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Generational Differences Between North African Francophone Literatures: The New Stories of Immigrants in France

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**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEUR AND
NORTH AFRICAN FRANCOPHONE LITERATURES: THE
NEW STORIES OF IMMIGRANTS IN FRANCE**

by

Christen Marie Allen

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Abstract

This study seeks to establish the generational difference between Beur and Francophone literatures using *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* by Faïza Guène contrasted with *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* by Malika Mokeddem. The struggle underlying both narratives is the protagonists' attempts to negotiate their own identities while being torn between two very differing cultures. *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* explores the role that the French colonization had on Algerians as individuals. The characters are Algerian nomads who cling to western ideals of literacy and personal choice and in so doing, reject Algerian social hierarchy. The characters in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* are from two cultures: their parents' culture, North African, and the culture of everyday life, French. The protagonist, therefore, must try to blend the two.

In this comparative study, I explore the underlying social and economic situation of Beurs and Francophone writers to find parallels within the novels, since most Francophone and Beur novels are autobiographical. I also analyze the writing and linguistic styles and language (such as borrow words and *verlan*) employed by the authors to support the larger themes of the novels. I contribute to our understanding of Francophone literature and add a new critical perspective to reading the changing generations in the two novels written by Beur and Maghreb authors.

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Generational Differences Between Beur and North African Francophone Literatures:
The New Stories of Immigrants in France.

North African Francophone studies is a previously neglected but now growing field in literary and cultural studies, particularly in Europe and the United States. More recently, Beur studies has attracted the attention of many scholars. The two have similar elements. Both raise and attempt to answer questions of language, and identity. Both pose a challenge to notions of nationalism and raise questions about the status of the French language in former colonies and in immigrant, exiled, or multicultural communities. However, North African Francophone and Beur literatures take two different approaches to the ideas of language and identity within the colonial and postcolonial context, as I show in this study. North African literature shows extreme fluidity of writing style and language as well as fluidity of identity, yo-yoing as it were between France and North Africa, with little cohesion or constancy, with non-linear narratives, fantastical or mythological elements, and linguistic code-switching. It remains somehow “other,” inhabiting third spaces that cannot be pinned down on the map, often with a nomadic or wandering feel to the narrative and the language. In addition, Beur literature also shows identities that are situated between France and North Africa, but that are stabilized by cultural and linguistic hybridity (to use the term employed by Bhabha, and studied by Kapchan and Strong). Brian Stross defines cultural hybridity as “the blending of traits from diverse cultures or traditions...” (254). In this case, the diverse cultures are French and North African cultures, which have been brought together through colonialism and immigration. Thus, the Beurs are pulling from both influences simultaneously to create a newly defined third space that better represents them. In this essay, I endeavor to show

how these different styles mirror the different identities of the individuals in the narratives, exploring the examples of *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* by Faïza Guène and *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* (Century of Locusts) by Malika Mokeddem.

The use of the words Francophone and Beur is becoming increasingly contested by scholars and authors within these genres of artistic production. As was asserted in the recent manifesto, *Manifeste "pour une littérature du monde en français,"* many of the forty four Francophone writers participating dislike the idea inherent in the word *francophone* that France is at the center with other places and cultures marginalized on the periphery. Instead, they prefer to call their writing une "littérature monde en français." However, the North African author studied in this paper did not sign the *Manifeste*, debate continues for authors and scholars, and the question labeling this literature is not yet settled. For simplicity, I have chosen to employ the common term Francophone North African literature. The word Beur was originally coined by the Beur community itself but its use has since become controversial, as the term can have a negative connotation. Some individuals happily tout the designation Beur, whereas others prefer the reverlanized form *Reubeu*, and still others shy away from any single defining word, asserting that there is not a single North African youth identity in France. Again for simplicity, in this paper I will use the term Beur.

The term *Beur* refers to the children of North African immigrants residing in France, or first-generation French citizens. It is a verlanized form of the French word *arabe* and initially became popular during the 1970s as a type of self-designation by youth members of the North African immigrant community around Paris (Hargreaves, *Voices* 29) and today extends to all first-generation French individuals with North

African heritage throughout France (the term *verlanize* is a *verlanized* word itself, deriving from the French word *l'envers*, or the reverse and *le verlan* becomes an important part of Beur and Maghreb identities as shown below). The majority of Beurs live in the urban area of Paris, Lyon, Lille, and Marseille as well as in other large, industrial areas and port cities.

The author of the Beur novel *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, Faïza Guène is the daughter of Algerian immigrants in France. Like many other Beur children, she grew up and still lives in public-housing projects, or *Habitations à Loyer Modéré* (HLM) in Les Courtilières, on the outskirts of Paris (Burke, “Voice of the Suburbs”). Based on her experiences from the HLM and on her perspective as an individual inhabiting two cultures, she wrote her first novel, *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, when she was seventeen and still in high school. It has enjoyed a wide reception and is extremely popular in France and around the world. *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* is only semi-autobiographical, and is the story of a young girl named Doria, the daughter of Moroccan immigrants, living in the *banlieue*, or suburbs, outside of Paris. The book is written in the form of a diary Doria keeps during approximately a year of her life when she is around 15 years old. Her thoughts and lengthy descriptions magnify the narrative while the realistic style and unique linguistic elements underscore her messages about the nature of identity. The stories in the narrative are really about identity crisis and identity in becoming, as we witness her growing up and figuring out who she is and who she wants to be. Through Doria, Guène looks at the process of growing up as an outsider and a native of France. She explores the difficulties and the richness of a life lived within and without, in between two cultures. In an interview for *The Observer* she said, “I always like to show the duality, ... Through

the characters, through the language. There is the opposition of childhood and adulthood, of France and the land of someone's origin; there is the change you see in Doria over the course of the novel." (as qtd. in Burke, par. 8). Doria is uncertain about her identity and place in France as someone of North African descent. She knows she is neither North African, nor French, but also both at the same time. She is aware of her otherness and attempts to come to terms with this. The underlying themes of this novel, the struggle for identity and belonging, are very similar to works done by the previous generation of North African writers in Francophone literature.

