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Η γυναίκα *beur* σε πρώτο πλάνο: Μετανάστευση, γυναίκα  
και ταυτότητα μέσα από τον κινηματογράφο *beur*

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The *Beurette* via Close up: Immigration, woman and  
identity through the *beur* cinema

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the immigrant women of the world: Syrians, Iraqis, Persians, Kurdish, Yazidis, Afghanis, Palestinians, North Africans and Africans exiled in Europe; Mexicans, Cubans, Indigenous from Latin America exiled in USA and Spain, Tibetans exiled in Nepal and India and to so many more displaced femininities crossing mountains, seas and dangerous borders in search for freedom, equality, justice, life and peace. As the Kenyan poet, raised in the UK, Warsan Shire wrote in her poem “Home”, 'no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark'. Let's hope to a world with less metaphorical and real borders between people and countries.

## Η γυναίκα beur σε πρώτο πλάνο: Μετανάστευση, γυναίκα και ταυτότητα μέσα από τον κινηματογράφο beur

Σημαντικοί Όροι: Μεταναστευτικός κινηματογράφος, μετανάστευση, ταυτότητα, πολιτισμικές υβριδικότητες, εθνοτικότητα, επιπολιτισμός, ανήκειν, Άλλοι, Φύλο

### Περίληψη

“Η Γαλλία δεν είναι μόνο λευκή. Στη Γαλλία υπάρχουν όλα τα χρώματα” υποστηρίζει ένας νεαρός δεύτερης γενιάς μεταναστών σε μια συνέντευξη του με αφορμή τις εξεγέρσεις στα παρισινά προάστια το 2005. Πράγματι, η Γαλλία λόγω του αποικιακού παρελθόντος της εξελίχθηκε κατά τη μεταποικιοκρατική περίοδο σε μια χώρα υποδοχής για πολλούς ανθρώπους από τις πρώην αποικίες της, κυρίως από τις χώρες του Μαγκρέμπ και μεταμορφώθηκε σε μια πολυπολιτισμική, πολυεθνική και πολυδιάστατη κοινωνία. Μια κοινωνία που καμία φορά ξεχνά τους εθνικούς της Άλλους. Αυτή η διπλωματική εργασία επιχειρεί να δει ποιος είναι ο Άλλος, εστιάζοντας στις γυναίκες πρώτης και δεύτερης γενιάς μεταναστών από τη Αλγερία μέσα από τον κινηματογράφο Beur. Ο κινηματογράφος Beur αναφέρεται στην εποχή που οι μετανάστες δεύτερης γενιάς αποφάσισαν να πάρουν τις κάμερες ανά χείρας και να κάνουν τους εαυτούς τους και τη γενιά των γονιών τους ορατούς. Μέσα από την ανάλυση θα προσεγγισθεί η εξόριστη γυναίκα της πρώτης μεταναστευτικής γενιάς τόσο μέσα από τη μνήμη και τον ξεριζωμό όσο και μέσα από τη διαχείριση της σωματικότητάς της και στη συνέχεια θα αναλυθεί το αίσθημα του ανήκειν της γυναίκας της δεύτερης γενιάς ως υβριδική υποκειμενικότητα.

# The Beurette via Close up: Immigration, woman and identity through the beur cinema

Keywords: Immigrant cinema, migration, identity, hybridity, cultural hybridities, ethnicity, acculturation, belonging, Others, gender

## Abstract

"France isn't only white. In France, there are all the colors", says a young second-generation immigrant interviewed during the 2005 revolts in Paris suburbs. Indeed, France, due to its colonial past, evolved during the post-colonial period into a host country for many people from its ex-colonies, mainly from the Maghreb countries, and transformed into a multicultural, multinational and multidimensional society. A society that sometimes forgets its ethnic Other. This master dissertation attempts to examine who is the Other through Beur cinema, focusing on first and second generation immigrant women from Algeria. The Beur cinema is the moment when second generation immigrants decided to pick up the cameras and make themselves and their parents' generation visible. The present analysis firstly frames the exiled subjectivity and body of the first generation women, discussing memory and uprooting, in order to explore afterwards the hybrid subjectivities of the second generation women and their sense of belonging.

## ΥΠΕΥΘΥΝΗ ΔΗΛΩΣΗ

Με την παρούσα δήλωση:

1. Δηλώνω ρητά και ανεπιφύλακτα ότι η διπλωματική εργασία που σας καταθέτω αποτελεί προϊόν δικής μου πνευματικής προσπάθειας, δεν παραβιάζει τα δικαιώματα τρίτων μερών και ακολουθεί τα διεθνώς αναγνωρισμένα πρότυπα επιστημονικής συγγραφής, τηρώντας πιστά την ακαδημαϊκή δεοντολογία.
2. Οι απόψεις που εκφράζονται αποτελούν αποκλειστικά ευθύνη του/ης συγγραφέα/ως και ο/η επιβλέπων/ουσα, οι εξεταστές, το Τμήμα και το Πανεπιστήμιο Πελοποννήσου δεν υιοθετούν κατ' ανάγκη τις εκφραζόμενες απόψεις ούτε φέρουν οποιαδήποτε ευθύνη για τυχόν λάθη και παραλείψεις.

Ο/Η δηλών/ούσα

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*“What a shitty destiny. Fate is all trial and misery and you can't do anything about it. Basically, no matter what you do you'll 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”*

*Faïza Guène*

*“Suburb today it means trash”*

*Nadja Harek*



Figure 1 Samia, Philippe Faucon, 2000

## Introduction

-Are you French?

-No. Not really.

-Are you a stranger?

-No. Not really.

-Where were you born?

-In Algeria.

This is one of the final scenes of the beur film *Sous les pieds de femmes* directed by the Franco Algerian Rachida Krim in 1997, where an Algerian émigré woman declares her double or non-identity in front of a French court. In this terse dialogue of that representative film of beur cinema is recorded a long-time history. The history of Algeria and the post-colonial era in France, the history of immigration and identity, the history of the women faced with displacement and integration. A story that begins with a boat full of immigrant women with traditional clothes called *caftan*, leaving behind Algeria and ends today in the multitudinous and multicultural suburbs of the French metropol.

The aim of this research is to explain the identity construction of the immigrant woman in French society across the cinema called *Beur*. Through the filming narration will be shown who are these French born overseas or born by immigrant parents. These generations of people with Maghrebian origin are grown up in the same society with French people but they had always the feeling of otherness because of their family name, the color of their skin and the question “where are you from?” that where always present to remind them their distant origin (Claire Diao, 2017:3). This MA Thesis will discuss how the Beur woman shapes her identity balancing between two worlds, the world of French with Maghreb ancestry and the world of their North African immigrant parents.<sup>1</sup> Who is the woman of the suburbs? Stranger in France and stranger in Algeria? A western

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<sup>1</sup> Diasporic Cinema, Film Reference

girl or a girl respecting and guarding the moral integrity and the traditions of her family? She feels equal among the French society or she is forced to stand on the sidelines? Algerian or French? Her name is Arabic, her neighborhood most of the times is a parallel world populated only by Africans, Algerians or Tunisians but her identity is French. How all the aforementioned factors influence her identity?

Claire Diao (2017:152) argues that these people – in our case these women – are growing in a perpetual uprooting with the feeling of not being really French, nor completely of another nationality. This study will provide an analysis on the identity of the immigrant woman in France, through representative films made by French people with North African origin depicting themselves, focusing on concepts like ethnicity, otherness and femininities.

## 1.1 The Algerian immigration in France

Nowadays, in France, there is the biggest exiled Algerian community in the world. (AIDA)<sup>2</sup>. According to INSEE<sup>3</sup>(The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) in French Republic, they reside approximately 1,1 million of French people with Algerian origin while the total amount of immigrants in France is about 5,7 million persons. In particular, as stated in INSEE, 3.1 million people aged 18 to 50, born in metropolitan France, are children of immigrants where the majority of them became form the African content, mainly from the Maghreb countries and especially from Algeria.

Framing the immigrant trajectory of Algerians in France, according to the sociologist Sayad (1991:61), the immigration of Algerians in France is divided into three “ages” or periods. The first period is described by a male immigration of short duration mostly concerning young men coming from rural areas of their country, struggling for their survival and the amelioration of the socioeconomic conditions in their homelands. The first age immigrants were always returning to their country and during their working season in France they remained in distance from the dominant society. The second age of

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<sup>2</sup> Algerian International Diaspora Association.

