

Social Binaries in Contemporary *Beur* Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the term *beur* as well as the category it defines, both in terms of individuals who identify as *beur*, and the genre of literature that stems from the *beur* population in contemporary France. I begin by first suggesting that the notion of *beur* as a category and label serves as a third space in the binary of French culture and Maghrebi culture. This third space is necessary as the children of Maghrebi immigrants in France find themselves in between each culture and the sphere of influence that follows. The term is then problematized. The theme of binaries and the third spaces that emerge because of the problematic nature of the binaries is recurring throughout my study. I explore what these third spaces are by examining four contemporary French novels: Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Un homme ça ne pleure pas*, Ahmed Djouder's *Désintégration*, and Brahim Metiba's *Ma mère et moi*. The characters in each of these works struggle with their identity as they forge their own third spaces as solutions to various binaries that they discover they cannot fit into. In my study, I demonstrate this in three realms: integration and engaged citizenship; familial relationships, primarily parent-child relationships and the generational difference that further complicates pre-existing cultural difference; and gender roles. Each of the narratives and the main characters conveys the problematic nature of viewing French and Maghrebi culture in a binary. In my explication of the text, I argue that each narrative works towards the creation of a new third space in varying ways.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In the 1980s, a new population in France, labeled *beur*, defined as the French born children of North African immigrants in France, emerged. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and continuing into the present time, this population has contributed to the canon of French literature. This literature is comprised of engaged sociopolitical issues that *beur* individuals and their immigrant family members face as French residents and citizens, as the political climate of France pushes for cultural and social integration and assimilation. In this study, I examine four contemporary French novels: Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Un homme ça ne pleure pas*, Ahmed Djouder's *Désintégration*, and Brahim Metiba's *Ma mère et moi*. These texts, which engage issues faced by *beur* communities, explore the cultural binaries that emerge from growing up in France with immigrant parents, as well as the spaces between each end of the binary. I explore issues of identity in the realms of citizenship, familial relationships, and gender roles. The characters in these novels demonstrate the problematic nature of viewing French culture and North African culture as existing in a binary, as such a binary raises questions concerning identity for individuals who identify as *beur*. This research sheds light on current social issues that are active in contemporary France and conveys the marginalized position that *beur* individuals tend to occupy. My study of these four works of literature focuses on the idea of engaged citizenship and exercising agency on the part of *beur* individuals, and the relationship between this notion and each of the works.

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Introduction

In the 1980s, a new population in France, labeled *beur*, emerged. This population, defined as the French born children of Maghrebi immigrants in France, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, continuing into the present time, has contributed to the canon of French literature with literature comprised of engaged sociopolitical issues that *beur* individuals and their immigrant family members face as French residents and citizens. With this new categorized population emerged a new literature: *beur* literature, which has evolved over the past 35 years to include offshoots such as *banlieue* literature. With the sociopolitical climate of France pushing the assimilation of immigrants and their families, questions of identity and more specifically, what it means to identify as *beur*, are prevalent in *beur* literature. What is *beur* literature? Who is writing *beur* literature? Why is it being written and how it is received by the public? Asking these questions will allow me to explore the infinite third and fourths spaces that present themselves as solutions to multiple sets of binaries that manifest in the content and recurring themes of example works of *beur* literature, particularly through characters and their relationships with others within the narratives. I will be examining these questions and issues concerning identity, especially in the realm of gender issues and how they intersect with culture, and the ways in which they are discussed in four examples of contemporary *beur* literature: Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Un homme ça ne pleure pas*, Ahmed Djouder's *Désintégration*, and Brahim Metiba's *Ma mère et moi*. With two of these works having been published within the last three years, I will be examining not only how these four contemporary *beur* works participate in a new and upcoming generation of *beur* literature but also how the four works show the evolution of literature in this genre that has taken place within the past 13 years as well as the diversity that exists within the genre of *beur* and *banlieue* writing. These four works show a variety of literary

themes, showcasing the diverse ways in which the multiple sets of binaries present themselves in literature.

Faïza Guène, author of four novels, has become an icon in female *beur* writing, with her young age distinguishing her from other authors. Her first novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, published in 2004 when Guène was 19 years old, is written from the viewpoint of Doria, a 15-year-old girl of Moroccan origin, living in a Parisian *banlieue*. Doria carefully albeit judgmentally analyzes her life, her relationships, and the world in which she lives, and in turn, provides a fresh perspective on life in the French *banlieue* to the reader. While Guène claims to not have purposely given the novel a feminist perspective (Kelleher 4), *Kiffe kiffe demain* tackles issues relating to family structure and the struggles of immigrant women in France that break out stereotypes of women as well as blur binaries in the realm of gender roles for men as well as women. Doria's narrative, spanning a school year, shows an evolution in her attitude, ending with a spirit of hope and optimism that contrasts her outlook at the beginning of the novel as she is still in the early stages of dealing with an absent father who has just left her and her mother to marry a younger woman in Morocco in the hopes of bearing a son. Doria's feelings of inadequacy because she is not the child that her father hoped for and has left to actively seek, as well as the position that she and her mother are put in as a result of her father's leaving, allow for gender issues to be an active and recurring theme in the narrative. While we see Doria's vision of what life is like in the Parisian *banlieue* as she navigates having to deal with the struggles of a changed family structure and the poverty that she and her mother face as a result, as well as her friendship with Hamoudi, a man who lives in her *HLM* building and is involved with drugs and petty crime, the main theme of the novel is Doria's coming of age and her evolving views on the world as her experiences shape her. Guène humanizes the stereotyped narrative of living in the subsidized

government housing of the outskirts of Paris by honing in on the parts of Doria's life that are not *beur* struggles, yet struggles that any 15-year-old girl would face, in the context of her circumstances as the daughter of Moroccan immigrants, like her relationship with Nabil, an annoying classmate who eventually becomes a love interest. Speaking to situations that immigrant families of North African descent in France face, such as having social aid workers become a part of daily life, through Doria's eyes, Guène sheds light on the realities of what being the daughter of a Maghrebi immigrant in the outskirts of Paris is like in a spirited way, using Doria's angst, sarcasm, and cynicism, especially towards the beginning, to bring a human and personalized perspective to issues that are typically dealt with in negative and impersonal terms.

Guène's fourth novel, published in 2014, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, also highlights themes of human struggle within the context of immigrant families in France. The novel, written from the point of view of Mourad, the youngest of three children of Algerian immigrant parents living in Nice, recounts stories of Mourad's experiences growing up in the form of flashbacks as he becomes an adult and reunites with his eldest sister, Dounia, who was estranged from the family for 10 years after feeling suffocated by her parents and what they wanted for her. Mourad, constantly anxious about his future and whether or not he is doing and saying the right thing, holds a generally neutral position in his family structure and watches the tension among his family members unfold, particularly between Dounia and their mother. Themes of prescribed gender roles dominate the novel as Dounia breaks out of the subservient female role set out for her. Expectations for Mourad as a Maghrebi male also becomes a prevalent theme, made clear by the novel's title as well as his father's constant reminders that men do not cry. Like *Kiffe kiffe demain*, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*'s main themes are of family relations and gender roles, with questions surrounding *beur* identity and experience being the backdrop to the situations that

Mourad faces and analyzes in the novel. Throughout the novel, Mourad deals with tragedy and hardship that appeal more to the rawness of the human experience than an essentialized “*beur* experience”, such as the loss of his father after watching him struggle medically throughout almost the entirety of the narrative, and his personal struggle as he begins student teaching. These conflicts that he goes through, either internally, or with other characters, are then further complicated by the struggle he faces as he navigates life in France with immigrant parents who hold a different culture than the one he grew up with outside of the home.