At the forefront of North African Francophone women's writing is Malika Mokeddem. Francophone North African authors come from the formerly colonized countries of Northern Africa: Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in the Maghreb, and use French as the primary language of their novels. Mokeddem was born 1949 in Kénadsa, Algeria. Her parents were recently settled nomads and she is part of a large family. She was one of the only women in her family to continue her education past primary school. Mokeddem attended French schools during the colonial era. She studied medicine in Oran and then in Paris. She is formally trained as a nephrologist, or kidney specialist, but retired from medicine in 1985 to focus on her literary career; her medical background still informs some of her writing. She has lived in France since she moved to Paris in the 1977 and currently lives in Montpellier. She has won several literary prizes, including the African Mediterranean prize ADELFI for *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* (*African Success*). Her novels are often situated in the deserts of Algeria and are non-linear, fluid narratives about colonialism and identity; her novels are influenced by images of the desert and the nomads who move within that fluid, ever-changing space of sand drifts and oases, giving

the impression at times of wandering through a metaphorical desert. In part because of the importance of the desert and nomadic or exiled figures within her novels, Mokeddem's writing has been characterized recently as nomadic by scholars such as Christa Jones and Yolanda Helm.

Mokeddem's *Le Siècle des Sauterelles*, written in 1992, is the story of a father and his adolescent daughter, Mahmoud and Yasmine, who are atypical and marginalized nomads living and traveling in the deserts of Algeria. The book opens with Yasmine witnessing the rape and murder of her mother, an escaped African slave. Mahmoud evades police custody and being accused of murder. As fugitives in exile, he and Yasmine spend the novel traveling around the desert of Algeria after the murder of Yasmine's mother. Their constant wandering is mirrored in the writing through the non-linear narrative that floats in and out of memories; moving from place to place, moving from genre to genre, and moving in the past and the present; the narrative moves into the realm of folklore in the end. In a larger sense, with the movements of her characters and the non-linear movements of her narrative, Mokeddem explores real-life exile and nomadism and sends a message about the impacts of the French colonial period on Algeria as well as on the Algerian nomadic culture.

Both Malika Mokeddem and Faïza Guène write about serious issues stemming from colonialism. Mokeddem adopts a very serious tone to bring out the subtexts of revenge, hatred, violence, trauma, oppression and colonialism present in the novel. She uses a poetic and non-chronological style of writing that flows between the past and the present as the characters wander around the deserts of Algeria. The characters of the novel endure violence, loss and hardship with every event in the novel. Mokeddem

mitigates nothing in the novel, opening the book with the rape and murder of Nedjma, followed quickly by the death of her baby, Mahmoud being accused of murder, the abandonment of Yasmine, the probable death of Mahmoud, the arranged marriage of Yasmine and so forth. There is no respite for the characters or the reader. Guène however, diffuses her own subtexts of discrimination, prejudice and post-colonialism with irony and humor. She moves from serious issues such as the role of Islam in secular France, to racism and discrimination, to poverty, to innocent childhood anecdotes about riding the métro, going to the store, or being kissed by a boy. In a very personal style, she gives other characters her own nickname, such as *L'Assistant Cyborg* for her social worker. She jokes about French names, calling one social worker Mme Duquelquechose, 'Mrs. Something.' She juxtaposes the youthful name-calling and activities with stories of being ridiculed because of her poverty, her isolation from mainstream metropolitan France, even the beating and imprisonment of other girls in her neighborhood. Mokeddem and Guène portray their worlds differently, one showing the seriousness of broader issues facing an entire country while the other showing the difficulties as well as the lighter side from an individual's experience.

Identities

Beur individuals live in two cultures that both inform their identities. They start life within the family North African traditions in their home and then encounter the metropolitan French way of life upon entering the French education system, which forces them to assimilate and learn the new set of social rules and customs. While these children have French citizenship by birth and are considered French nationals by the state, many

French people still consider them foreigners in a sense, and many Beurs also feel not quite French or do not identify as such, in a refusal of any French nationalism. On the other hand, Beurs are not actually from North African countries and often feel distanced from their culture. Christine Doran shows how they remain other, somehow outside of both cultures, "...since [the] dominant society [the French] tends not to recognize them as fully French, nor are they considered 'full-fledged' members of their parents' countries of origin, they lack a clear set of 'repères culturels' (cultural guideposts) by which to define themselves." (Doran 142). Because Beurs lack these 'cultural guideposts,' they may struggle to define who they are, as is depicted in the novel I discuss below. In response to the cultural gaps they face, they may pull from various cultural sources and create a new hybrid culture all their own, complete with customs and a unique linguistic repertoire. Beur individuals may suffer as marginalized outsiders or may embrace the richness of their hybridity, or both, as can be seen in Beur novels.

In contrast, North African Francophone writers grew up in the very different French and North African cultures. The Maghreb region, including Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, has very different traditions than the colonial French governments and the societal ideals imposed upon the Magrebin population by the French through roughly the 1960s. Before and during French colonization, the Maghreb countries were populated for the most part with nomadic Berbers and Arabs. Islam was the main religion and framework for the societal structure. Oral tradition was very important, while education and literacy were not very highly valued. When the French came, they brought a very different perspective. The French did as much as possible to promote "Frenchness" as an idea and ideal among the indigenous population. They tried to show through media and

the educational system that France was the “patrimony,” or respected legacy and heritage, that French culture, language, and (Christian) values were superior, that their way meant progress, and that “liberté, égalité, fraternité” became the new law of the land. France highly encouraged the settlement of the nomadic peoples and education of the general population in a French school system; government programs and advertising encouraged immigration from North Africa to France, in part to build up a metropolitan French workforce, to replace the workforce devastated by war in previous decades. These North African immigrants grew up between the culture of the French governing elite and the culture of their Maghrebin peers. The result was diglossia and many bilingual first-generation immigrants. Since many North African Francophone authors are products of this dual cultural system, they concentrate on the difficulties of defining the self in the conflicting worlds. Often their writing is an attempt to situate themselves in this in-between space between two worlds.