<sup>3</sup> « Les immigrés en France », Insee références, édition 2005.

immigration started approximately in 1950. It was more permanent, according to Sayad (1991:78), and it consisted of young proletarians from urban and rural areas. Their wives and mothers remained in the country of origin, waiting for the money that their immigrant relatives were sending to them and expecting their return during holidays or celebrations of the Islamic calendar like Ramadan, Eid etc. The third age of immigrants came after the implementation of the family reunification law (*regroupement familial*) allowing the immigrants to bring their families to France. It was therefore a collective immigration of every region, age, gender and social class that started in the aftermaths of the independence in 1962 and increased after 1970, especially for mothers, wives and young women (approximately 350.000), from rural and urban areas, Arabs Berbers and Kabulis. With the establishment of women after the Independence of Algeria, a new era for French society begins. An era where France owes its today's contemporary image of a multiethnic and multicultural society. This generation of immigrants carried their homeland with them reestablishing a kind of small society in the receptor country, composing the colorful and hybridic mosaic of the French big cities.

. Many first-generation immigrants and especially their offspring who sprang from this cultural amalgam among them many women, they found space in artistic creation in order to talk about the experiences of the post-colonial immigration of them and their parents' generation.

## 1.2 Immigrant cinema

To start with, the *beur* cinema that will be analyzed in the following subchapter, belongs to the immigrant cinema, the *accented* cinema, as Nacify named the cinema framing displacement, exile, migration and diaspora in contemporary Europe (Nacify, 2001:4-17). This genre of cinema diverges from the norms of classic “white” cinema like Hollywood and depicts, as Veikou and Lalagianni (2015:82) mention, “identity issues related either metaphorically either literally with ephemerality, transition, ambiguity, homecoming, borders, familiarity and unfamiliarity, memory, history, the desire to return”. As it emerges, there are different types of cinema that deal with identity issues, nostalgia for lost homeland, uprooting, memory and cultural representations, such as exilic, diasporic,

transnational, accented, postcolonial and third cinema (see Veikou and Lalagianni, 2015:82).

For Nacify the accented cinema subcategorized into exilic, diasporic and ethnic, is a dialogue between home and host societies. According to his research, the main differences between them lies in the connection between the films and the creators and their homeland or land of origin. However, as Nacify argues in his book project (2001: 4), all the genres highlight the meaning and the burden of exile and diaspora “by expressing, allegorizing, commenting upon and criticizing home and host societies and cultures as well as the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers” All these films that construct the immigrant cinema are independent films, separate from the mainstream industrial film making. Multilingual, bilingual films with an accented language, dominated by visual fetishes of the lost homeland and visual indications of otherness and difference, through clothing and cultural behavior (Nacify, 2001:24). A characteristic example of the above is the protagonist of the beur film *Inch'Allah Dimanche* by Yamina Benguigui (2001), that will be discussed more thoroughly in the first main chapter. The main character, an immigrant woman recently settled in France, speaks Arabic and she has an accented French, she wears the traditional clothes of her homeland and in the beginning of the film we see how she keeps the connection with her lost country by kissing a photo of her mother left behind, a mother who could also represent Algeria.

Undoubtedly the role of the *émigrés* and their descendants in literature as well as in cinema is significant in order to represent themselves since it is a cinema made by people who come from those communities depicting themselves and their families. Before the immigrant cinema, the image of the *émigré* was stereotypical and “exotic”, whereas the accented cinema, like the diasporic black cinema, offers images of self-determined men and women (Susan Hayward, 1996:35). A good example could be the mainstream French cinema that was representing the immigrant female bodies under a colonial angle sexualizing them and exoticizing them (Tarr, 2005:87). The beur filmmaking gave to these girls and boys the opportunity to speak about themselves and break the image of the exotic Other. As Hayward (1996:149) mentions, “in Europe during the 1970s and the

1980s it was the time to make the camera more accessible for the marginalized self of women, Blacks and Beurs”.

### 1.3 Beur/Beurette

The meaning of *beur* describes the bicultural identity, French and Arabic, of a person with Algerian Maghreb origins who is born in France, the offspring of a working-class *émigré* (Nacify, 2001:96). The word *beur* derived from the anagram of the word “Arab” in the youth language of the suburbs and indicates the hybrid identity of the second generation of North Africans who are neither “fully Arabs nor fully French” (Tarr, 1998:70). It is a word deeply rooted in the history of France. A multiple France which, according to Claire Diao (2017:278), has colonized countries of the African continent such as Algeria, a France that after the independence attracted foreign labor with their families from its ex-colonies following the family reunification agreement, only to place them later in the big cities' suburbs. These new French were the *beurs*, the Others of the French nation, the people raised in housing projects-residential zones built during the 1950s and 1960s, specially designed for the poor working-class families from the ex-colonies of France.

The urban planning of cités was designed with a style that placed the immigrant working class out of sight of the French bourgeois and in the multicultural suburbs, called *banlieue* or *cit * in French language. The *cit * was the place of action and interaction of the beurs who formed their identity under the distinction and tension between their parents expectations culture, traditions, Islamic rules and the contemporary French culture and identity, of a society mostly hostile facing the Other.

Even though the term *beur* has been used by the white French society in order to stigmatize the immigrants of second generation, the beurs as Tarr (2005:3) says “they have been the most visible, the most stigmatized and the most dynamic ethnic minority in the postcolonial France”. In 1980 the *beurs* decide to represent themselves and speak about the difficulties derived from the adverse social conditions and the identity issues

entering the world of the literary and audiovisual creation, music and media. Consequently, the second generation of north Africans adopts the term *beur* to identify themselves, to *reterritorialize* their social and individual transnational bodies, to distinguish themselves from the generation of their parents, to embody their ethnic otherness within the French society as a way to fight against their exoticization and demonization by the dominant French culture. The Beurs raised in public spaces, geographically and socially discriminated, they are more defined as Isabelle Coutant (2001:302) mentions, by their *cit * culture than their origin culture. Indeed, France and its suburbs are the only real homeland that they recognize (Veikou and Lalagianni, 2015:123). They experience displacement and exile differently from their parents. While for their families, homeland, the *bled* as they are used to call their countries in *beur* literature and cinema, is rooted inside them and transferred in the country of reception, for them it is only the place to spend summer holidays, or they just respect the need of the family to maintain the origin culture in the private sphere.

The *beur* woman and man need, as Veikou and Lalagianni mention (2010:124), to differentiate themselves from the first generation of immigrants in France. The first immigrants, before the independence of Algeria, had as priority the struggle for the independence of their homeland and the end of French colonization. The immigrants after the independence were forming a poor working class striving and sacrificing themselves for a better future. Both were connected deeply with the idea of homeland, nation and the idea of return, even if they almost never returned. Their offspring has limited bonds to the sense of *bled* and they are more determined by now and here. They are trying to escape the suffering of their parents and to fight against the marginalization and misery of the suburbs. As Tahar Belloun (2005) writes, these young people are not even torn between two countries, for example Algeria and France, they can identify with neither one of them. Their country is France, but this country does not recognize them, nor gives them a place at the table, so they feel excluded and rejected. This fact leads to a rupture of identity, lacking a place to take root. Therefore, the young *beurs*, contrarily to their tired and suffered parents who remain in silence, decide to act and occupy the lack of space.

Thus, the *Beurs*, French in Algeria and Algerian in France, felt the need to talk about their bicultural identity. In this way, the second generation of immigrants in France carrying the *exiled consciousness* of their parents, one phenomenon that marked the 20<sup>th</sup> century through increasing flows of immigrants, refugees and exiled people, and constitutes an aftereffect of the indissoluble relation of western and non-western societies with the history of imperialism (Said, 1994:406-407), they decided to make their identity visible, to reestablish their displaced by the dominant French culture, body. For Judith Butler(2009:13), being your body means being exposed to structures of social composition and conformation making the ontology of the body a social ontology. *Beurs* through the creation declare: “We are here”. According to Butler (2013:196), “The 'We are here' that translates that collective bodily presence might be re-read as 'We are still here', meaning: 'We have not yet been disposed of. We have not slipped quietly into the shadows of public life: we have not become the glaring absence that structures your public life’”. Likewise, through their presence in the art so in the public sphere, the *Beurs* discontinue to be naked bodies, exposing the personal truth of their Islamic and Algerian culture in the house and the “secular, mediated by Western mass media and pop culture”, as Nacify (2001:96) claims.