The two other works, *Ma mère et moi*, and *Désintégration*, each serve as counterpoint examples when juxtaposed with Guène’s works, yet in different ways. Brahim Metiba’s *Ma mère et moi*, published in 2015, provides a perspective on questions of identity that differs from those of the three other works in that both the author and protagonist and narrator of the book are first generation immigrants to France from Algeria. While Metiba and the protagonist of the book, who remains unnamed, are not children of immigrant parents in France as the other characters in the other works are, the themes of the book are still relevant as they confront intergenerational cultural difference, particularly in the realm of gender and sexuality. In short snippets, this work recounts the interactions between the protagonist and his infirm mother in Algeria where he has returned to visit her. While very little information on the characters, their family structure, and the context of their present situation is disclosed, it becomes clear towards the end of the work that the protagonist moved to France years ago and has adopted many facets of French life and ways of thinking, which his mother notices and responds to by always telling him that he has changed. He knows that he has changed and tries to articulate to her that it is a positive change and that he is happier. The audience only sees a very small part of the relationship between the man and his mother because of the brevity of the work, yet themes of expectations in the context

of filling gender roles perpetuated by his mother, and conflict between homosexuality and lifestyle as ascribed by religious belief. This work also differs from the others in that the entirety of what we see between the protagonist and his mother takes place while he is an adult who has already forged his own life. The misunderstandings between them are thus limited in a way that the struggles of characters in the other works are not, as it is assumed that soon, he will return to his life in France, with his mother staying in Algeria. The physical and emotional distance between the man and his mother provides a new perspective on cultural difference between France and North Africa in comparison with the other works.

Désintégration, written by Ahmed Djouder in 2007, is unique in that while it is labeled “un roman” as shown on the title page, it does not have characters nor a plot that is narrated. Unlike Guène’s novels that effectively humanize the life of immigrants and their children in French *banlieues*, *Désintégration* provides a list of anecdotal vignettes that recount the sobering realities of what it means to live in France with North African immigrant parents while dealing with poverty and the inner conflict brought on by finding oneself between two cultures and countries, neither of which are fully accepting. Of the four works, *Désintégration* approaches *beur* issues with the most negativity, showing almost no positive sides to being a French person of North African origin, in order to argue that integration into French society is not possible when one does not have the means, because they are not integrated, presenting a dilemma. *Désintégration* is told from the perspective of an all encompassing “*nous*”, representing the descendants of North African immigrants, while *vous* is used to represent the French. This distinction and dichotomy, present throughout the entirety of the work, is not only divisive and over-generalizing, but also misleading. It can be assumed that the *vous* is intended to represent not the French, but more specifically *les Français de souche*, yet this distinction is not made

explicit in the book. This becomes confusing as the individuals represented by *nous*, technically also are part of the *vous*, as they are French citizens. This dichotomy of *nous* and *vous*, representing a larger binary of French versus North African, shows the ways in which this binary, along with other sets of binaries that present themselves in these texts, are problematic. Each of the two categories are seemingly clearly defined and distinguished from the other, yet the subject of the narrative itself in the case of *Désintégration*, that created the dichotomy, does not even fit neatly into either compartmentalized label. While still problematic in its own right, the term and label *beur* acts as a solution to the problem of mutually exclusive binaries, providing a third space. Hargreaves explains how *beur* fits into the context of the dichotomy by saying, “Those who call themselves Beurs circumvented the simplistic choice with which outsiders tended to confront them, insisting that they be labelled as *either French or Arab*” (*Immigration* 105). Wadman cites Azouz Begag whose ideas on the term are in agreement with the notion that the *beur* label filled a gap in identity markers by calling it “the most popular ‘unregistered trademark’ used to describe a generation that came into being at a junction of two national/cultural identities (French and Arab) but was not containable by either of them” (85).

The *beur* label creates a third space by escaping the dichotomy of French or Arab, as Hargreaves and Begag point out. However, the creation of this new label entailed the creation of new problems and questions surrounding identity. Not only are there multiple ways to define the *beur* category but there are multiple ways to conceptualize the term and its origins as well as its place in contemporary France and its literature. While the use of the *beur* label to describe oneself would be a personal decision with numerous factoring issues, using the term to describe a genre of literature, shared by many, brings about the need to properly define what the term entails in such a context. Even in the dialogue that academics engage in when discussing using

the term *beur* to describe a whole genre, there are vast differences in thought and approach. Kleppinger writes, “Officiellement, l’écriture dite ‘beure’ n’existe pas: il n’y ni mouvement littéraire beur, ni manifeste fondateur établissant un projet commun. Même le mot ‘beur’ est utilisé selon des stratégies différentes et le sens du terme peut changer radicalement” (“L’invention du roman beur” 22). Here, Kleppinger points out the unstandardized nature of the term *beur* and how it is used in relation to the genre. In explaining that there are different meanings of the term that are subject to change, she demonstrates the unstable and unorganized nature of the term. She continues to problematize the term: “En fait, il n’y a jamais eu de notion établie du ‘roman beur’; l’espace des interprétations de cette écriture a toujours été un lieu de conflit et de débat” (“L’invention du roman beur” 45). Despite the debate that surrounds the term, some general conclusions are made. In her preamble, Durmelat says:

Le mot *beur* fournit donc un lieu où des forces diverses, dont il est aussi la résultante, participent au processus d’imagination d’une communauté qui implique les descendants d’immigrés maghrébins, les sociétés d’origine des parents et la société française. Et l’imagination même de cette communauté met en question la notion de nation, aussi bien en France qu’au Maghreb, car elle ne reproduit pas un seul héritage historique. (36-37)

Durmelat explains how *beur* as a category essentially becomes its own forged third space, as the children of Maghrebi immigrants find that they do not have place within the French-Arab binary. This is, at its most basic form, the purpose of the word *beur*, and the way in which I will be using the term. Durmelat continues to articulate the way in which this category is a created third space, forging a place for itself between two sides of a binary: “Entre récupération et relégation, intégration et désintégration, le mot *beur* articule le lien entre jeu de nominations et enjeux de domination” (47).

The meaning of *beur* as a category and what it entails is contested and charged, just as the meaning of the term itself is. Because at its root, the term aims to build a third space for marginalized populations that do not neatly fit into either the French social category, or the Maghrebi social category, because of their position as the French-born children of Maghrebi immigrants, *beur* holds the connotation of being in the political realm as it relates to the political climate of contemporary France. The content of works of *beur* literature as well as how both the authors and works are received are evidence that *beur* literature is a politically engaged genre. According to Brinda Mehta:

As *beur* literature engages with the sociological and political reality of Arabs in France, it is impossible to separate literature from the social text. Literature and sociology intersect in these works to provide a complex and creative sociopolitical document of lived experience. This literature thereby poses important questions about the multiethnic identity of France, the positionality of Arab-Muslims, and the French Republic's tenuous negotiations of cultural plurality amid this diversity, while affirming the place of *beur* literature in the canon of contemporary French writing. (174)

As I will later examine, several *beur* authors, Faïza Guène included, have resisted the imposed role of being a socio-politically engaged spokesperson despite this engrained connection between literature and sociopolitical phenomenon. This phenomenon highlights the various problematics concerning voice, representation, and agency that exist within the realm of *beur* communities and their literature. While I use the term *beur* to label the category, even the names used to describe this genre of literature are politicized and carry significance. The terms used to describe and situate the works as well as the authors, particularly in relation to their work, are engaged in

sociopolitical discussion surrounding the *beur* phenomenon as well as what it means to be French, of Maghrebi extraction and in the *banlieue*.