Doria, the Moroccan heroine of *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, does not seem to be torn between France and North Africa. Though the reader might expect some amount of nostalgia, homesickness, or longing for a mother country, Doria does not recount her visits to Morocco in a kind light, instead saying that she felt distanced or separated last time she returned to Morocco: “La dernière fois que nous sommes retournées au Maroc, j’étais égarée.” She continues and criticizes the treatment of women there that is different from in France, lamenting that women are expected to just “shut up” when asked, to just get married, and know how to cook bread: “Là-bas, il suffit que tu aies deux petites excroissances sur la poitrine en guise de seins, que tu saches te taire quand on te le demande, faire cuire du pain et c’est bon, t’es bonne à marier. Maintenant de toute façon,

je crois qu'on retournera plus jamais au Maroc." She does not feel she can return. She, like many Beur authors, relates the difficulty of fitting in, in a culture that is not really their own. They must somehow make their own culture, find their own language and their own space, or move between the cultures. Beur individuals are the children of North African immigrants, but they are not North African.

Beur culture is often seen as a youth phenomenon in metropolitan French media, literature, and popular culture. In *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, Doria feels that Mme Burlaud, although a nice woman, is too old to really understand her. She says that the woman comes from another time and that she must therefore watch her language; to amplify this idea that there is a youth language, she even uses slang and very familiar language here to explain that she must choose her words carefully and correctly if she is to express her feelings to the older woman, who is her therapist, "Elle [Mme Burlaud] vient d'un autre temps. Je le vois bien quand je lui parle, je suis obligée de faire attention à tout ce que je dis. Je peux pas placer un seul mot de verlan ou un truc un peu familier pour lui faire comprendre au mieux ce que je ressens..." (175-6).

At the end of *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, the characters find resolution and a hope for the future. Doria's mother has changed, thanks to *la formation*, or government employment 'training,' and finds a job in a middle school cafeteria. Her change is seen as progress, though it is really more like assimilation of French culture, "Je sais pas ce qu'ils ont fait à la formation mais elle est plus la même. Elle est plus heureuse, plus épanouie. ... Même l'assistante sociale Cyborg lui a fait remarquer qu'elle progressait." (138). Her friend Hamoudi, who often symbolizes the more unpleasant side of life as an immigrant in the low-income housing high-rises of *la cité* finds love, a job, and happiness and is able to

leave the slums: “Avec Lila, ils ont même des projets de mariage.” (163). She starts spending time with her friend Nabil again: “Voilà, je suis réconciliée avec Nabil et je crois aussi que... je l’aime bien.” (181). When Doria leaves Mme Burlaud’s office for the last time in her last therapy session, she relates the finality she feels. “En sortant, je me suis sentie un peu comme dans l’avant-dernière scène d’un film, quand les héros ont à peu près résolu le problème et qu’il est temps de construire la conclusion.” (176-7). The idea of “constructing the conclusion” and “solving the problem” is very different than her view of life earlier in the book; the narrative thus moves from uncertainty of identity to the resolution of constructing a new life and a stable new identity.

Contrasted with the more stable Doria, Yasmine’s identity seems to be in a state of flux throughout the novel. Both Yasmine and Doria are mixed in a way, already hybrid, and already in between two cultures. Yasmine is the daughter of an Arab and a sub-Saharan slave. She is often called the pejorative name *hartania*, “Hartania! Hartania!” (155) She explains that the name represents impure, evil, and betrayal, “Hartania est perjure, le nom de l’impur, l’emblème d’une trahison...”(155). Yasmine not only faces the trauma of her mother’s death, but the daily reminder of that loss; moreover, because of her mother’s origin and her mixed ethnicity she is forever different and will never really be accepted into the Arab social system.

Yasmine occupies in-between spaces throughout the novel. She is literate and mute; she is black and Arab; she is a girl raised by a man; she is an Arab who is not Muslim. Her gender and religious preferences place her into in-between statuses. She is a young woman who rejects the female roles of Algerian society. Instead of learning to cook or make wool, she learned to write and spends her time wandering and thinking,

considered masculine pastimes in her culture; but she cannot truly be a man, of course, because she was born a woman. Compounding the gender-based identity confusion, Yasmine also demonstrates religious confusion. Islam is the dominant religion of the nomads with whom Yasmine associates, but there is also Christianity present among the French population living in Algeria. Since she is not Christian French and she does not accept the Islam of her Arab peers, she must live in a religious in-between space. Existing in a religious in-between is very difficult since religion plays such an important role in identity. At the end of the novel she allies herself with another marginalized individual, an older Jewish man, who takes on a fatherly role as mentor in her life after Mahmoud disappears. Just like her, he is neither Arab Muslim nor Christian French, but other.

Unlike *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, the ending of *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* shows the fluidity, movement and uncertainty present throughout the novel. Instead of the resolution that the Doria and her friends and family experience, Yasmine simply and literally continues her nomadism by wandering through Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa. Unlike the realism present in Doria's story, her story turns into myth in the end, the narrator tells us. Mokeddem changes the tone of the narrative in the last few pages from recounting of events to hearing murmurings and stories about the fate of Yasmine. There is a shift in tone and in genre as we move from reading a novel to listening to a fairy tale, legend, or folklore. On page 276, as the story draws to a close, Mokeddem moves in to the realm of legend, moves away from written language to highlight orality as she presents a folkloric story without end. Repeatedly, toward the end of the text she opens her paragraphs with phrases such as "They say that she..." or "rumors are murmured," as with "On dit que..." and "On murmure..." (276-9). According to the

story Yasmine spends the rest of her life as a wandering traveler in the desert and in the dark, trying to trace the steps of her lost mother, a big source of her identity—or so the “story” goes: “certains prétendent que de caravane en caravane, elle a traversé le désert vers la noire source de sa mère.” (278). She never finds any sort of stability and the narrative remains open-ended, a mixture of pleasure and pain that continues: “On dit qu’elle va d’amant en amant parce qu’aucun amour n’a su la retenir ni l’apaiser. ... On dit que tous ses bonheurs sont soudés de douleur...” (278-9). Every aspect of her life is caught in between opposites and she is left to wander, and to wonder, as are we.