The *Beurs* belong to two worlds without completely coming from either one of them. Due to this fact it would be beneficial to mention the cultural hybridity. Edward Said (1993:336) claims that humans are mixed, and no one today is purely one thing as there is a constant mixture of cultures and identities. In his book *Culture and Imperialism* (2003:407-8), he mentions that “All cultures are involved in one another”, “none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous and non-monolithic” and that identities, cultures and people always cover each other through memories, oblivion, integration, collision and intersection. For Peter Burke (2009:13), cultural hybridity can be noticed everywhere, in individuals, religions, philosophy, arts, languages, cuisines, cinema and literature. The amalgam is visible everywhere as a result of civilizations' mixture, a mixture originated from the displacement of populations and diasporas all over the world. *Beurs* and Arab immigrants in France are hybrid individuals whether they were forced to exile, or they were born in France, but their parents have different culture from the host country. “A life between two cultures”, in our case between Maghrebi and French, results

in a “double consciousness” (Peter Burke, 2009:31). The process of this hybridity characterizes the contribution of the *Beurs* to French culture, in literature, cinema, music, theater where they became themselves cultural hybrids like, for example, the *émigré* Arabs that were writing in French language. Today in France, even if the immigrants and their descendants are still marginalized in the suburbs under harsh conditions of life, the hybridity is everywhere due to the contribution of immigrants from ex-colonies and their children, a hybridity that attempts to render French society a status of intercultural society.

#### 1.4 The Beur cinema

*“On this thing Mom just made a kind of squiggly line. She's not used to holding a pen. The jerk didn't even think about that, didn't even ask himself why her signature might be weird. He's one of those people who think illiteracy is like AIDS. It only exists in Africa. Everyone calls her "Fatma" at the Formula 1. They shout at her all the time, and they keep a close watch on her to make sure she doesn't steal anything from the rooms. Of course, Mom's name isn't Fatma, it's Yasmina. It must really give Monsieur Winner a charge to call all the Arabs "Fatma," all the blacks "Mamadou," and all the Chinese "Ping-Pong." Pretty freaking lame.” ( Faiza Guene, Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow, 2004:5 )*

This small part of the book of Faiza Guene, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* that could be representative of the post beur literature, offers an image of the difficulties that was facing and still faces the first generation of immigrants in France, the parents of the *beurs*, in their attempt to integrate. Additionally, Geune demonstrates in this passage the discrimination and racism issues within French society. Although, the present paper is related to *beur* cinema, it could be useful to point out briefly the *beur* writing that appeared in the 1980's, since various books of *beur* literature were adapted by *beur* movie makers later.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1975:16) a *minor literature* is a literature constructed within a major language. The *beur* literature, a “marginal literature” born in the margins of French society by the children of the immigrants. It is affected “with a high coefficient of deterritorialization”, one of the main characteristics of the minor literature according to

Deleuze and Guattari. The *deterritorialization* of the language in *beur* writing occurs through an accented language, a slang vocabulary of the *banlieue* (ghetto), including, as Tarr mentions, Arabic, Berber and English slang borrowings, a corollary of their cultural hybridity and a need to construct a new identity that crosses their parents culture and the major French society and language, proposing a new critical look at both societies. The *beur* authors found a way through literature to deal with their trauma generated by the difficult socioeconomic conditions of their life in the receptor country, by historical circumstances like exile and the pain of their parents as well as their in-between status (Tarr, 1998:68). In broad terms, their oeuvre is semi-autobiographical and concerned with sketches of their parents' culture, gender roles if the novels are written by women authors, religion, socioeconomic conditions in the suburbs dominated by unemployment, drugs and crime, how is to be a non-white citizen in France and their dreams and hopes. If we take a look at some titles of *beur* books like Houari's 1985 novel *Zeïda de nulle part* (*Zeïda from Nowhere*), Sakinna Boukhedenna's *Nationalité: immigré(e)* (*Immigrant nationality*), Tassadit Imache's *Une Fille sans histoire* (*An Ordinary Girl*) and Soraya Nini's 1993 *Ils dissent que je suis une beurette!* (*They Say I'm a Beurette!*), we can understand that the second-generation experience feelings of non-belonging.

Nevertheless, through the *beur* writing the young *beurs* claim space and discourses for their social and individual bicultural bodies in the French society. A society that not only closes its imaginary internal borders by excluding and leaving out the immigrants and their descendants, but also marginalizes their literature by placing it in the suburb districts of Literature (Chaouite and Begag, 1990:69). As Veikou and Lalagianni (2012:122) mention, the *beur* pen was the pen of dispute and claim, in search of a new space for their dual belonging.

However, by struggling and insisting, the authors of North African origin managed to impose themselves in the French literary milieu. Some of the most representative *beur* authors we could cite here are: Farida Belghoul, Azouz Begag, Mehdi Charef, Faiza Geunae, Sakinna Boukhedenna and many romans were adapted by *beur* film directors.

When we speak about the *beur* cinema we mean the work of filmmakers of Maghrebi origins obtaining their own place in the second French Nouvelle Vague after the 1980s.

Before the emergence of immigrant cinema in France, the French film narration “belonged” to a cultivated middle-class, French and white (Claire Diau, 2017:18), in which Arabs and Blacks were presented as criminals, women of Maghrebi origin as prostitutes and several times both of them like victims. Consequently, we assume that in its representation of people with north African origin, French cinema had a colonial vision, tending to marginalize the voices and narratives of its ethnic postcolonial others (Tarr, 2005:9-10). As a result, the beur cinema gives a response to the mainstream narrative of a Eurocentric understanding of Frenchness and white cultural superiority, presenting France as a multicultural a multiethnic society. The beurs due to the lack of space and non-belonging try through the cinema to find a place for their dual identities, to negotiate their own position in French society. There is an instance in one of the most representative and historic beur and *banlieue* films where we could comprehend the significance of gaining place for the young people of the *banlieue*. There is a characteristic scene in the film *La Haine*, a 1995 black and white film by Mathieu Kassovitz when the young protagonists of the suburbs are wandering in the city of Paris. In the shot we see a big poster in the wall with the image of the earth with the moto “Le monde est à vous” (“The world is yours”), the young beur with a graffiti spray a symbol of the urban *banlieue* culture changing the “v” with the letter “n” he is changing the moto to “Le monde est à nous” (“The world is ours”), claiming space for him and his friends in the French dominant society.



Figure 2 L'Haine, Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995

Farida Belghoul a famous activist, novelist and filmmaker divided the *beur* cinema in three categories, in films made by *beur* filmmakers born and raised in France, those by *émigré* filmmakers born in Algeria and those by French filmmakers sketching the *beurs* (Nacify, 2001:96). *Beur* filmmaking is dominated by realism that describes as the *beur* literature, the experiences, the concerns and the reality of the young *beurs* apropos the racism, the unemployment, the criminality the sociopolitical, sociocultural and economic conditions of their parallel world, the remembered experiences of their parents for what is homeland, and their identity between two worlds and two languages (Tarr, 2005). The camera and shots of *beur* directors are zooming to the first and second generation of Arabs in France, framing the difference. Used up *émigré* fathers carrying the suffering of displacement and labor exploitation (Veikou and Lalagianni, 2010:124), mothers of the family, always carrying Algeria in the host country, their offspring condemned to live in the margins of society with limited opportunities, girls with Arab origin living under the gender oppression imposed by their Islamic roots and the male dominated suburbs are some of the major themes of the *beur* filmmaking. If *beur* cinema frames the difference focusing on ethnic otherness, the *banlieue* cinema – the cinema of the suburbs – is a youth urban cinema that accentuates the construction of sociocultural identity of the *beurs*, descendants of a working class within the suburban landscape: social problems, urban underground culture (hip hop, graffiti) and a multiethnic collective culture (Veikou, Lalagianni, 2010:131).

When it comes to gender issues, it could be argued that the struggle for *reterritorialization* carried out by women of Maghrebi origin, who are the main “protagonists” of this research, is double. The *beurette* woman filmmaker and the *beurette* protagonist have to face from one side the mainstream white French cinema which presents them as an exotic object of desire and from the other side a male dominated *beur* film narration that attributes them a secondary role (Tarr, 2005:87), as it happens in real-world societies, where in the public sphere French society marginalizes their identity and in the private sphere their origin oppresses them to gender roles constructed by the Islamic culture and tradition. In order to understand better the gender roles of the women of Arab origin in France, we should take a look into the theory of *performativity* of Judith Butler. According to Butler (1990), the *performativity* of gender

is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender. The social gender and role of a woman is a socio-cultural construction, *performative* as Butler claims, including sexuality, way of speaking, dressing codes and other behaviors that are determined by society and culture. The repetition of such acts is being incorporated to the social consciousness (Veikou and Lalagianni, 2010:68). Predetermined roles for the daughters of the *émigré* working class in France, are indeed imposed to her social body by French dominant society and origin culture. For the society she is the Arab, the stranger and for the private sphere her role is to preserve the honor and the traditions of the family, the modesty and submission to the male. Many times, the French and Beur cinema repeats these roles for the young beurette. In the films discussed in this research – some of them directed by women filmmakers – the young women transform themselves in to strong female subjects, fighting for equality, independence and liberation, writing their own history and negotiating their own space in French society.