Of the four works, Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain* has been studied the most, yet the four works, in conjunction and juxtaposition with each other, show the variety that exists within the genre of *beur* literature. *Kiffe kiffe demain*, having quickly become a success, continues to be valorized in this field of writing, thirteen years after its publication. By examining this work alongside Guène's latest publication, *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, I will demonstrate how Guène's writing has evolved along with the genre. Thirty years after the birth of *beur* literature, there are numerous published works that can be categorized as "*beur*" either by their content or authorship. The four works chosen for this analysis are a reflection of what scholars are studying in the field of *beur* literature. This selection also reflects what is most recently published, as two of the works were published within the last three years, and also serves as a sample of *beur* literature that engages themes of family and gender in its content.

So how is the *beur* label connected to these works? Although the term itself is not a central theme or common occurrence in the works, it describes the phenomenon that is central to each of the works – in-between space between two cultures that do not fully accept the children of North African immigrants in France. In the preamble of her book, *Fictions de l'intégration: Du mot beur à la politique de la mémoire*, Sylvie Durmelat analyzes *beur* as a term by saying, "Selon la doxa, le mot *beur*, verlan d'arabe, désigne un groupe de personnes d'origine maghrébine, plus précisément issues de l'immigration maghrébine, nées ou ayant grandi en France, et ayant fait leur apprentissage scolaire en France" (33). Here, she provides the straightforward definition of what the word *beur* entails, yet the term and how it is used as a label has become contested and politicized, given the socio-political context of immigration in

France as demonstrated by Kleppinger's previously mentioned analysis and problematization of the term. Hargreaves and McKinny also speak to the charged nature of the term: "As a neologism, *Beur* had many advantages. It lacked the pejorative connotations associated with *Arabe*, and enabled its users to speak of themselves without having to choose between one of the ready-made national or quasi-national identities (French or Arab/Algerian) constantly proffered to them". However, they continue on to say, "During the mid-1980s, the term became widely used in the French mass media, leading many young Maghrebis to reject it as a neo-colonial projection" (20).

The linguistic origin of the term is also significant not only in its meaning but in how it is publicly received. *Verlan*, French slang, is formed by creating the inverse of a French word, as seen with how *beur* is *verlan* for *arabe*. Mehta explains how *verlan* also aims to invert the meaning of the word itself:

Resisting stasis in confining paradigms of identity, *verlan* is an attempt to go beyond the literalness of meaning by creative neologisms that expand and extend the limits of academic French and limited paradigms of Frenchness. If the word *Arabe* signifies cultural marginality and represents a justification for Islamophobia, the reversal of the terms into *beur* is an attempt to go beyond colonially determined categorizations by claiming transnationality. (196)

Here, Mehta points out what is essentially the reappropriation and reclaiming of a label via *verlan*. The process through which the term *beur* is realized adds to the politically charged nature of the term, as the term itself is actively fighting back against stereotypes and ways of thinking that dominate opinion in contemporary France. Furthermore, the term does this through the French language itself.

The emergence of the term was made possible because of a gap that existed, between labels of “French” and “Arab” that the descendants of immigrants found themselves in. Not only is it problematic that this gap exists, even more prominently before the creation of the term *beur*, but the terms used to describe this population brought even bigger problems that reflect archaic ideas surrounding otherness:

The fact that until recently the term most often used by the French media to describe sons and daughters of Maghrebian immigrants to France was ‘second generation immigrants’ testifies to the persistent hold of the concept of immigration and foreignness on French culture and politics in discussions of identity and difference. The paradox of calling immigrants those born and brought up in France is exploited by the Beurs themselves, who consistently represent their plight in paradoxical terms of double allegiance and, at the same time, double non belonging. (Wadman 85-86)

Individuals, born and raised in France, are labeled “immigrants” because of their ethnic and cultural origins, which becomes particularly problematic when it comes to issues of citizenship and conceptualizing French nationality and identity, especially in the realm of integration into the French society that they have already been born into. “Bien souvent, le terme intégration n’est pas approprié pour parler des deuxième, troisième, et quatrième générations d’immigrés d’origine nord-africaine car ils sont bien souvent Français et parfaitement intégrés au paysage” (Puig 42). The notion that immigrants should fully integrate, typically meaning an abandonment of their origin culture, into the French society in which they hope to be accepted, is already problematic. This issue becomes even more problematic when the immigrant label is applied to people who are not immigrants themselves and whose identity as French born citizens is thus

removed from them, as they are essentially asked to learn a language and set of cultural and social mores that they are already familiar with.

Azouz Begag delves further into the issue of labeling by saying, “Though born in *metropolitan* France, the children of immigrants are still seen as the children of colonial subjects, as the descendants of ‘natives’ and ‘Muslims’. They are still the ‘they’ whom ‘we’ (Gauls? Descendants of Vercingetorix? Merovingians?) have honored by accepting them into our ‘host society’” (109). By demonstrating the illogical nature of these labels for children of immigrants, Begag shows the larger social problem that the immigrant label creates – the idea that this population, born in France, does not belong there and furthermore, needs to take extra steps in order to be accepted as French. If a term implying that this population is an immigrant population because of their immigrant parents is not appropriate, does the *beur* label more correctly describe this group?

As the term remains ambiguous, Durmelat continues her discussion of the term, pointing out the possible paths for the term as an entity and what it entails:

On pourrait ainsi dire que, au mieux, le mot *beur* ne désigne pas une affirmation identitaire, mais plutôt l’invention d’un concept et d’une communauté problématique dont l’invocation performative met en question la notion même de nation et de communauté. Au pire, il souligne les limites d’une prise de parole qui, ne s’étant pas accompagnée d’une prise de pouvoir, échoue à définir une identité culturelle » (40).

While the term itself continues to be unstandardized in its meanings and uses, the four chosen primary works each demonstrate the struggles and experiences of individuals who find themselves in the third space that *beur* as a term aims to encompass.

Chapter 1

Integration and Engaged Citizenship through an Engaged Literature

When examining a genre of literature whose content is so closely tied to current events, the ongoing struggles of populations from which the authors in this genre hail, it is necessary to examine also the role of the genre and how heavily the sociopolitical aspects of the literature weigh on the genre and how it is defined and categorized. Not only is it important to pose questions about the genre, but also about those that contribute to its canon. Guène's publication of *Kiffe kiffe demain* sparked further interest in *beur* literature and the connection between lived experience and the literature as from an outside angle, she closely resembled the protagonist of *Kiffe kiffe demain*, her first book, as a young *beur* girl living in a Parisian *banlieue*. Guène's sudden success and fame within the field sparked preexisting questions and conversations surrounding the field, and jumpstarted further conversation on the topic.

