale. Contrary to Jussawallian postcolonial hero-heroine-protagonist model, Fathma's formation does not inspire the "political consciousness" of her indigenization or a "refusal of hybridity" for nationalistic purposes, rather it spurs up a feminist sentiment that understand the place of women in her homeland and a revolutionary spirit that deconstructs omnipresent patriarchal orders in her postcoloniality. Fathma chooses none of the two cultures (Moroccan and French) in order to occupy a luminal third space where she has no allegiances either to Morocco that imprisons womanhood or France that discriminates against her immigrant community. Ben Jelloun's narrative illustrates the capacity of Fathma to negotiate hybrid identity while

problematizing its borders and binaries, thereby permitting a possible reconceptualization of what Rellihan calls an "ironic nationhood". Repudiating two antagonistic cultures, Fathma finds herself "neither here nor there", acquiring a postmodern fragmented identity or an identity de "troisième lieu qui n'est ni [sa] terre natale ni [son] pays d'adoption" (Ben Jelloun, 1991:296-7) [third space that is neither her land of birth nor land of adoption].

## **6. Conclusion**

Begag's *Le Gone du chaâba* and Ben Jelloun's *Les Yeux baissés* present immigrant communities of the Berber in France where home and harem are recreated in exile through the agency of memory and nostalgia. The two texts are consensual in their representation of exilic subjects and juxtaposition of first generation immigrants and their progeny who negotiates the borders of cultural identities to become transculturally hybrid migrants. However, each writer is autonomous in his style of writing. Azouz Begag deploys the technique of autobiography that affords him the opportunity to present his own diaries while Ben Jelloun writes a postcolonial Bildungsroman where the Bildung of the female protagonist, Fathma enables her to acquire a postmodern identity for the deconstruction of French and Moroccan cultures. From this hybridized subjectivity, Fathma

becomes a schizophrenic personality and a tourist in her own village where she arrives with a camera. Her arrival is not a product of responsibility or obligation since it is mythically believed that the keys to unlock the village's hidden resources are buried in her hands,

but a product of adventurism, characteristic of tourists. Disappointed, the villagers take their destiny in their own hands and through collective efforts, water as a hidden source of life returns to the community which is agog with celebrations.

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