The beur film are francophones and the languages that the spectator could listen are Arabic, Berber, French argot and Verlan and the accented French of the first generation of immigrants. The languages of the popular neighborhoods dominate also in the beur cinema. Some of the most representative directors of the beur filmmaking are Farida Belghoul, Rachid Bouchareb, Mehdi Charef, Yamina Benguigui and Abdellatif Kechiche. In the present research, in order to discuss the displacement, identity and gender in France, the following films will be used: *Incha'Allah Dimanche* directed by Yamina Benguigui in 2001, *Sous les pieds de femmes* by Rachida Krim in 1997, *L'honneur de ma famille* by Rachid Bouchareb in 1997, and *Samia* by Philippe Faucon in 2000.



*Figure 3 Zouina(Fejria Deliba) in Inch'Allah Dimanche, Yamina Benguigui, 2001*

## Chapter 1

### Displacement, ethnicity and first generation in “Sous les pieds de femmes” and “Inch’Allah dimanche”

#### 1.1 Introduction

In the documentary *Nos mères, nos daronnes* (2014), the director Bouchera Azzouz mentions that usually the most discussed topic in France is the banlieue or the second generation immigrants in France. There is scarcely a presentation of the female first generation, of the mothers of the Beurs, the *daronnes*<sup>4</sup> as they are used to calling them in the suburbs. As Bouchera Azzouz says, their stories, their battles, their victories and hopes usually remained untold. Actually, as we observe in most of the literary and cinematic creation, they were relegated to a secondary role. As it occurs, until nowadays, their role has been restricted to the *émigré* woman, to the woman who comes from popular neighborhoods. Through two important beur films, this first chapter of the present analysis will attempt to discuss the identity of this first generation immigrant woman, the reterritorialization of her exiled body, to present her suffering and her courage, her displacement and her attempts to integration, her bonds to the bled and her quests for freedom and emancipation within French society. For Azouz Begaz (2002:55) identity is a question of memory, the memory of people, time, place, the memory of the first generation immigrants, enclosed in the banlieues of 10 or 20 floors in the French suburbs. These mothers, transplanted in those popular districts after the law of family reunification of 1973, were confined by their traditional roles and their husbands to tragic isolation (Rene Predal, 2000:215). They were defined by memories of *el ghorba* (exile in Arabic language) and they reconstructed their small society, their *Casbah*<sup>5</sup> in the receptor

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<sup>4</sup> Daron/Daronne: Father and mother in the French Argo, Dictionnaire Argot-Francaise, Eugene Francois Vidocq, 2002, Edition du Boucher

<sup>5</sup> Casbah or Kasbah is the citadel of a North African city.

country, lacking opportunities to find a new place in the dominant society. (Abdelmalek Sayad, 1991:68)

According to Abdelmalek Sayad (1991:113), the émigré always determines its existence through his origin country left behind and not through France. In the book of Tahar Ben Jelloun, “*Hospitalité française*”, we read that the image and destiny of the first generation are always related to Algeria. Indeed, even though, as mentioned before, their daughters’ identity is determined by the *cit * culture and the now and here, the identity of the *daronnes* is deeply lockstep to the memory of their missed land and nation.

These women, colonized, decolonized and * migr es*, combatants, workers, heritage and traditions preservers, mothers of the family, Muslims, Arabic or Berber speakers, were not only in the margins of French society but of their own history, as they were women without rights nor speech both in the origin and receptor country (Kealhofer- Kemp, 2015:1). For the above reasons, beur female artists and writers like Yamina Benguigui and Rachida Krim in our case, tried through filmic narration and memories of their mothers to restore and make visible the truths of these women, truths of femininity, exile and uprooting. As we observe in the interviews included in the documentary of Yamina Benguigui *M moires d’immigr s l’h ritage maghr bin* (2008), the first generation women, the mothers, didn’t have homogenous behaviors, as these behaviors depended on their age, class and education level. Nevertheless, almost all of them talk about the importance of their freedom and the nostalgia for lost Algeria. In the interviews, we observe that the women expected that France would be some kind of paradise but at their arrival there they were faced with various difficulties and a different reality. As Sayad points out (1997, p. 42): “*Dans notre France a nous, il n’ y a que des t n bres*. [in our France we have only darkness]”. Additionally, besides the difficult socioeconomic conditions, the interviews and films that will be analyzed below reveal that there is a desire for adaptation to the receptor country. Unfortunately, the will for integration is rarely successful story since, as Leslie Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:1) claims, the majority of first generation immigrant women in France remain in silence, both at home and in the public sphere due to their low level of education, their difficulties with French language, the Muslim and patriarchal conditions and the postcolonial vision that the receptor

country was holds upon them. In the same research, the author mentions that the mothers of the beurs are engaged to their memories, transferred to the receptor country through fetishes and social behaviors, customs and traditions. For the first generation there is a need for a collective memory that carries the experience of uprooting and homeland. In order to maintain this memory, to exist – as we mentioned before the existence of the first generation is related to the country of origin – the immigrant women need to interact with people that share a common memory, a common place of origin, a common culture, common realities and, as Abdelkader Belbahri (2002:59) notes, “a common social horizon”. Those elements shape the ethnicity that will be discussed in the films below. The ethnicity describes the solidarity, the interaction and the connection of a person, a group, a minority (Veikou , Lalagianni, 2010:15). The common experiences in the origin and receptor country connect the immigrant communities in exile and ethnicity gradually becomes a personal identity component (Abdelkader Belbahri, 2002:59). In both films the Algerian heroines constantly attempt to belong on the borderline of their common social body and their origins.

*Inch'Allah Dimanche*, directed in 2001 by Yamina Benguigui, with Fejria Deliba playing the leading role of the first generation immigrant Zouina, and *Sous le pieds de femmes*, directed in 1997 by Rachida Krim, with the aforementioned actress in the role of the young protagonist Aya and Claudia Cardinale playing the older Aya, are two films based on the narrated memories of the director's mothers' experiences. Through their cinema, the female beur directors attempt to give voice to the first generation – their parents –, to approach these women's history, memory and identity, to make their exiled identities visible (Tarr, 2005:125). Their movies represent an effort to show to the French society as well as to the following generations the trauma of their parents, provided by their colonial past as colonized and their postcolonial present in France as immigrants.

## 1.2 Inch'Allah Dimanche

*Inch'Allah dimanche* is a film directed by the Franco Algerian Yamina Benguigui. It describes the life of a young immigrant mother, Zouina, recently settled in a French city

with her mother in law and her children, in order to reunite with her *émigré* husband after the law of family reunification in 1974 under the government of Chirac. The first sequence of the film is very dramatic as it depicts the trauma of Zouina's displacement. (Kealhofer- Kemp, 2015:177). In the footage of the uprooting, women, elderly people and children dressed in their traditional Algerian clothes start their journey of migration to France. The scenes of Zouina's departure are significantly tragic since her mother is screaming and crying because her daughter is leaving. Zouina is also suffering and before entering the boat she returns to hold her mother's hands for one last time. She must walk away from her mother and homeland, immigrate to an unknown place and meet a husband that she knows only through his occasional visits to the *bled*. The moment Zouina enters the boat and her life as a first generation immigrant woman in France begins.