In several interviews, Faïza Guène speaks on her relationship with her written work and the role that her political voice as a French citizen plays in her literature. While she acknowledges that she does have a voice that is being heard and feels she should use it with purpose, she also refuses to have the role of spokesperson for an entire (diverse) population imposed on her – Maghrebi immigrant families. Thomas cites Guène who says, “I realized something important, which is that not many people from my background, with my social and cultural origins, are represented in the media or have a voice. I got this opportunity, and now I realize I don't have the right to pass it up. It's rare for someone to speak out, especially in a field that's not normally reserved for people like us” (43). Here, she notes the importance of using her voice and exercising her agency, especially as a member of a marginalized group that does not hold a lot of power. She delves into why and how her voice being seen as a representation of this

group becomes a controversial problem. In response to being labeled “a voice for channeling the feelings of a disenfranchised immigrant community in France”, in an interview, Guène says:

‘Unfortunately, second generation immigrants are so under-represented in France that as soon as someone appears on the scene, the media transforms this person into A Leader, A Representative, a Master of Thoughts’ [...] ‘It doesn’t matter who this person is or if this person has something to defend or not; as long as this person can speak, that is enough. As if ONE person could represent all the diversity you have in the *banlieues*! I have always refused this function. But sometimes, there are so many clichés, you feel obligated to give your opinions. But when I do choose to give it, I do it only in my own name.’ (Kelleher 5-6)

Guène carefully navigates this problem concerning her role in the genre, by first recognizing that she has agency that should be exercised, then saying that it is impossible to fill the role others have imposed on her, yet without holding herself back from being one of the many voices of the *beur* community. As Guène states, she cannot be representative of an entire group that has so much diversity because she is just one individual. However, another aspect of her and her success in particular, holds her back from being able to represent the underprivileged and marginalized of the *banlieue*. Hargreaves discusses the ways in which *beur* authors are different from their peers by saying, “Yet to produce literary works capable of attracting commercial publishers, *Beur* writers have necessarily had to exercise quite sophisticated forms of verbal control over the unsettled experiential world in which they have their roots. They tend, therefore, to be among the more successful products of the French educational system, and this makes them in some ways unrepresentative of their peers” (“Beur Fiction” 662).

Again, Guène recognizes her privileged position among her peers, as a published writer, and is able to exercise her agency in her own way in order to write about issues that affect a community of which she is a part. Guène's personal views on her role in the genre do not mean that others who see her work see her role in the same way she does. In the commentary on an interview with Guène, Kelleher writes, "Writing about the trials and tribulations of growing up and living in the Paris *banlieues*, Guènes novels were always going to be about people and their humanity in difficult physical and social environments, the strengths and weaknesses, the despair and hope" (5). While it's true that both of Guènes novels that are included in this study do have those themes, the language used here to talk about Guène and her writing limit her work, as if this is all she would write about because she focuses on *beur* issues and contexts in her fiction. Kleppinger, when analyzing *Kiffe kiffe demain* and its immediate success, says, "it presented a more optimistic and less dramatic vision of life as a young girl of North African heritage in a Parisian *banlieue*. In a challenging twist for Guène, her publisher and the media jumped on *Kiffe kiffe demain* because it can be read as an intervention in a highly charged social space, but one that Guène had no interest in addressing" (*Branding the 'Beur' Author* 206). In response to the public assuming that the connection between Doria, *Kiffe kiffe demain*'s protagonist, and Guène herself, was stronger than it was, "Guène repeatedly insists that the only relationship between her own life and her character Doria is that they share a general set of circumstances" (*Branding the 'Beur' Author* 211). Kleppinger continues, "...her use of her background is no different from any other author's use of familiar settings and people..." (*Branding the 'Beur' Author* 211). Here, Kleppinger is shooting down the assumption that was made surrounding the publication of *Kiffe kiffe demain* that Guène was using this piece to make a political statement. By imposing this political element on her work, the media disregards any stylistic and artistic choices that Guène

made, turning the entirety of her work into a politically charged way outlet for Guène's personal agency and voice. While Guène was intentional about her writing and did want to use her writing as a way to express sides of living in the *banlieue* that were not previously shown in the media, it is unfair to assume that her fictive novel was entirely motivated by the desire to exercise political agency. In fact, Thomas writes:

...one should stress that Guène's work does not disguise the harsh realities associated with living in underprivileged communities in France. On the contrary, an equilibrium is achieved between an engagement with social realities and an insistence upon the quotidian aspect of family living, along with the various trials and tribulations, joys and disappointments associated with this life" (44).

Here, Thomas points to two major aspects of Guène's literature. First, one of the many reasons *Kiffe kiffe demain* was so successful, was because of the refreshing view it provided on life in the *banlieue*. Second, the major themes of her work are not political, but rather draw on the political climate of France and the situation that *beur* communities find themselves in and use these as the backdrop for narratives that focus on family life. These aspects will be discussed further on in the chapter.

Returning to the political category that is imposed on her work, the imposition happens in part because she has a different background than writers who might be considered as *français de souche*. Because her difference is visible, and it's known that she grew up in the *banlieue* herself, it is assumed that she has something to say about it. Again, she does engage these themes, yet it is important to not dismiss that her novel was an artistic expression, and that other political motivations for writing should not be projected onto her as a writer. When problematizing the term *beur* when used to describe the genre of literature and drawing parallels between the term

and the writers who contribute to the genre, Kleppinger writes, “De toute évidence, la notion de ‘roman beur’ engendre des problèmes à plusieurs niveaux: d’abord, faut-il *être* beur pour écrire un ‘roman beur’? Cette question entraîne le problème de la réception, car l’existence même de cette étiquette montre à quel point l’auteur d’origine beure est déjà marqué, aux yeux du critique, par son héritage” (“L’invention du roman beur” 23). The main question that these issues, shown by Guène and the reception of her work, boil down to is: Is *beur* literature political by nature? (Kleppinger, “L’invention du roman beur” 29). If so, what is the role of the author? Does the author become a political agent? What is the intended audience? Does the literature exist to make a statement? Guène’s responses to these questions suggest that at least for her and her literature, the answer is no. However, how the literature is received by the public, also plays a significant role. The relationship between the literature itself, and the larger themes concerning contemporary society and politics that the literature engages, is essential to examine. By recognizing her powerful position as a published *beur* writer, who now has a platform that she can use to publicly express her voice, Guène is in some ways inspiring a call to action, just as Doria does, which will be further discussed later in the chapter. Because of this, a major theme that is closely connected with not only themes found in the literature, but the recurring phenomenon of the *beur* genre categorized as being politically motivated, is that of engaged citizenship.

Because they actively involve contemporary issues concerning integration, assimilation, and the general context of *beur* communities in contemporary France, the themes and content of *beur* literature, particularly of the four works chosen for this analysis, are socially engaged, regardless of the intention of the author. Engaged literature connects to the idea of engaged citizenship as the issues of citizenship and voting play a significant role in the politically charged

discussion manifested in the works. While Guène maintains that her works in their entirety are not solely political statements, it is difficult to separate artistic choice and writing style from what is politically charged when issues such as voting are explicitly discussed.

The notion of citizenship is an important one to consider when analyzing the complex spheres in which second-generation French immigrants live. As descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb, individuals ascribed to the *beur* category confront issues of identity, belonging, and finding a sense of home. Having been born in France, they are French citizens who grew up with French language and culture, despite the added influence of a *culture d'origine* at home. However, issues of integration and assimilation are still raised, albeit problematically. Begag dissects the ways in which integration is problematic for the *beur* generation:

There is now an entire generation for whom the word *integration* evokes ambiguity, trickery, and disillusionment. The word now crackles provocatively and aggressively in the ears of young ethnics. *Integrated?* They already are! They are a part of French society. They were born into it! They are French *by birth* but *not recognized* as such” (91).