Spaces

The linguistic situation in North African countries can be somewhat confusing; indeed some of this confusion is experienced and expressed in the rich diglossic writings of some Francophone writers. For the purposes of this paper, there are two major or official languages used by North African Francophone individuals, French and Arabic. In the simplest light, Arabic is a more oral language in this region (and is more often used by illiterate individuals than French), whereas French has the language prestige that is used for writing, in the educational system, and in legal and formal situations. Obviously the actual linguistic usage is more complicated and beyond the scope of this study. Today, French is still considered a more prestigious language and Arabic is generally used in familiar conversations, viewed as the street language; but in reality the two languages are used simultaneously as code-switching, with lots of borrow words, as Bentahila and Davies’ study shows.

Francophone literature situates itself between Arabic (or other languages) and French, the language of the colonizer. It is neither here nor there, but in between: “En effet, la littérature francophone est, fondamentalement, une littérature entre deux langues.” [In effect, Francophone literature is, fundamentally, a literature between two languages.¹] (Gontard 38). Francophone literature is thus an in-between literature, written by individuals who often situate themselves as in between, culturally, linguistically, and geographically. As with the novels in the present study, there are at least two approaches to this in-betweenness. The first generation of francophone writers chose to write the most correct Parisian French possible, adhering to the expectations of the Académie Française and hoping to be accepted into the metropolitan French literary community, get published by good publishers, and enjoy a wider reception and audience in France and abroad, “...les écrivains francophone de la première generation ont donc souvent écrit dans un français académique, très respectueux des règles. [...the first generation Francophone authors often wrote in an academic French, very respectful of rules.]” (Gontard 39). Many of the later Beur writers take a different approach, incorporating their own “living” language as it is heard on the street, with Arabic slang, borrow words, verlan, and newly created slang, thereby celebrating their diglossia and their in-between status.

The economic situation of immigrants, particularly the population of the Maghreb, is complex and merits some explanation as it often a major theme in Beur literature. To generalize, members of this North African ethnic group, along with other minority immigrant groups, are hampered by tripartite dilemma when trying to find employment in France: lack of formal qualifications, automation of industry, and discrimination. Most of the immigrants from Northern Africa are poor. They are

¹ All English translations are mine.

marginalized to low-wage jobs that require few skills, as they are often illiterate and untrained, and therefore suffer sub-standard income. Immigrants are often discriminated against in the workplace or by the media. Approximately three-fourths of the population lacks any kind of formal qualification, marginalizing them to manual labor jobs in the low-wage industrialized sectors. Work spaces are often in factories or on assembly lines. For example, the automotive manufacturing industry was one of the largest employers of foreign nationals in France, including the Maghrebis. The economic climate was made even more disadvantaged for the Maghrebis and other foreign nationals with the robotization of the automotive and other similar industries. Since many of these jobs in this sector were done by the Maghrebis and other foreign immigrants they suffered the greatest losses and have been forced into evermore marginalized and insecure jobs.

The third element of the dilemma is the discrimination that many Maghrebis and other foreign immigrants face at the hands of metropolitan French community. In a report from the official French labour inspectorate, employers were quoted as saying “no coloured people, no arabs, no Maghrebis” in reference to possible candidates for hire (qtd. in Hargreaves, *Immigration* 66). In the face of such lack of qualifications the decrease in the non-specialized industrial jobs and the discrimination that the Maghrebis face maintain the low economic status that characterizes these immigrant communities.

The economic situation of the North African immigrant community is often a major theme in Beur writing. In *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, many of the characters face these economic challenges of being under qualified and discriminated against in an already difficult and shrinking job market. The first example of the story is Doria’s mother. Because Doria’s father abandoned them and returns to Morocco, the mother works at a

Formule 1, a cheap motel chain in France. There she faces blatant racism from her boss, as well as extremely low wages that are not sufficient to support her daughter Doria or even herself. Although this job is financially inadequate and emotionally unpleasant, the mother has no viable alternative because she is illiterate and untrained to perform any other form of occupation. When she is fired unjustly, she is left with no recourse other than the welfare program furnished by the state. Guène explores the issue of discrimination most notably through the eyes of another character, Hamoudi, who is Doria's friend. He experiences difficulty finding a job and faces discrimination even when he is able to find a job as a security guard. The inability to find an adequate job restricts the characters in the novel, just like their counterparts in the real immigrant communities of France, to low income housing, generally in the poverty stricken *banlieue* or suburbs surrounding Paris.

The perimeters of large cities and nearby poor suburbs are often the settings for these novels of exile. Many immigrants lived in *bidonvilles*, or shantytowns, when they arrived in France, were later relocated to *cités de transit*, temporary migrant housing, or to low-income housing estates similar to American housing projects called Habitations à Loyer Modéré or HLM. Today, most of the immigrant population of France is concentrated in urban centers, with the largest concentration within the Greater Paris area. (Hargreaves, *Immigration* 66). Almost half of the North African population lives in HLMs. For many people *la banlieue* suburb, where these HLMs stand, connotes “an isolated, working-class, semi-industrial area with a sizable immigrant population.” Currently the word refers not to a geographic region, that surrounding Paris and other large cities, but rather to “specific socio-economic conditions” (Doran 120) with many

negative connotations in popular culture, perpetuated by the media. Many novels and films portraying Francophone African immigrants depict these HLM areas as suffering from poverty, high unemployment, exclusion, discrimination, violence, and other negative aspects. As such, they are generally locations of extreme poverty and physical isolation, on the outskirts of town, often surrounded by railways and or highways. These areas are often seen by outsiders or those who live in the city as violent or dangerous and are avoided due to high crime levels, or perceptions of high crime levels. Several scholars, including Christine Doran, explain the negative effects of the violent outbursts of the 1980s on the perception of *la banlieue*: “Unfortunately, the violent actions of the youths involved in these incidents, who were mainly of North African (Arab) origin, resonated with older visions of les voyous [criminals] in these marginal areas, and reinforced certain negative stereotypes of immigrant youths as troublemakers...” (Doran 118). More recently, the youth riots and car burnings of 2005 in and around the Paris area involving North Africans and Sub Saharan Africans and media coverage of the violence perpetuated such views of the area. Thus the individuals who live in these areas must combat their own exclusion from the main stream French society, leading to feelings of frustration at the lack of understanding and opportunity outside of their neighborhoods and communities.