Figure 4 Zouina's departure in Inch'Allah Dimanche, Yamina Benguigui, 2001

When Zouina arrives in France, she encounters a lot of challenges and difficulties. She must learn to cope with a despotic husband, a proletarian who dreads the dominant French society and beats her every time she tries to approach the French culture by going outside, possessing a book or make-up products. She must endure her authoritarian mother in law, an elderly woman who suffers as well by her traumatic memories of

French colonialism and her exile at this age. Zouina is also forced to confront her racist neighbors who always remind her and her mother in law that France is not their home, that “here is not Algeria”. However, despite her suffering caused by her uprooting and new life, Zouina strives to integrate French society by making two French friends, an independent modern woman called Nicole and a woman who lost her husband in the war in Algeria. Zouina tries to learn the French language and discover the major culture through some radio programs who talk about love and sexuality as well as through her interaction with local people when she goes for shopping. The protagonist feels the need to belong. She doesn’t only wish to find her place in the French society but also to find her lost society in the receptor country. Consequently, her dream is to find another Algerian family, another Algerian woman to celebrate their traditional festivities, to share her experiences, fears and hopes, to have a friend from the *bled*. Hence, when she learns that there is another Algerian family in the city she decides to meet them. She searches for this family for three Sundays and when she finally finds the Algerian woman called Malika her dreams and illusions are smashed. Malika is a fearful suffering woman, who has been living for 15 years in France and still hasn’t adjusted. She is always at home with the fear of her husband, trying to grow up her children according to the Algerian traditions and customs. She rejects Zouina and her need for solidarity and sisterhood, thus dissolving the sentimental world of Zouina who feels alone in her exile. The footage of her meeting with Malika is significantly dramatic. When Zouina is rejected by her compatriot, she desperately screams to Malika to open her door, breaking her window and injuring herself. Malika, also desperate, starts to cry inside her home, realizing that due to her own fears she cannot open the door to Zouina, and ends up hitting herself. In these scenes we perceive the suffering and trauma of displacement of both women.



Figure 5. Malika (Amina Annabi) in *Inch'Allah Dimanche*, Yamina Benguigui, 2001

However, Zouina is determined to find a place for her and claim a life. In the final sequence, she imagines being invited by the bus driver who passes every day outside her window to come in, while he kicks all the passengers out and brings Zouina and her children back home. When she arrives home, it seems like something has changed: her husband defends her in front of his mother and Zouina, in an emotional close up, tells him that she will send the kids to school from now on, “the principal agent of integration” as Tarr (2005:178) claims.

There is a powerful sequence in the film of Benguigui that demonstrates the lost homeland burden, the nostalgia. Zouina starts to cry while she is removing the clothes from the drying rack, calling her mother in the Arabic language. Immediately after, there is a flash-back scene transporting the viewer to Algeria the day of her departure. An immigration song accompanies the separation from her land with somber faces, followed by a close up to the hands of her mother touching hers saying goodbye. After the flashback we see Zouina dancing a traditional dance and crying in her effort to banish her sadness. In this scene we observe the emotional ties of the young immigrant mother with her origin culture, ties of every immigrant woman of first generation.



Figure 6. Zouina(Fejria Deliba) in *Inch'Allah Dimanche*, Yamina Benguigui, 2001

For Benguigui it was very important to bring to life her mother's story, the stories of these mothers (Kealhofer- Kemp, 2015:176). She created the character of Zouina with tenderness, and respect. Zouina represents every exiled mother from Algeria, ruptured by her displacement. The close-ups to Zouina's face reflect her sentimental world, her feelings, her fears, her desperation, her hesitation that gives place to her courage and braveness, her willingness to make a new life for her and her children in France (Tarr, 2005:178), her small personal struggle to find a friend to share her burden. The story of this mother carries the attachment to her origin land and her desire to negotiate a place for herself in the new society, interacting with both worlds, her origin and receptor country.

### 1.3 Sous les pieds de femmes

Rachida Krim directed the film *Sous le pieds de femmes* in 1997, in order to narrate an unknown aspect of female Algerian immigrants, their experience as fighters for the freedom of their nation (Tarr, 2005:127). The director was inspired by interviews she made with her mother and other women, all activists and ex-members of FLN (National

Liberation Front<sup>6</sup>) in France, struggling for the independence of Algeria. According to Leslie Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:145), this film marks a turning point since it is the first time in French cinema that the main protagonist is a woman of Magrebi descent. More importantly, this is the first film talking so openly about the participation and contribution of Algerian women to the Algerian revolution for Independence. As Djamilia Amrane (1992:58) claims, the female combatants of the Algerian war and their struggle are less known. But in reality, both in colonial Algeria and metropolitan France they had a noteworthy role in the liberation by providing accommodation to the FLN activists, liaison, transport, information, surveillance, laying bombs, attacks, recovery of weapons, delivery of letters and parcels to detainees, evacuation and care of the wounded (Neil MacMaster, 2012:169). Many families, fathers and mothers of the first generation participated to the War of Independence but in the aftermaths of the liberation of Algeria they remained in silence, their stories and contribution remained untold. Rachida Krim wanted to break this silence and to give voice to her mother's generation and to the women that fought for the liberation of their land (Kealhofer- Kemp, 2015:146).

In the first scene of the film *Sous les pied de femmes*, we are in France in 1993. Aya is seemingly a westernized independent woman from Algeria, a mother and a grandmother who lives with her Algerian-born husband, Monsef. At the first close-up of Aya we see her being carefully prepared in order to welcome a visitor from the past who participated with her husband the Algerian War – as she informs her granddaughter. The return of this man in France 35 years later disrupts Aya and invites her through flashbacks and voiceover interior monologues to recall the past in her memory. The story of an illiterate *émigrée* mother, who became a fighter for the liberation of Algeria, a woman in love, her dreams and her ultimate frustration driving her to her present identity. The memories recalled by Aya after the return of this man, memories condemned to silence, are necessary in order to determine her identity as well as the identity of her daughter's and granddaughter's generation (Tarr, 2005:130). Memories are necessary for the mothers of yesterday and the daughters of today in France. Consequently, through the conversations

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<sup>6</sup> See the film "The Battle of Algiers" by Gillo Pontecorvo (1966)

of Aya with her visitor Amin, through flash backs and inner monologues an important part of the history of first generation immigrants in France is being unfolded.



Figure 7. Aya (Claudia Cardinale), her daughter and granddaughter in *Sous le poids de femmes*, Rachida Krim, 1997

In the firsts flash backs we meet Aya, a typical illiterate émigré young mother (Tarr, 2005:127), restricted to her traditional roles of housekeeping and bringing up the children. Her husband participates at the FLN and they hide in their home another member of the FLN, Amin, who is wanted by the police. Aya is attracted to the young and charming Amin and after the detention of her husband by the French police, Amin asks her to participate to their struggle because as he says: “We need women to be responsible for all the logistics”. Aya accepts and starts her contribution by transferring money. At first, she is motivated by love but later on she becomes, as Carrie Tarr (2005:127) claims: “a competent, independent mind FLN activist”. According to Salima Sahraoui-Bouaziz (2012) there were a lot of motivations that led the émigré young wives and mothers to participate to the struggle for liberation, such as: the rejection of their colonized status that was the cause of their rupture and exile, as well as the dream to return to an independent Algeria of justice and socioeconomic prosperity. For these reasons the young Aya accepts to leave her children temporarily and to follow Amin. She

transforms herself to a modern French woman called Rose Benoit in order to be unnoticed and to commit an assassination under the instructions of Amin, for which she is later tortured and imprisoned by the French justice.



Figure 8 Aya (Fejria Deliba) and Amin (Mohammad Bakri) in *Sous les pieds de Femmes*, Rachida Krim, 1997

There is an important scene in the film that signals the future trajectory of Aya as woman, as Algerian, as *émigré*, in the sequence of Aya and Amin in the house after the commitment of the assassination. Aya asks Amin to teach her how to read and write in Arabic. Amin explains to her that he doesn't know, as a result of the colonization that attempted to abolish their natal language, culture and history. Aya recognizing his disappointment, tells him to close his eyes because she has a surprise for him. In the next scene she appears wearing a traditional Algerian dress. Amin gets angry and tells her that she must not wear this dress any more with him and that she has to remove it. Aya claiming her space as a woman and her identity as Algerian she answers to him:

*-I am not Rose Benoit. I am Aya, born in Msirda, daughter of Mohamed and Fatima Bouziane.*

However, as Carrie Tarr claims, after the violent gesture of Amin against her decision to wear this dress and his rejection to see her both as Algerian and independent, Aya is

losing her love and her Algeria because she understands that Algeria will never be a place for an emancipated woman. Hence, Aya decides to stay in France and to remain in silence because this is a place where, as Tarr (2005:129) claims: “she has more chance of being accepted as liberated woman than in Algeria”.

The film ends with the departure of Amin back to Algeria. After facing her memories, Aya is more redeemed and says goodbye, accompanied by her daughter and granddaughter, the next generations of emigres from Algeria in France.