Hargreaves also calls into question the notion of integration in the context of *beur* individuals:

“...it was assumed that their children, socialized from birth in France, would be sufficiently French in outlook to justify the automatic acquisition of citizenship on reaching adulthood. These and many other related assumptions have been called into question in recent years” (*Immigration* 31). While integration and assimilation have different meanings and connotations, Hargreaves continues and articulates that for the *beur* generation, being born in France is simply not enough to be considered French, and that “Assimilation tends to imply not only acculturation but also the complete abandonment of minority cultural norms” (*Immigration* 34).

When he says, “After twenty years of the banlieues and of the vicissitudes of ‘integration’ policy, it is clear that France has not lived up to expectations. The social cost of this accumulation of political errors is very considerable, and we are still paying the price of it”, Begag essentially pins the blame on France, and having the state and its policies as responsible for the problem that *beur* individuals and communities find themselves in concerning their position as French people. However, Begag does not victimize those in marginalized positions. Rather, he encourages them to use the agency they do have in order to act on their marginality and enact change. He writes, “We urgently need to invent a new and more modern notion of social recognition, new forms of participatory democracy, and new citizen-ambassadors for equal opportunities” (92). In saying this, Begag places responsibility on both individuals in marginalized positions as well as the state of France for having elected officials that can more widely represent France’s population. The theme of encouraging engaged citizenship continues in his text: “Public institutions are not the only ones to blame for these tensions. Young ethnics also need to take responsibility as individuals. They must *start to move*” (124). This call to action relates to Doria’s commentary on voting in *Kiffe kiffe demain*.

These call to actions however are not sufficient to find resolution. Despite facing difficulty with being accepted as French in the social context, their citizenship, and thus French status as defined by the law, affords them agency that they can exercise through voting. Yet their right to vote as French citizens is not sufficient for the fight to raise themselves and their *beur* communities out of marginalization. Regardless of this ability to exercise agency, there continues to be a theme of marginalization among *beur* individuals as shown by recurring themes of discrimination, xenophobia, and being categorized as the “other”. The issues of voting, citizenship, and political engagement primarily comes up in two of the novels, *Kiffe kiffe demain*,

and *Désintégration*, which each take different stances on the issue. In her novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Faiza Guène uses the characters to show the importance of solidarity and community and how these aspects of life in the projects can result in taking action towards bettering the experience of Maghrebi immigrants in France. Even though she is only fifteen years old, *Kiffe kiffe demain*'s protagonist and narrator, Doria, makes intentional comments about the issue of voting, why it's important, and why she will vote when she is old enough. Her thought process after a conversation with Nabil based on a school assignment shows that she not only feels strongly about voting, but she also understands why there is lower voter participation among Maghrebi populations in France's *banlieues*. She thinks back to Nabil's point that:

...un mec de la cité du Paradis qui ne va plus à l'école depuis longtemps, qui n'arrive pas à trouver du boulot, dont les parents ne travaillent pas et qui partage sa chambre avec ses quatre petits frères, 'qu'est-ce qu'il en a à foutre de voter?' Il a raison Nabil. Le type doit déjà se battre pour survivre au quotidien, alors son devoir de citoyen... Si la situation s'améliorait pour lui, il pourrait avoir envie de se bouger et de voter. Et plus, je vois pas très bien par qui il pourrait se sentir représenté. (Guène, *Kiffe* 97)

This passage demonstrates two key things: the primary concern of those in the *banlieue* which is survival and getting by on a financial level, and the fact that there is no one to vote for that would represent well the needs of the *beur* and *banlieue* communities. Hargreaves speaks on this issue of representation and lack of active political engagement and the resulting cycle:

While concentrations of postcolonial minorities in the *banlieues* might potentially give them considerable clout at the local level, in practice, their low rates of electoral registration and voter participation have contributed to their political

marginalization. They are even more marginalized in national politics, where electoral calculations focus overwhelmingly on the majority ethnic vote. (“Empty Promises” 109)

Doria continues by saying “Je me dis que c’est peut-être pour ça que les cites sont laissées à l’abandon, parce que ici peu de gens votent” in reference to the idea that abstention is a problem in the *banlieue* (Guène, *Kiffe* 97). As she internally analyses these issues, thinking about her surroundings and how she sees people reacting to them, she asserts herself and says, “Moi, à dix-huit ans, j’irai voter. Ici, on n’a jamais la parole. Alors, quand on nous la donne, il faut la prendre” (Guène, *Kiffe* 98). Here, Guène uses Doria as a tool to express a call to action, specifically on the matter of voting and engaged citizenship. While this aspect of the novel does not define Guène’s entire work as being a political statement, the inclusion of the notion of voting and its importance is significant and holds weight because of the context of the narrative.

A common theme in *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* as well as in *Désintégration* by Ahmed Djouder is that while beur individuals do have the legal right to vote as defined by their citizenship, there are not government officials who represent their voice and therefore, voting does not in fact allow them to exercise a form of their agency that would enact change or give power to their voice. We see Doria, a 15-year-old, however, see the value in voting as she expresses that when she is old enough, she is going to vote and exercise her right and privilege to do so as a French citizen. Guène uses Doria in order to make this point to show that Maghrebi immigrants, like Doria’s mom and her co-workers, as well as their descendants, are able to take action which does ultimately lead to concrete change, as shown by the effects of the hotel strike. The example of the hotel strike shows the feminine power in *Kiffe kiffe demain* and how women are portrayed as doers that take action to fix their present situation, yet it also shows that having the means to do

something is also necessary. Yasmina's coworkers, who went on strike when Yasmina could not afford to, were successful in their efforts. Doria recounts hearing of this news, which came about after Yasmina stopped working at the hotel, and says:

Pour les bonnes nouvelles, je suis tombée sur un reportage du journal régional de France 3 l'autre soir et qui je vois à l'écran toute pimpante avec un boubou rose ? Fatouma Konaré, l'ancienne collègue de ma mère au Formule 1 de Bagnolet. Y avait marqué son nom dans le reportage avec en dessous : 'Déléguée syndicale'. Le commentaire disait que les filles avaient gagné la lutte. Leurs revendications seraient entendues prochainement. Même les salariés qui ont été licenciés pendant la période de grève ou ceux qui sont partis sans indemnités verront ces préjudices réparés. Ça veut dire aussi que Maman va toucher des sous, même si elle était pas gréviste ? (Guène, *Kiffe* 172)

Le Breton, when analyzing this piece of *Kiffe kiffe demain*'s narrative, brings up the idea of struggle, courage, and the role that women occupy in the midst of enacting change. (111). She goes on to further analyze the role of Fatouma Konaré in Doria's life, saying that she becomes a role model for her, as the organizer of the strike. Fatouma serves as an example that shows actual change can come about as a result of taking action. Fatouma's significance in the narrative, despite her not being a main character, is shown by the fact that she is the sole character whose last name is given in the narrative (Le Breton 112).