In Beur novels, the main characters themselves live in *bidonvilles*, *cités de transit*, or HLM estates, therefore inhabiting such impoverished marginalized or in-between spaces that are neither in a more prosperous downtown nor in a more idyllic countryside. In the story recounted in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, Doria describes an imposing physical wall that separates her neighborhood from the French part of the city. She says that the French

who put it there failed to understand about the mixing of culture and that the real or imagined barriers are their fault,

Ils n'avaient rien compris à la mixité sociale et au mélange des cultures.

En même temps, c'est pas vraiment de leur faute. Il y a quand même une séparation bien marquée entre la cité du Paradis où j'habite et la zone pavillonnaire Rousseau. Des grillages immenses qui sentent la rouille tellement ils sont vieux et un mur de pierre tout le long. Pire que la ligne Maginot ou le mur de Berlin (90).

In the novel, Doria was ignored by French children when her mother took her to a playground in the pavillonnaire Rousseau just like she and her community behind the wall are ignored by the French on the other side.

The graffiti tags painted on her side of the wall are clearly done by youth of non-European heritage, since the language of the spray-painted tags often promotes immigrant homelands, for instance: "Viva Tunisia" or "Sénégal représente." Within these HLMS, foreign nationals tend to group together, creating small micro-societies with immigrants and their families in tight-knit communities. With the exception of Mme Burlaud, the only people with whom she interacts in the novel are also immigrants from North Africa and their children: Nabil, Hamoudi, Tante Zohra and her children, and others. Lila's failed marriage is indicative of the difficulty of mixing Maghrebi and French cultures. Lila married a Frenchman, angering both her family and her husband's family. Unable to overcome the prejudice they get from their families and the two communities in general, they eventually divorce, in a sense returning to the society from which they came. This may represent the drawbacks of cultural assimilation.

The social exclusion and poverty that immigrants face relegate them to marginal areas around the cities where they form communities of various immigrant and otherwise stigmatized populations, as depicted in the novels. Doran points out that “HLM housing complexes had now existed long enough that they now constituted ‘communities’ of sorts, meaning that *la cité* now began to be seen as constituting its own type of socio-economic entity on the French landscape, with specters of the marginality, poverty, and low-income status...” (Doran 116). In the Maghrebi populations of urban centers in France, these micro-communities recreate the cultural dynamic of their homelands. It is distinct from the French culture elsewhere, with different social rules and expectations; yet it is not really in North Africa—it is a third space that is somehow in between the two, with its own culture, commerce, and language. A telling example happens on the first day that Doria goes to her new beauty school. Her mother does her hair and puts grease in it to make it shine, a symbol of beauty in her mother’s Moroccan point of view, even though Doria worries that the other French students at the school will think she is dirty. Several examples of exclusion and cultural difference are when Doria and or her mother are mocked by French individuals because of their poverty. Doria and her mother are mocked by young French girls because of their old and unstylish clothing on their way to go shopping at a second-hand store, *le vide-grenier*. In another instance, Doria wears a shirt to school that her mother bought her and is mocked because it is actually a pajama top. Her mother remains ignorant of such cultural differences. In addition to the isolating physical space which she and her family inhabit, her low economic status isolates her from the world outside of her community.

In *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* there are three well defined, unchanging spaces that Doria moves between: her home, her school and Mme Burlaud's office. Each represents a different culture and identity for her. For most of the narrative, Doria talks about interactions that take place within her HLM community, within this in-between space that is neither France nor the home country for its residents. She recounts many incidences that take place in the private space of her own apartment, for instance when the social workers come over to inspect the house, or when Nabil comes over to tutor her. In her description of the events, she pays specific attention to the cultural items from Morocco: the "bibelots" or trinkets from Morocco, the "babouches" or Moroccan slippers they wear in the house, or the couscous meal served at Tante Zohra's house. She uses the Moroccan terms for such items. By referencing North African, specifically Moroccan, elements in her home, she establishes it as a North African space in her life. There she accepts the traditions of her parents and expresses her North African identity.

The second most important places in Beur novels are at the school (Hargreaves, *Voices* 50) and in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, anywhere outside of the *banlieue*. These locations are dominated by French individuals, the French language and French culture. The French education system emphasizes speaking French and cultural assimilation and does not promote bilingual education. When the Beur children are at school, as shown in this novel and others, they are expected to speak "proper" French and to dress, act, and speak like the other children. Together they form the French space for Doria and other Beur individuals which can at time conflict with the North African space. In the novel, Doria has a problem justifying an Islamic practice to a French teacher. "Le Ramadan a commencé depuis un peu plus d'une semaine. J'ai dû faire signer à Maman un papier de

la cantine précisant pourquoi je ne mangeais pas ce trimestre. Quand je l'ai donné au proviseur, il m'a demandé si je me foutais de sa gueule." (13). The problem arises when Doria expresses elements of her Moroccan identity in the French space of the school. It is further compounded by the fact that the principal does not understand that her mother is illiterate and therefore cannot sign her own name, an unusual situation in France, instead assuming that Doria forged it.