Figure 9. Aya (Fejria Deliba) in *Sous les pieds de Femmes*, Rachida Krim, 1997

## 1.4 Conclusion

To sum up, in both films two beur women filmmakers decided through their creation to give voice to the *émigré* women of first generation and to offer as Tarr (2005:130) says: “the parents story to the spectators of second and even third generation”. As we observed, Zouina and Aya are two immigrant women that are not represented as in the mainstream dominant French cinema or in other beur films. Obviously, they don’t assume the traditional role of the silent immigrant mother following the patriarchal and religious rules and acting eliminated in their private sphere. The directors give to the public the image of a woman that writes her own history. There were women like Zouina and Aya who fought for their liberation and emancipation, who struggled to find their own space,

and Benguingui and Krim wanted to make visible this aspect of their mothers. Zouina and Aya, are young immigrant illiterate mothers who transform themselves into strong subjects, claiming self-determination, space and identity, into subjects of desire, since both of them need to love and to be loved – Zouina through the discovery of the meaning of love and sexuality by listening to the radio and Aya by following the man she loved to the struggle for independence. Both films highlight the ties of first generation women with their culture of origin: Zouina attempts to find her origin community in the receptor country and Aya fights for the liberation of her country left behind. On the other hand, they demand their own space within French society as they need to integration. If the beur films that narrate the stories of the second generation women, highlight the problems of identity and belonging as Tahar Belloun (1977:94) says: “*ni Francaise ni Algerienne*” (neither French nor Algerian) the films focusing on the stories of the parents’ generation are as Tarr Claims: “*trous de memoire*”, demonstrating the memories of colonialism and displacement, narrating the common and painful experiences of the War and the uprooting of Algerian women. These films are about the collective memories and identities of their parents’ generation, stories that most of the time remained in oblivion and derive from their need to investigate their roots through the “remembered and imagined memories of their parents” (Tarr, 2005:129).



Figure 10. Zouina (Fejria Deliba) in *Inch'Allah Dimanche*, Yamina Benguigui, 2001

## Chapter 2

### In between: belonging and cultural identity in “*L’honneur de ma famille*” and “*Samia*” .

#### 1.1 Introduction

*“My future? I don’t see clearly. Yes, I can see a house with doors, windows, furniture, but I can’t see in which country. Every time I search the country, I lose everything. I am thinking Canada, Australia... No, better be stateless. Do stateless exist? Tell me where do they go this kind of people, the stateless? I will need a country, a country where I won’t be asked about our pedigree, a country where I won’t be asked where I come from or why my skin is dark, a country where I won’t be asked if where I come from there have cars and schools.” (Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité française*, 1984:96)*

With these words, the author Tahar Ben Jelloun gives voice to *Houria* a young Magrebi girl of second generation in France featuring the obstacle of possessing a double identity, the obstacle of belonging in two different and almost opposite worlds. When Jelloun (1984:97) describes the progeniture of the first immigrant generation, he talks about a generation of rupture because despite the fact they are born in France, they cannot see themselves completely belonging neither to the French society, a society that placed them to the popular marginalized neighborhoods, nor to their parents’ society, a society deeply rooted to the Islamic and traditional morals. Similarly, the receptor country does not consider them French and the origin society does not consider them totally Algerian. (Maalouf, 1999:3). As a result, they feel strangers everywhere. As Maalouf (1999:11) explains, concerning the young Beur’s way of life, behavior, language, family, social relations and artistic or culinary preferences, “the French, European and western influences are blended inside him with Arabic, Berber, African and Muslim influences”. This fact constructs a composite, hybrid identity of the young Beur. The hybridity, as Veikou and Lalagianni (2010:78) claim, describes a culture where people have bonds to their country of origin, preserving some characteristics of the origin culture, but they do

not imagine their return to the origin society and they adapt themselves to the receptor country. By carrying this hybrid identity, the young Beur or Berreute need to reterritorialize in order to find a new space to belong and create what Veikou and Lalagianni (2010, p. 130) call “a third space”.

The young Beurs are also defined by a conscience of uprooting (Belloun, 1984:94), yet different from the first generation, since it consists of a permanent condition followed by implications and questions imposed by both societies. The Beurs born in French territory are directly stigmatized by French society as strangers, the Others because of their skin color, their name or neighborhood. At the same time their wish to integrate into a western culture society clashes with the wishes and beliefs of their parents’ generation. As discussed in the introduction of the current research, the beur literature and cinema attempt to claim space for the dual identity of the young Beur, seeking a place to belong, a place to exist. For the young Beurette, for the women of second generation, it seems even more complex to find a space because of their strict family gender roles. Additionally, when it comes to the cinema, the majority of beur films are male-oriented, focusing on violence (Tarr, 2005:111) and there are only a few representations of women beurs, characters with whom the girls of the popular neighborhoods could identify.

In this chapter, will be analyzed two contemporary French cinema films that describe the identity of second generation Algerian women. The first one is the TV film “*L’honneur de ma famille*” realized by the famous Franco Algerian director Rachid Bouchareb in 1997. According to Tarr (2005:137) it “is the only film directed by a beur filmmaker that represents the internal conflicts of an immigrant community by a beur perspective”. The second film that will be presented is “*Samia*”, by Philippe Faucon, directed in 2000, an adaptation of the beur novel “*Ils dissent que je suis une beurette*” (They say I am a Bereutte), written in 1993 by Soraya Nini and based on the personal experiences of the author. Besides the fact that the films are male-directed and not both from beur directors, they construct feminine spaces in the French cinema where the young *Beurette* is not represented as the silent sister or daughter, as the girl who needs protection and rescue or as the exotic Other (Tarr, 2005:121) In these films the girls of Magrebi origin give their own fight to live as they choose, as Leslie Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:123) says: “free from

oppression and judgment”, demanding independence and space for their individual and social bodies, for their desires and dreams, for their own history and life. The films give speech to the *meufs rebues* (*femmes beurs*), the women beur like they are used to call them in the French verlan (Bluher, 2002:91), the women of Magrebi origin. The *meufs rebues* need to express themselves, to be represented, to claim their existence (Bluher, 2002:91). By focusing on female subjects, the beur art, literature and filmic creation in France manages to break the stereotypical image of the second generation woman, creating new spaces for her marginalized female identity, as Tarr (2005:112) says, in both domestic and public sphere, for both of the cultures and identities she possesses.

## 1.2 L'honneur de ma famille

Rachid Bouchareb with his comedy *L'honneur de ma famille* with the Franco-Algerian actress Seloua Hamse playing the leading role of Nora, narrates the story of an Algerian origin young woman living in the French province. Nora outside her private family milieu seems to be a typical 90's post-adolescent French woman: with her best French friend Carole (Karole Rocher), she smokes, she takes psychedelic drugs, she works in a club secretly from her family, she has tattoos, she listens to electronic music and she has relations with boys. The scenes out of the immigrant neighborhoods where Nora lives, depict spaces of freedom and liberation for the young beur woman who wants to live the way she chooses. Obviously, her way of live is in conflict with the traditions and customs promoted by the first generation immigrants at home. When the camera enters her neighborhood, the landscape becomes more claustrophobic: the windows and doors of the houses lead to an interior open air common space where immigrants socialize and interact between them. It seems to be a city apart inside the French city where sounds and colors remind the *bled*, the North-African countries. Nora balancing between two opposite societies tries to create a new identity for her, to construct a new homeland where to belong: she wears Hindu fetishes, she reads spiritual books of Asian culture, she prays to

Buddha and to Hindu deities and she is planning to escape from her reality and to travel to India with her best friend. As she claims in a scene:

- *In Buddhism, it is you who decide for your life, you are responsible for you.*

We could assume that the spiritual and cultural interests of Nora express “her dream for a more pleasurable existence in an exotic elsewhere” (Tarr, 2005:140) and also her wish for independence and self-determination.