Despite the success that results from the hotel strike, Yasmina's part in this piece of the narrative relates back to Djouder's point in *Désintégration* that political engagement is not always feasible when other, more pressing obligations must take precedence. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Doria says, "Maman m'a dit qu'elle aurait bien aimé faire la grève avec les autres filles

de l'hôtel mais qu'elle peut pas. Fatouma et les autres, elles ont leur mari qui les aide, mais nous, on est toutes seules" (Guène, *Kiffe* 63). The injustices and discrimination that Yasmina, Doria's mom, faced at the hotel where she worked, elicited action resulting in the strike, yet Yasmina could not afford to partake because otherwise she would have no source of income. The connection that this part of the narrative has to the point that Djouder makes reflects the complex nature of these issues, especially in the context of actual situations, and not just broadly discussed abstract themes. This complexity points to the idea that while it is binaries that separate people and create these problems in the first place, none of these issues are clearly dichotomized in practice, as there are other factors and nuances that play a role, such as feasibility.

We see themes that are both similar and different in Djouder's *Désintégration*. While Djouder's narrator also highlights points of feeling unrepresented and having daily life responsibilities that take precedence over living out and acting on engaged citizenship, both of which Doria mentions; there is no optimistic follow-up explaining that this is an opportunity for young people to use their voice and exercise their agency, as we see Doria do. One of the main points of *Désintégration* is the idea that integration, assimilation, and engaged citizenship are not viable options for *beur* individuals and their immigrant parents as they are preoccupied with the stresses and duties of daily life as marginalized individuals. While language barriers and cultural differences that are obstacles for immigrants in France more concretely stand in the way of integration into French society as the French desire, the children of immigrants who are born and raised in France and go through the French school system do not face these obstacles, as French is their language and culture. Djouder also makes the point throughout his book that this should mean that *beur* individuals should not have any need to integrate, as they are already woven into

French society by nature. Yet this ideal is not realized in real life, and *beur* populations still find themselves struggling with government representation and engaged citizenship. A key difference between *Désintégration* and *Kiffe kiffe demain* is that while they both engage similar themes of voting and integration and why abstention is a rampant problem in the *banlieue*, *Kiffe kiffe demain* takes a positive tone and through Doria, encourages action when *Désintégration* does not.

While immigrant parents and their struggles are a key part of *Désintégration*, in a more explicit way than in the other works, the points that Djouder makes concerning immigrants and their lack of political participation sheds light on the climate in which Maghrebi population in general finds itself. This lack of participation and agency on the part of immigrant parents also affects their children, as they are not given examples of what it looks like to use their voice and exercise their right to vote. Djouder makes this point by first addressing the issue of poverty. We see this in particular two times in *Désintégration*: “La pauvre est trop concerné par lui-même et trop préoccupé par ses besoins vitaux” (78-79). This statement is given more context later on in the book when Djouder writes, “Quand on est pauvre et ignorant, on choisit d’abord de résoudre le premier problème: la pauvreté. C’est la base” (109). This connects back to and reaffirms what Doria says of her conversation with Nabil surrounding the issue of voting in *Kiffe kiffe demain* and why abstention is a problem.

While Djouder’s work sheds light on the harsh realities of being of Maghrebi descent in France, especially when having been born in France yet not having a complete claim of French identity, Guène uses Doria’s age and change in outlook over the course of the narrative to provide optimism to the circumstances. When analyzing the previously mentioned passage of *Kiffe kiffe demain* where Doria shares her thoughts on voting, abstention, and her own hopes to

vote and be an active citizen when she is of age, Le Breton says that Doria's thoughts here show "une fois dans la citoyenneté, où la mobilisation et la conscience civique des individus permettent de faire changer la vision ancrée dans l'imaginaire national, pour que tous les habitants de France sans discrimination soient reconnus égaux de droit" (113). She continues to say, "Le personnage devient acteur social, citoyen engagé. Les personnages de Guène s'opposent ainsi au statisme et à la victimisation qui avaient pu gouverner nombre des romans 'beurs' des débuts" (113). As previously mentioned in the context of voting issues, this is a defining difference between the two works and how they approach the larger issue of engaged citizenship stemming from the problematic of integration. While Guène's characters do not submit to integration policies and ideals, they actively strive to make their place in French society. We see the opposite in *Désintégration*:

Nous n'attendons pas avec une impatience feinte que vous nous acceptiez. Votre 'intégration' est bien hilarante. Ce mot est moche. Nous n'en voulons pas. On ne doit pas s'intégrer. On ne s'intégrera pas. On attendra que vous réagissiez, que vous nous voyiez comme n'importe quelle autre personne, comme n'importe quel étranger, n'importe quel Français. (Djouder 92)

This passage in particular, shows the ways in which this text is concerning in how it approaches the issue of integration, especially in comparison with the other primary works. As the narrator expresses what they as a collective narrator and *beur* community, we see that what they ask is too idealistic and is not feasible in the confines of how French society is presently constructed. While for many individuals in France, being seen as any other French person without having to put in extra efforts to integrate is the ideal, the narrator is basing what they ask of the French *vous* category off of assumptions that cannot be made. The last line of the passage is an example

of such an assumption, as it puts both the broad category of foreigners and French people on same level, which is not reflected in the reality of French society. This passage highlights the resistance against integration, which is also the reason for the work's title. This resistance is felt throughout the text, particularly through the divisive categories of *nous* and *vous* that are used throughout the work. Begag defines integration as "finding a place in the system" (40).

Following this definition, if one doesn't integrate, then arguably, one is not in the realm of the system. The problematic nature of the text and the argument it extends comes down to the idea that the narrator is suggesting that the change they want to enact will come about by actively separating themselves from the system in which the change needs to happen. Because this isn't feasible and the narrator then is found focusing on arguing the issue, rather than finding ways to use what power and agency they do have to act on their marginality, the narrator is essentially asking for something to happen that is not in accordance with how French sees its constituents while actively pushing away any entrance into French society that would allow them to better use their agency. This is not to say that they should submit to French desires of integration of immigrant families, but that engaged citizenship and thus action, are necessary. Problems from this work also stem from the confusing nature of the language used to describe *beur* communities, which is inherently French on a legal level, in comparison to *français de souche* communities.

This problem however speaks to the complex and confused nature of the binary that exists in defining those of French origin and those of Maghrebi origin. Djouder's narrator writes, "Nous n'avons pas une vraie place dans ce pays. Nos parents non plus" (112). While this statement makes sense in the context of the book, on a broader scale, it does not make sense that a French-born French citizen would not have a place in his own country. However, this statement that the narrator makes reflects the reality of living in the middle of the binary that separates France and

the Maghreb, and by extension, the people and communities that hail from those places and bring their culture with them.

As discussed, in his work, *Désintégration*, Djouder counters Guène's point of the importance of taking control of one's agency in order to take action. His language and use of "nous" and "vous" in a divisive and segregating does not allow for open dialogue and the possibility of resolution, despite the harsh conditions under which *beur* and immigrant communities exist in contemporary France because of how they are seen by others. This segregating language in conjunction with a tone that is both defensive and offensive against the French limits the narrator's view, regardless of the validity of the points the narrator makes. For example, we see the narrator say, "Entre nous, les Français aiment ce mot, 'intégration', car il leur donne l'impression qu'ils peuvent nous domestiquer. Mais savez-vous que nous ne sommes pas des animaux sauvages ?" (Djouder 91). Although this section shows a switch in pronouns, using *ils* to describe the French rather than *vous*, the same ideas, apply. Furthermore, the analogy of the domestication of wild animals used here, and the otherness that is therefore implied, relates to the almost sarcastic comparison that Durmelat makes between *Beurs* in France and a newly discovered tribe: "La découverte de l'existence des *Beurs* en France est comparable à celle d'un nouveau territoire, d'une nouvelle tribu que l'on s'empresse de nommer, en oubliant au passage qu'ils sont français" (37). While she says this in the context of problematizing the term *beur*, suggesting that the term is unnecessary as it is describing a population that is already defined as "French", the parallel that she draws between conceptualizing *Beurs* in France and a new tribe, speaks to the imposed alterity that is found in Djouder's narrator's statement.