The conflict between French and North African spaces and identities renders it virtually impossible to accommodate both or find a sense of stability and belonging. Thus, Guène includes an important third location in the novel, the office of Mme Burlaud, the counselor that Doria sees each week. Already I have outlined the important roles of the protagonist's home neighborhood and his or her school in Beur literature. At home, Doria is Moroccan and at school Doria is French. She is caught in between the two spaces. The two locations represent the two extremes of the identity spectrum in which Doria as she travels back and forth, negotiating. Mme Burlaud's office is the in-between space where Doria is not obligated to be either French or Arabic—here she can be herself, if she can only come to terms with what that might be. I interpret the office as a neutral location for her, the in-between place where she spends time trying to negotiate her identity. "...Beur writers evoke the need to find—or to invent—a 'third space' for identity, one in which they can be accepted as they are, to have identities which do not involve 'erasing' any part of their personal histories in order to be recognized, and find acceptance." (Doran 155). Still, even in this third space she is not completely at home or herself, because, as stated above she must "watch what she says" and change her language to express herself to the counselor.

Linguistic Features

Faïza Guène uses a lot of informal writing and familiar vocabulary or street slang in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*. The grammar tends to be very simple and informal, mirroring very closely the type of speech Doria uses, as a representative of Beur youth. The writing is intentionally adolescent and chatty at times. The verbal-like writing highlights the importance of Beur orality and oral culture in the novel, shows the level of education of Doria and also perhaps of Guène, the author. Most Beur writers have only the basic education provided through the French education system and very few are able to attend university. This is not to say that Guène and other Beur authors do not know how to write with formal French grammar, but rather that they do not feel they can express themselves as adequately or as authentically with it. They write as they speak, using familiar grammar structures and words they grew up with, often borrowed words, slang, contractions, and familiar language. For example, throughout *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, Guène uses the phrase “ ’Y a,” which is short for “Il y a...” meaning ‘there is.’ It is very common in casual speech to clip the ‘il’ and just say ‘y a’ since it is faster and the ‘il’ is naturally assumed. She also writes “t’es” and “t’as” for “tu es” and “tu as,” again mimicking faster, conversational French. These contractions are heard in oral language and not typically used in writing since there is usually less need to be faster in a written work. So the contractions are striking. She also writes with simple sentence structure throughout the novel, mirroring the simpler grammar used in everyday conversation.

The use of very informal verbal-like writing in Beur novels is different from Francophone novels. Francophone writers generally are well educated in the French education system and are familiar with the canon of French literature. In general, their

novels use formal, more complicated grammar and do not reflect conversational style writing. In *Le Siècle des Sauterelles*, Mokeddem never truncates or clips phrases and uses complex sentence structure. She conjugates verbs in several past tenses, including the passé simple, an elegant literary past tense used mostly in literature and historical writing. Guène uses only the contemporary tenses, imparfait and passé composé, in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, again relying on authentic speech patterns as her basis for the novel.

The voice in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* is much simpler than in *Le Siècle des Sauterelles*. Guène uses a first person singular narrator, Doria. All the information in the novel, every experience is interpreted by Doria and then relayed to us as the readers. Because she is the only narrator, any details or information Doria lacks, the reader also lacks. As the narrative progresses, we learn more details and start to see a broader picture only as Doria learns and broadens her view. Guène treats the audience as friends of Doria by using the first person narrator and the conversational writing. Along with Doria, the reader traverses the crossroads of childhood and adulthood and origins. The narration of *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* is more complex. Mokeddem employs an invisible narrator who employs third-person omniscient narration. The reader follows Mahmoud, Yasmine and Nedjma, as well as getting information from relatives in the form of dreams and letters. Whereas Doria is situated at the center of *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* and actively moves the narrative along, the characters of *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* are pushed through the events of the story by external events and the unnamed narrator. *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* is written in a less elaborate and more direct style than *Le Siècle des Sauterelles*, using informal sentence structure with truncation of common phrases based on oral use, more contemporary and simpler past tenses for verbs, and a single first person narrator. The

simpler style makes sense because the main theme in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* is the identity, growth, and maturity of Doria. Mokeddem uses a more complicated style to explore broader themes like Algerian society, Islam, and the implications of French colonialism.

Grammar and narration are not the only elements used by Faïza Guène and Malika Mokeddem to convey the ideas in their novels. The registers and vocabulary used by the two authors are very different. Just like any language, the French language has several different registers that are used in different ways. There are four levels commonly referred to: *formel*, *familier*, *l'argot*, and *verlan*. 'Formel' French is the French learned in school and used in very formal situations. 'Familier' French is used in everyday conversations and is understood by all French speakers. L'argot is similar to English slang. Argot words often vary by region and are generally used with friends and in relaxed social situations. As mentioned above, Verlan is a system of inverting certain French words, producing a speech that sounds very different than standard French; this is part of street language.

Verlan is very simply defined as syllable inversion of French words. The word *verlan* is a good example of this syllable inversion. In standard French it means *l'envers*, or 'the reverse.' It has two syllables: len + ver which are switched to make ver + len and the spelling is altered slightly to make 'verlan.' For example, word like 'fou,' that only has one syllable is just reversed, in this case becoming 'ouf' (Davis 7-8). The rules for "verlanizing" a word are not explicit and there are a lot of variations to the process making it very difficult to use Verlan unless raised with it. It also incorporates large numbers of borrowed words from foreign languages, particularly the languages of immigrants and English slang. While Verlan seems to involve radical changes to the

French language, they are limited to certain lexical items of the sentence. Grammar and most of the sentence remain unchanged (Doran 65). Guène's novel is filled with verlan, so it is important to discuss the role of language in general in the formation and expression of identity and the specific role that Verlan plays in Maghrebins' identities.

Language is an important element of identity. Linguistic features can and do mark aspects of an individual's identity, showing membership to ethnic, age, racial, and gender groups (Doran 23). Different identities can be represented by different languages as well as represented by different registers within the same language. A language is like a travel poster advertising a particular culture, in one sense. It is one of the most obvious outward signs of nationality and ethnicity, two very important elements of identity. Bilingual individuals choose a particular language depending on the situation they are in: with whom they are talking, where they are, what the subject and goal of the communication is, etc. The choice of language is more than just deciding what best facilitates communication. A lot of Francophone writers, for example, Malika Mokeddem and other Maghrebi immigrants are bilingual, speaking Arabic and French. Mireille Rosello points out that

...when subjects are always aware of the possible use of several languages, when linguistic issues represents a constant layer of painful self-consciousness, then the question of what one means shifts from the units of language to the language itself. Success and failure, integration or exclusion, marginalization or belonging do not depend on what one says in one given language but on which language one chooses to conduct the encounter in (Rosello 77).