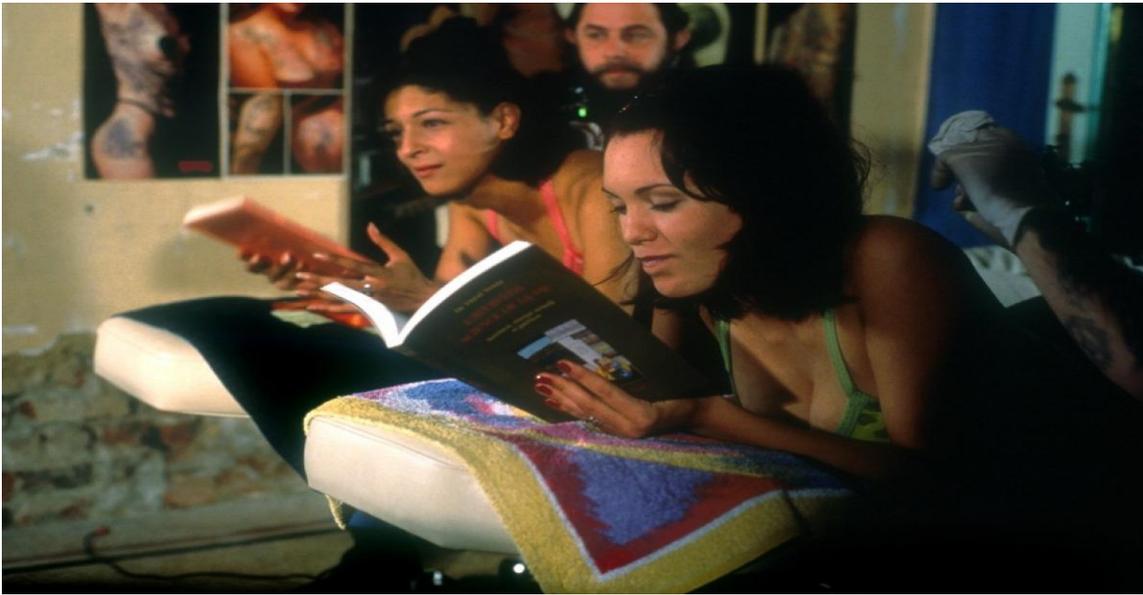


Figure 11. Nora and Carol in *L'Honneur de ma Famille*, Rachid Bouchareb , 1997



Figure 12. Nora's pray to Buddha in *L'Honneur de ma Famille*, Rachid Bouchareb , 1997

An unwanted pregnancy forces Nora to face her origin culture. The father, a French Caucasian, rejects her because, according to her, she is an Arab. Her remark highlights the vision of the French society upon the second-generation immigrant woman who isn't always recognized as totally equal. It's time for Nora to face her mother, a first-generation immigrant woman, enclosed to her house and neighborhood, with no interaction with the French society and culture, who is speaking almost always Arabic and rarely an accented French, while Nora addresses to her mother only in French. It would be useful to point out that for the Beurs' parents, learning French was not simple. Especially for the women, that passed their daily life in the Arab speaking suburbs of French cities. Instead, their children refused to learn and speak Arabic because they considered their mother tongue to be inferior and one of the main reasons of marginalization of their community (Sabrina Fatmi-Skhri, 2014:7-8).

Suddenly, Nora's desires are challenged by her origins' tradition, when her mother decides to protect the honor of the family due to the fact that the pregnancy and the loss of virginity are considered as misconduct and shame for the Algerian community. Her mother, hiding the pregnancy of her daughter, arranges a marriage with the young Beur Hamid who keeps a shop with Algerian costumes with his overprotective mother. In the marriage arrangement scene, we discover how different are the two worlds of Nora, imposing her to a continuous bipolarity of identity: from the rave and modern culture, to the private sphere of her origin culture where the decoration refers to Algeria, the women wear their traditional *kaftans* and they follow Algerian ritual of the tea.

Nora is living two parallel lives, ready to be a married woman covering her hair in front of her mother in law and continuing to be the modern girl planning to go to India with her best friend. Meanwhile her future mother in law, becoming suspicious, asks for a virginity certificate, a fact that demonstrates how dissimilar is the vision on sexuality and female body and desire in both societies.



Figure 13. Nora's future mother in law, *L'honneur de ma Famille*, Rachid Bouchareb, 1997



Figure 14. Nora covering her hair, *L'honneur de ma famille*, Rachid Bouchareb, 1997

When the secret of Nora is revealed in the Algerian community, she decides to follow her dream and she escapes with her friend Carol to reach India. In order to realize their trip, Nora steals the golden jewelry that was chosen for her by Hamid's mother as a

marriage gift<sup>7</sup>. Hamid, charmed by Nora and her spiritual explorations, abandons his mother and hides in the car trunk of Nora. Nora's trip to freedom begins and the film ends with a Bollywood scene.

In this film, Rachid Bouchareb highlights the identity differences between the two generations of immigrant women in France. As Leslie Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:123) mentions, the émigré woman of first generation is “blindly following norms about family, sexuality and family/female honor, transmitted by mother to daughter in the origin country and carried with them in the receptor society”. This fact imposes problems for the daughters who besides the marginalization they are well integrated. The daughters of immigrants claim new spaces for themselves; they want to differentiate themselves from their isolated mothers, to be free and to make their own choices in order to determine their body. Therefore, Nora and the other protagonists that will be discussed below decide to revolt against their parents' culture (Tarr, 2005:140). Hence, the complete denial of their own roots proves to be an arduous process; through the narration of the film *L'Honneur de ma famille*, we observe that Nora obeys many times to her mother's plans.

### 1.3 Samia

With his film *Samia*, Philippe Faucon in collaboration with the beur author Soraya Nini – since the film is an adaptation of her book – presents how the young girls of Algerian descent construct their identity facing their roots, their family and the Other, the French society. We should mention that the director gives a very critical – even negative – view through the filmic narration to both societies, creating a suffocating environment for the second-generation girls.

Samia (Lynda Benahouda) is a teenager, born in France, living in the suburbs of Marseille, in South France. Members of a multi-child Algerian family, Samia and her sisters desire to live like every girl born in France: they like to hang out, to listen to

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<sup>7</sup> In MENA countries the tradition expects from the future husband and his family to gift gold to the woman.

western music, to put modern clothes, to go shopping, to go to concerts, to skate, to meet boys. It appears, however, that the girls are forced to have a different life in the private sphere. Most of the interior scenes that depict the house of Samia and her family, represent a typical house in Algeria. In the family dinner scene, the Algerian, Arabic and Islamic fetishes and behaviors emerge from everywhere: the house decoration, the type of food, the Ramadan rituals, the traditional clothes of the mother and her daughters, even the music that accompanies the scene of eating (news in Arabic language and the Islamic call for pray on the radio).



Figure 15 Family dinner in *Samia*, Philippe Faucon, 2000

The father is a tired and used up man, sick after years of hard working as a laborer under exploitation ( Tarr, 2005:114) in France, who assigns to his older son the responsibility of the family. The son is behaving violently towards his sisters, punishing and beating them for their choices in order to protect the honor of the family. There is a key scene that highlights his vision for his sisters in the beginning of the movie: when a girl of the family arrives home late, he says to her:

*-Here it's not America. At home you are in the bled. Understood?*

With this declaration he imposes her to behave as an Algerian and not as a western girl in the house. The mother, an immigrant woman of first generation, is presented as a submissive and silent person, carrying the burden of her exile and trying to transmit to her daughters, as Leslie Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:157) claims: “the gender-based expectations” of the Algerian culture. Those expectations require submission to their tradition, maintenance of their virginity, obedience to the male members of the family and dedication to the household. Virginity is a very important fact for the mother and as she says to one of her daughters<sup>8</sup>:

*-My daughter, I asked your father to let you go study. But he says you shouldn't meet boys or hung out in the night, so that the day of your marriage we can be proud of you. This is the biggest concern of your father. It is more important than your studies.*

Evidently, the main dream of the first generation concerning the future of their daughters is a good and honorable marriage. This dream defines the limits of the mother's vision. In another dialogue with Samia that could be, as Leslie Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:158) claims, the main message of the film, demonstrating the difference between the first generation of Magrebi immigrants and their descendants, we observe that she expects from her female progeniture to grow identical to her. Addressing to Samia, she says:

*-I left my country for you! So that you could live well! I didn't have a life. I spent mine in misery. You, you have everything, and you want to go out! I did everything at home! I made bread when I was eight years old. You walk around outside all day long.*

Samia vainly attempts to convince her mother that things have changed and all the girls hang out. She then asks her:

*-You weren't happy, so we can't be happy either?*

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<sup>8</sup> The conversations between the girls with their mother are in their mother tongue, in Arabic and between the sisters with their brother in the dominant language of the receptor country, in French.