A central point in Djouder's work is the idea of institutionalized discrimination, and that the colonial history between the Maghreb and France has lasting effects on *beur* individuals,

making it difficult to use whatever agency they do have as French citizens and residents. The language that is used in the text however, suggests that the blame should be placed on French people themselves, rather than the state of France. By enforcing an “us vs. them” type dialectic with the uses of these pronouns to categories whole populations of people, the narrator persists in holding onto a divisive and segregating view of contemporary France.

Both the main point and problems of the divisive nature of Djouder’s use of “nous” and “vous” to differentiate between the *beur* and the *français de souche* are conveyed in Djouder’s response to the rhetorical question of why the children of Maghrebi immigrants were not in Algeria for its reconstruction. He writes, “Vous savez pourquoi nous n’y étions pas? Parce que nous sommes français” (84). The binary and dichotomy of *nous* and *vous* is blurred here as the proponent of the *nous* label has now identified as the thing that defines who is *vous*, essentially, the “Other” in contrast to the *beur*. The issue presented in this part of the book showcases several problems with the binary of *nous* versus *vous*. The narrator’s response to his own rhetorical question shows that the narrator himself, as well as the category of people that he ascribes himself to, take part in both the *nous* group and the *vous* group. While there is still the implicit distinction between him, a French person of Maghrebi origin with immigrant parents, and a French person of French origin, this example shows the ways in which these labels are problematic. This issue of labeling is a recurring theme throughout Djouder’s book, and raises lots of questions about the point of view of the narrator, essentially boiling down to what he wants for the *beur* population in France in terms of recognition as French citizens, as well as how the narrator sees this community in terms of being French.

Physical spaces, social infrastructure, and segregation caused by *banlieues* further complicates and worsens the issues of citizenship and voting that are already rampant among

beur populations because of confused notions of identity and relationship to the state of France. It is important to note, however, that the category of those in the *banlieue* extends beyond the *beur* community, as the *banlieue* exhibits diversity that comprises of multiple ethnic and minority groups. The physical separation of Maghrebi immigrants and populations living in the *banlieue* from the populations of France's city-centers renders the social separation and distance visible and concrete and adds a concrete component to the already existing rifts among populations. Hargreaves quotes Manuel Valls' use of the word "apartheid" to terms of the *banlieues* then continues to say, "But if apartheid is understood in a more literal sense as referring to a situation in which ethnic groups live to a large extent separately from each other, the term is clearly pertinent to relations between the *banlieues* and the rest of French society" ("Empty Promises" 110). It's important to note that the diversity in points of view that exists among *beur* populations, as with any population, extends to what the *banlieues* entail and connote. While this separation is viewed negatively, especially as it drives individuals further away from engaged citizenship and political action, Guène offers a refreshing perspective on ideas of the *banlieue* itself and how she conceptualizes it. In an interview, Guène says, "Je n'ai pas envie de partir maintenant. Si le départ, ça signifie la réussite, ça laisse entendre que rester, c'est l'échec [...] Je ne supporte pas cette vision manichéenne de la banlieue, avec d'un côté les bons, les exceptions placées sur un piédestal et, de l'autre les voyous qu'on condamne" (Thomas 44).

This connects to the idea of images of France from the media and the mostly negative portrayal of the *banlieue*, which further perpetuates negative stereotypes and dichotomies surrounding how the *banlieue* is thought of and conceptualized, creating a cycle. When analyzing the *HLM* and its role in *Kiffe kiffe demain* Mehta says, "These sites of exclusion and

seclusion remain hidden from tourist eyes through spatial demarcations maintained by an inferior/superior, rich/poor, civilized/barbarian colonial binary of imposed deviance in which French civilization upholds its self-purported distinction through the criminalization of its Others” (179). Not only does the notion and reality of *banlieue* living perpetuate the already existing distance between immigrant families and their descendants and their French origin counterparts, but it also is a tangible neo-colonial recreation of the social disparities found among the groups. The physical space of the *banlieue* as well as what it represents reinforces old ideas of colonialism and is also the harsh reality that immigrants face when coming to France in the hopes of escaping the colonial remnants of their home country. Because the *banlieue* is essentially a recreation of the *bled* that immigrants left behind, the role that physical space plays in their immigration experience is convoluted and somewhat of a catch-22: “...the limitations of the ancestral *bled*, or village, inspire the trip to France. However, in France itself these limitations are reactivated within the confining projects as postmodern *bleds*, ensuring that immigrants and their children will never lay claim to the idyllic France reserved for the favored few in power” (Mehta 188). The issue surrounding the *banlieue* and its neo-colonial ties is three fold: it’s a recreation of the *bled* that immigrations sought to escape; it physically separates immigrants and their families from the rest of French society, furthering the separation in society; and it also keeps perpetuates further separation because of the lack of opportunity, and lack of access to opportunity, faced by immigrant families. This connects to the idea that social infrastructure, intended to aid those in marginalized positions, actually results in keeping those individuals in their weakened state, as the social infrastructure seeks to separate those who are marginalized from those who are not. Begag articulates this in saying, “In France specific measures targeting discrimination against specific minorities have the disadvantage of

reinforcing those minorities' social marginalization, if not their ghettoization" (116). In her analysis, Mehta continues by saying, "...the decaying school system and the dilapidated housing projects represent living vestiges of the colonial residue to interrogate France's continued engagement with coloniality and its hypocritical claims to democratic citizenship" (195). Alquier draws a parallel between the idea of ghettoization of the *banlieue* and the genre of literature that stems from it: "Banlieues et banlieusards font partie intégrante de la société française; cependant, un processus de ghettoïsation s'opère et les banlieues sont souvent rejetées à la périphérie du champ littéraire, fonctionnant comme un zone d'étrangéité" (Alquier 453).