Immigrants must choose between both languages, trying to successfully show the appropriate identity to signal the right to inclusion in a certain group. For instance, it would be inappropriate for an Algerian immigrant to speak to a French person in Arabic but it can be equally inappropriate to address a fellow Algerian in French. The situation is not that simple, however. Some Algerians feel French and identify as French because of the colonial period, when Algeria was occupied and part of 'France.' French is not merely a symbol of the French people, but also of education, prestige, western ideals, even religion, etc. Interlocutors can use it for any of these reasons and many others. It is also complicated by the possibility of word borrowing and code-switching. Mokeddem and others from the Maghreb area use a mix of Arabic and French. Code-switching is common in Maghreb countries between the L1, Arabic, and the L2, French, as shown in the research on code-switching in Morocco by Bentahila and Davies.

Arabic words are also common as borrowed words in French and in code-switching due to the exchange of people during and after colonization. Maghrebi Arabs were used as a reserve labor force in France while soldiers and officials were stationed in the Maghreb countries along with many vacationing French citizens so languages flowed both ways. Unlike borrowed words, Arabic words in code-switchings are localized to individuals with some level of understanding of Arabic and are not really understood by the population at large. Arab immigrants in France still use Arabic heavily and use code-switching just as the populations of their homelands do. It remains a link to their homelands and their culture and is tied to religious beliefs as well. Francophone writers often use Arabic code-switching to mark themselves as distinct from the French and to

gain inclusion with other Arab immigrants. In Francophone North African literature it is yet another symbol of the fluidity of North African identities.

In *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* Mokeddem includes Arabic words within the French structure of the narrative. She uses over 156 different Arabic words more than 560 times throughout the novel. Interestingly, the type of words with which she code-switches are a good example of her linguistic and individual fluidity. Several examples abound in the text. In the opening chapter of the book, the character Nedjma uses both ‘el-rih’ which is Arabic for wind and ‘le vent’ the French equivalent. “ ‘Ah! qu’il vienne, qu’il vienne, le vent!’ , chante-t-elle avec nostalgie.” But just a few lines later she switches and says, “C’est peut-être *el-rih!*” (10-1). Mokeddem also frequently alternates between ‘kheïma’ which is Arabic for tent and ‘la tente’ the French equivalent. She writes, “Son bébé est endormi sous la tente.” and then later “Puis, ses yeux se reportent sur ceux-là qui se dirigent droit sur la *kheïma.*” (11-3). The most notable example is found in the title as well as throughout the story. ‘Les sauterelles,’ meaning locusts is part of the title “Le siècle des sauterelles. The French term is used throughout the novel along with the Arabic word ‘ejrrad.’ “ ‘Les sauterelles! reprit-il. Une de mes plus grandes terreurs enfantines!’ ” And again just a few pages later, she switches and writes, “ ‘Ouuuh, ouuuh! *Ejrrad! Ejrrad!*’ ” (53 & 56). There is no constancy in the Arabic usage. The words are generally associated with Algeria and nomadic culture but French words are also used to describe these same elements. Mokeddem’s linguistic fluidity mirrors her in-between situation, oscillating between North Africa and France.

The Arabic words used in many Francophone novels are not generally widely known by anyone outside of the Arabic language community. *Le Siècle des Sauterelles*

has many Arabic words that are italicized and listed in an Arabic-French glossary at the back of the novel. By knowingly including a glossary in this novel, Mokeddem openly acknowledges that her lexical choices are not part of the French language or culture. Moreover, she invites the reader in this way to learn more about her culture and to consider her linguistic choices. She also assumes the reader would not be familiar with such language. By using Arabic words that are not generally understood by the educated French-speaking metropolitan French population, her assumed audience for the novel, she marks herself as a member of the Algerian community which gives credence to her novel.

Unlike their parents, Beur youth in France use Arabic indirectly in their speech. Instead of L1-L2 code-switching like their parents, they borrow Arabic words and change their structure, or ‘verlanize’ them and employ them in their brand of slang, Verlan. Some do not speak Arabic and others do not use Arabic once they learn French for various reasons including rebellion to parents or to avoid the stigmatism of being Maghrebin. Whatever the reason, the overall trend among the youth is to avoid Arabic and use French. But they do not feel especially French. Many face strong prejudice and discrimination. They are seen as different by the French and they generally live in socially excluding areas, like the *banlieues* of large cities. Since French is a strong identifier of French people, it represents an inadequate medium for these individuals in constant flux about their identity. Verlan is a way for them to express themselves without adopting the sole identity of the Maghreb or the sole identity of the French. It is a way of creating a new identity that is neither French nor North African, but other, “by creating a set of terms relating to that most vexed aspect of identity in France—ethnicity—these

minority youths have expressed a will to create a ‘third language’ (based on French, but also differing from it) through which new kinds of cultural spaces and identity possibilities can be constituted and affirmed” (Doran 158). It provides a new and unique identity that is other and may comfortably inhabit a third space. Thus verlan has become part of the new language of Beur youth, a “third” language with which to express their identity.

Verlan represents an argot used by youth immigrant communities, in this case, the Beurs. I have already briefly mentioned the French term *argot*, which means slang. Here however, argot is an English linguistic term meaning, “an often more or less secret vocabulary and idiom peculiar to a particular group” (“Argot”). An argot is used to create exclusivity for a group of people. Its use therefore may include one as member of a group. Beurs use verlan to communicate amongst each other without uninitiated individuals understanding them. The exclusivity of Verlan shows a Beur identity that is outside the realm of mainstream metropolitan French. There are several elements to verlan that make it difficult for uninitiated users to understand. Verlanized French words are difficult to understand because of syllable inversion and vowel changes that do not always follow the same patterns. In addition to verlanized French words, there are a lot of foreign borrowings employed mainly from Arabic and English.