Figure 16. Samia and her mother in *Samia*, Philippe Faucon, 2000

Similarly, in another scene, when a relative wishes to Samia in front of her mother to have a marriage soon, Samia responds:

*-I will not be married. I don't want to spend my life like you, always trapped with the children.*

As it emerges, the relationship between daughter and mother is characterized by tension and conflict as they have different opinions about women's gender roles. Samia, like her sisters, all born in a western society, does not want to become a submissive woman. She wants a different life for her. She doesn't want to live in misery and face the same adversities as her mother's generation. Samia, through Faucon's frames, resists to her brother's domestic violence and reacts to her mother's aspirations. When her mother forces her and her sister into a humiliating virginity test by a doctor, following directions from their brother, Samia reacts and doesn't accept to do the test, claiming that this is her body, her choice and no one will touch her if she doesn't want to. Samia denies a forced intervention on her body, denies the intervention to her life and claims her self-determination. She chooses to hang out, to flirt with the boy she likes, she chooses her freedom and she struggles for her autonomy. As René Prédal (2008;147) mentions: "Samia is a complex character, going beyond her function to acquire an authentic

personal existence, lively, attentive, conscious of her charm”. Samia and her sisters are characterized by revolt and unwillingness to accept the roles that their family expects from them (Kealhofer- Kemp 2015:155).



Figure 17. Samia and her friend in *Samia*, Phillipe Faucon, 2000

The young protagonist of Phillipe Faucon doesn't only claim space by seeking happiness and love (Rene Predal, 2015:148); she doesn't only fight for her autonomy facing the traditions of an Algerian family who considers her female body as inferior. She must also demand equality for her as a second-generation immigrant within French society. The first scene of interaction with the other that demonstrates, according to Tarr (2005:113) "the heroine's problematic place in French society", is the introduction scene of the film which takes place at school. The teacher presents Samia her professional options depending on her notes: if she succeeds she can start a training to be secretary, if she gets lower notes she can choose between being a vendor or a florist and if she gets poor results she can work as a cleaner. This scene demonstrates the limited opportunities of the second generation of immigrants and that fact even though they are born in France they are frequently discriminated<sup>9</sup>. According to Tarr (2005:113), there is a connection

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<sup>9</sup> Today the young that become from the immigration, Arab or Africans, are 50% unemployed in the banlieues. There are 752 sensible urban zones with 5.000.000 habitants. In these districts, the rates of unemployment and scholar failure are two times higher, the salaries are lower and the hospitals less.

between the ethnicity of the Beurs and the unsuccessful schooling in the banlieues. Samia reacts to these options, denying this kind of future for herself, claiming a better life since, as she says, she is already a cleaner in her own house. In another scene, Samia, her mother and her sister are verbally attacked at a bus station by two Nazi skinheads. Samia, becomes a strong female subject and affronts them without fear, claiming also a homeland for her generation and her exiled mother in the receptor country; demonstrating that France is not only white.

The director's camera focuses on a courageous and rebellious teenager who creates a space where she can be able to belong, both as Algerian and French; Algerian but not submissive, French but not of "second-class". In the end of the film, we see Samia, her mother and sisters on a boat, leaving to spend the summer holidays in the *bled*. The wind plays with Samia's hair and the protagonist seems full of hope and confidence.



Figure 18. Samia in the last scene, *Samia*, Phillippe Faucon, 2000

## 1.4 Conclusion

As can be seen, the films of Rachid Bouchareb and Phipilippe Faucon give voice and visibility to the ethnic minority of second generation Algerian teenagers in France, setting them as protagonists in search of emancipation and freedom, as subjects that create space for themselves in a mostly male-dominated beur cinema. The young girls of the banlieues are finally able to recognize themselves through films that portrait female beur characters as Samia and Nora (Predal, 2005:209). According to Kealhofer- Kemp (2015:111), a process of acculturation has been observed, through the description of second generation Magrebi women in the cinema. Indeed, young immigrant girls born in France, like Nora and Samia, watch French women of their age living in total freedom according to their desires, while at home they are forced to adopt a culture and a country that they don't recognize as homeland (Jelloun, 1984:108). The female beurs belong to a generation more identified with the Other than the generation of their parents and they seem to adopt and integrate cultural and social behaviors that are dominant in the receptor society.

However, the second generation women still possess hybrid identities. They carry two opposite roots and they need to accept both (Maalouf, 1999:3) in order to create new spaces of belonging. French and Algerians, Samia and Nora and the other girls of their generation constitute hybrid subjectivities who must challenge both the patriarchal imposition of gender roles in their domestic sphere and the negative vision of the Other on them and on their origin culture in the public sphere, in search of woman empowerment, justice and liberation. Women like Nora and Samia have to face on the one hand, a domestic culture that restrains the role of a girl to the symbol of the family honor and on the other hand, a dominant society who discriminates them. As Jelloun (1984:100) mentions: "Algeria is a mother who does not make an effort to give them a language that they can understand, and France is a stepmother who abandons them, she has no time to take care of them". Between these worlds the daughters of the immigrants are in constant search of a place to embed their identities.

Other considerable films that focus on the second generation immigrant women in France are *Les histoires d'amour finissent mal en general* [*Love affairs usually end*

*badly*] directed by Anne Fontaine in 1993, the film of the beur director and actress Zaïda Ghorab-Volta, *Souviens-toi de moi [Remember me]* in 1995, the banlieue film *La Squale* in 2000, made by the director Fabrice Genestal based on his experience as a teacher working in a banlieue school. The multi awarded film of one of the most known directors in France Abdellatif Kechiche, *La graine et le mulet (The Secret of the Grain)* in 2007, a masterpiece of the contemporary French cinema. We should add here the 7 awards-winning post beur film *Divines* directed by Houda Benyamina in 2016. All of the aforementioned films create a space of femininity and empowerment for the second and the third generation of immigrant women.



Figure 19 Third generation in post-beur film *Divines*, Houda Benyamina, 2016

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, as can be seen the beur cinema consists of humanists and social films. The beur and banlieue cinema is a social and realistic cinema where the youth of French suburbs can recognize herself and be reterritorialized. In fact, it is a social cinema that demonstrates the multicultural dimension of French society. Within the narration of beur filmmakers and French filmmakers framing the beurs, the naked social bodies of the immigrants become visible, they obtain existence. As Butler (2011:39) claims, “When cast out, one is cast out into a space or a condition of bare life, and the bios of the person is no longer linked to its political status”. By "political" here is meant “membership in the ranks of citizenship.” Indeed, the immigrants of first generation and their progeniture – women in our case study – even though entitled to French nationality they lack space in the dominant society, deprived of ontological weight (Butler, 2011:15), due to their isolation and marginalization in the French suburbs. The cinematic creation following the literature gave to the second generation the opportunity to bring to the forefront the exiled consciousnesses of their uprooted parents in order to negotiate their hybrid identity in the dominant society.

In respect to the films that portrait the first generation of immigrant women in France, in fact, the directors discussing their mothers’ stories, emphasize on their trauma caused by the memories of colonization and afterwards by the individual and collective experiences of their uprooting. Through their frames they accentuate the bonds of the émigré women to their lost homeland and their attempts, sometimes successful sometimes not, for emancipation and integration. Despite the fact that in most of the beur films the mother is represented as submissive to the patriarchal and religious norms of her origin society, in the films presented in this dissertation, the spectators interface with women that wrote their own history making a step forward towards their empowerment.

According to the second generation women in France, although most of the films were focusing on second generation young men, giving to their sisters a secondary role, there were also some considerable films where the woman became prominent as well. In such a cinema the girls, the young female beurs are represented as strong and independent

subjectivities who desire to choose for themselves independently from the vision of their families, attached to their origin culture. Facing the oppression by the families and the stigmatization by the dominant culture; women of second generation try to construct new spaces for their dual cultural identity.

All things considered; it emerges that the experience of uprooting is different for the first and the second generation of immigrant women. Similarly, their identity and their attempts to integration are far apart. According to Maalouf (1998:71) “the reality is experienced differently by those born in the dominant civilization and those born outside it.” The first generation woman faced more difficulties to integrate herself because of her lifestyle, her language, her bonds to the country left behind. The first generation immigrant woman who experienced France as a colon and after as a receptor country that set her in the margin of the society, cannot always embrace modernization and integration to the receptor country without feelings of treason of her identity and culture. Contrarily for their daughters’ generation it is very important to find a place in French society, somewhere to root their own hybrid identity.

Drawing to a close, the history of France includes a history of displacement. The history of exile doesn’t always have a happy ending. Even supposing there were and there are still the Beurs, women and men who managed to escape the misery of the banlieues, excelling in arts, media, literature, sports, etc. (Jalloun, 1984:103), there are still many young people of second and third generation who continue to live in the cites under high levels of unemployment, delinquency, socioeconomic problems and discrimination, where especially the last years a turn to radical Islam is noticed. A future research could look into the causes that lead the offspring of the immigrants to a continuous rupture of their identities, to a constant statement of a bare life.

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