As mentioned earlier, foreign borrowings are very common in verlan language. These borrowed words often come from the immigrants’ maternal language. Verlan is used by all the groups of immigrant youth and there are certainly more universal features. Foreign borrowings are used to add specificity to different groups’ speech. Maghrebins add Arabic words to their verlan, sub-Saharan Africans add words from Wolof and other

local languages, and so on.. Doran points out that “For the most part, these borrowings do not fill particular semantic gaps (which is often a motivation for borrowings), but rather serve as markers of cultures of origin in everyday speech...and have less of a referential value than a phatic one, maintaining communication, asserting a sense of intimacy and interconnectedness among interlocutors, and confirming shared understanding of the local code” (Doran 83). Such “local codes” appear in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*, demonstrating the status of the “third” language. Moreover, it is a way for youths to create their own hybrid identity, as is part of the project of the novel, and perhaps to (re)own both languages for themselves, “...the borrowings from family minority languages, which are often youths’ native languages, represent a transfer of markers of their cultures of origin to their peer-group speech By including items from family F1s in their local (mainly French) code, youths signify a certain ‘reappropriation’ of their home culture in a French setting, asserting their ‘mixed’ cultural identity within the private social sphere of peer interaction” (Doran 87). Guène refers to North African elements using a form of the word *bled* as when describing Aziz’s “accent de blédard” (77). This can be a nostalgic move, but it is also creating something new with the language, “not uncommonly, the Beurs are in fact rediscovering the language and culture of their parents” (Hargreaves, Voices 25).

Words from English and other borrowings also become part of the mix, as when “Terms from American (rap) and Jamaican (rasta) English are also commonly borrowed; ... these cité borrowings are drawn from distinctly different semantic domains, namely music, gang culture, and drugs” (Doran 84). This is clearly evident throughout *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*. Doria uses a lot of English words or phrases and often mentions American celebrities, TV shows and movies. There are many examples of this in the novel and

“...they [American borrowings] reflect an ongoing fascination among many youths with various aspects of American inner-city life” (Doran 97). Clearly, the use of verlan and English borrowed words from rap music show that the novel highlights youth culture and relates it to the identity crisis experienced by many young Beurs. Of particular importance where young people are concerned is the related connection between the English language and modernity. In the novel she talks about “hi-fi video” and “speed-dating” which she compares to “Speed Burger,” (113&116) which is based on the American fast-food revolution. The United States has long been the trend-setter in virtually every field of popular culture. ... The forms of wordplay by which the Beurs demonstrate their linguistic prowess often include a sprinkling of English.” (Hargreaves, *Voices* 121-2). The way the youths using such language speak and the way we hear them speak in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* represent a generational difference not seen in the prior generation of Francophone literature.

The influence of music and television further show a generational difference in the language and message of these novels, because

...in the late twentieth century, the audio-visual media are for many children far more powerful sources of role-models than are works of literature. Recorded music, films and television are able to circumvent language barriers relatively easily. In so doing, they throw the Beurs wide open to the influences of cultural communities beyond those for the French- and Arabic-speaking worlds. The most obvious of these is American popular culture, with its near-stranglehold on the audio-visual media (Hargreaves, *Voices* 118).

She uses American cultural references like celebrities, movies, music, and clothes to establish Doria's character. She describes a man in the Metro using an American film reference: "Sa tête ressemblait à celle d'un cartoon, un peu comme le chat dans *Alice au pays des merveilles*." (30). When at a family friend's house, she plays an American video game where the player drives a car and tries to hit as many people as possible. She dreams of marry a 'super-mec' like MacGyver. She also mentions celebrities like Al Pacino, Marilyn Monroe, Antonio Banderas, Leonardo DiCaprio and others.

Choosing assimilation or choosing a third way remains an important question for Beur youths and writers, "It is clear, then, that language itself has been a major tool for forging this third way." (Doran 161). Again, the third way is a third language developed by and for those who inhabit a third space, and is a new form of expression for a new generation, "in this sense, as a language which was neither 'foreign' nor 'standard,' verlan serves as a tool for demarcating and constituting a 'third space' of social interaction in which these youths could negotiate identities which diverged from the hegemonic norms proposed by dominant society." (Doran 187). Guene's use of Verlan and informal grammar and slang within her writing style challenges *la langue soutenue*, or proper academic French, and calls into question the current political emphasis on cultural and linguistic assimilation in France.

Conclusions and Future Research

The search for belonging and identity are key to both *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* and *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*. Caught between France and North Africa, the authors wrestle with feelings of exile and notions of what it means to be the other. Both authors explore their own hybridity, but Guène more readily shows the cultural and linguistic richness stemming from that hybridity, while Mokeddem still questions the validity of a mixed identity versus French cultural assimilation. Guène's characters achieve stability by integrating their different identities using physical and linguistic third spaces, while Mokeddem's characters wander in and out of spaces, identities and languages, wondering who they really are. Unlike their elder Francophone North African contemporaries, Beurs use their literature to challenge the validity of cultural assimilation and what it means to be French, choosing instead a third identity created by themselves and reflected by their unique linguistic repertoire.

A related topic that would be interesting for further research but was outside the scope of my thesis is the role of gender in the identities of Francophone North Africans and Beurs in France. *Le Siècle des Sauterelles* and *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* are both written by female authors about female protagonists and include dilemmas based not only on their immigrant status but also on their gender status. The use of verlan by Faïza Guène would be of particular interest as it is generally considered to be a gender-bias phenomenon.

In the future it will be interesting as a larger study to see the effect of *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* and other Beur novels on French culture. Today there exists a drive for cultural assimilation and a need to be "French," using western ideals and *la langue soutenue*, or proper French. This remains a polemic issue in French politics and education today. *Kiffe*

Kiffe Demain challenges the idea that expression is effective only through formal language like *la langue soutenue* and calls into question the idea that one must assimilate in order to function within a society. Does the fact that the book has been so well received indicate that French mentality towards the need for assimilation is changing? Is the status of Beur individuals and communities changing? Will there be a new generation of writers soon and how will they tackle issues of identity with language? All questions for further study.

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