Parts of the issue surrounding the *banlieue* connect to the notion of images from the media, both of France and Maghrebi immigrants and their descendants living in France. This new problematic is multifold and also creates a cycle. In the works, we find two sets of media images: images of France that are projected overseas and create the idealistic "French Dream" that immigrants aspire to live and that motivate the emigration to France and the images of the *banlieue* and of Maghrebi immigrants and those of Maghrebi origin living in France that perpetuate the negative stereotypes of Maghrebi immigrants and their descendants. It is important to note that while these idealistic views of immigration to France are presented in the primary works, they are not a representation of what all immigrants experience. Each of the issues being discussed is traced back to the initial desire to emigrate to France, which occurs for several different reasons according to the literature studied. In *Kiffe kiffe* demain, Guène explicitly writes about the preconceived notions that those who immigrated held of France, before actually coming and witnessing first hand what their reality would be with life in the *banlieue*, as a marginalized member of society. Thinking back to the stories she heard of her mother's first moments in France, Doria says, "Ma mère, elle s'imaginait que la France, c'était

comme dans les films en noir et blanc des années soixante” (Guène, *Kiffe* 21). After describing the life that her mother imagined she would live, Doria recounts the reality that Yasmina immediately faced by saying:

Alors quand elle est arrivée avec mon père à Livry-Gargan en février 1984, elle a cru qu'ils avaient pris le mauvais bateau et qu'ils s'étaient trompés de pays. Elle m'a dit que la première chose qu'elle avait faite en arrivant dans ce minuscule F2, c'était de vomir. Je me demande si c'était les effets du mal de mer ou un présage de son avenir dans ce bled. (Guène, *Kiffe* 21)

Mehta describes this phenomenon well when she says that there are “two mutually exclusive realities of France” (174). Further in her article, she says, “The very process of immigration reveals the inherent duplicity of this mediated reality when the protagonist’s parents actually arrive in France” (187). Here, Mehta specifically references Doria’s parents and their immigration experience to highlight the role of images from the media in immigration and how they affect and created a disparity in how a future life in France is perceived versus the reality of being an immigrant in France. This disparity, and the harsh reality that is lived following, sets up the context for the other roles that images from the media have in the *banlieue* and in the representation of individuals of Maghrebi origin in France. This idealistic view of France is shown in Guène’s *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* as well. Miloud, the protagonist’s cousin, who moved to Paris from Algeria by himself as an adult, and his point of view serves as an example: “La France pour Miloud, c’était un rêve. Plus jeune, il ne comprenait pas que Mina pleure à la fin des vacances, lorsque nous devons rentrer à Nice” (Guène, *Un homme* 119).

Hargreaves articulates well the problem of images from the media portraying Maghrebi immigrants in France: “Little is seen of the silent majority of Muslims originating in the former

French colonies of the Maghreb now living peacefully in France” (“Gatekeepers” 88). As with all media images, the portrayal of Maghrebi individuals as well as French citizens of Maghrebi extraction in the media is shown with a bias. While issues of gang violence and drug dealing often come to mind when discussing and analyzing stereotypes generated surrounding the *banlieue* and the social issues that stem from there, other issues concerning women and their role both in France and in ex-colonies are presented in the media in a way that effectively reinforces pre-existing negative stereotypes of North African women as well as constructs new stereotypes. Catherine Raissiguiet problematizes women in the media when she says:

...the French media tend to focus on certain women and certain realities and not others and therefore offer dangerous and reductive constructions of immigrant women. First and foremost, they conflate immigrant women and African women and therefore fail to convey the incredible heterogeneity of backgrounds and lived experiences of immigrant women in France. They also frame certain immigrant women within narratives of victimhood and personal suffering. (78)

While issues concerning gender will specifically be mentioned later on, the role of media here is pertinent to how *beur* individuals, communities, and their experience is constructed.

Images from the media and various roles they play manifest in the works themselves, proving to be important players in the lives of the main characters of several of the works. The works themselves, also serve as mediated images of *beur* experiences. This relates back to the previously discussed elements of Guène’s writing and how her literature has been received.

Thomas continues to discuss the ways in which Guène’s work distinguishes itself:

...other factors – beyond the literary and linguistic qualities of the works themselves – have surely contributed to the interest generated by Guène’s work: a

concerted effort to avoid the kind of *misérabilisme* that has defined so much Beur and banlieue writing; a commitment to accessibility and to the democratization of reading by consciously reaching out to new audiences; an assumption of responsibility concerning the choice of themes and populations represented; and finally an alternative perspective on the cultural and social circumstances of the banlieue. (42)

Thomas demonstrates how Guène's work in itself strives to change the vision of the *banlieue* and of *beur* communities. Images from the media are also seen in the works and play significant roles in many of the main characters, proving to be forms of escape and mediators between characters. These examples show a different side of media images, and the ways in which they help *beur* individuals with an established life in France as French people of Maghrebi origin, as well as their immigrant parents. The narrator of *Désintégration* describes the positive role of television, and in turn the negative or missing role of other things such as social infrastructure, in their lives. He says "Heureusement, notre grand amie vient nous sauver du naufrage absolu. La télévision est cette grande amie. La télévision a une place centrale dans nos univers" (Djouder 55). The role of images from the media, in this example, television, comes down to the idea of escape. After the narrator makes this statement about television, he goes into the routine involving the TV and the various members of his family, recounting the ritual of watching cartoons after school, how the father would take charge of the remote control, and the kinds of channels that the grandfather would put on. Not only does the TV act as another agent in a sense, as the viewers become a kind of interlocutor of the media, but the TV provides a sense of normalcy and routine within the family structure. However, as the narrator continues to discuss the role of the television, the negative underside to the presence of these images from the media is uncovered:

Nous lui devons tout à la télé. Elle est celle qui éduque nos parents, leur montre le monde mieux que nous ne saurions le faire. Ils peuvent voyager, découvrir les autres cultures et surtout connaître le mode de vie du Français et ses mœurs. Ben oui, puisque personne ne leur apprend. Les voisins ne les invitent pas pour l'apéro ou pour un dîner même si, nous, ça ne nous dérange pas d'apporter un petit plat de couscous pendant le ramadan, des gâteaux, un petit tagine. (Djouder 55)

The television, as we see here in *Désintégration*, and in *Kiffe kiffe demain* as well, plays such a significant role in the lives of the protagonists because it is filling a void that arguably should be filled by their peers and French origin counterparts. This void remains unfilled by others, however, because of the marginalized state of the immigrant families, which in turn only reinforces their marginalization. The media, particularly television as in this case, acts as a friend, as the narrator in *Désintégration* says, yet more specifically, a French friend. In the above citation from *Désintégration*, the narrator uses his discussion of the television and the role that it played in their lives to bring up another important point: that they are essentially ignored by the surrounding French community, who, if present and more interactive with them, would be the ones to teach them about French culture, food, and custom.

The role that television plays in Doria's life in *Kiffe kiffe demain* relates to this idea, as Doria establishes television as the mediator between her and the world outside of her:

...s'il nous coupent la télé comme ils nous ont coupé le téléphone, c'est chaud. J'ai que ça...M. Werbert, mon prof de géo de l'année passée, quand on a étudié la période médiévale, il nous a dit que l'église, les dessins de vitraux, c'était la Bible du pauvre, pour les gens qui savaient pas lire. Pour moi, la télé aujourd'hui, c'est le Coran du pauvre. (Guène, *Kiffe* 151)

Television also proves to play a significant role in the relationship between Doria and Yasmina. When talking about the shows that Doria and her mother like to watch together and the conversation that follows, Doria expresses the meaning behind these rituals: “J’aime bien les moments où Maman et moi on a des discussions intéressantes et profondes” (Guène, *Kiffe* 81). In her book, *Branding the ‘Beur’ Author: Minority Writing and The Media in France*, Kathryn Kleppinger analyses the dynamic of the mother-daughter relationship between Yasmina and Doria in Guène’s *Kiffe kiffe demain* in the context of the media and the images that stem from them. Kleppinger makes the connection between the references to media and the relationship between Doria and Yasmina and says, “The two bond over French popular culture: Yasmina never misses her favourite soap operas, while Doria knows all of the prime-time culture programmes” (*Branding the ‘Beur’ Author* 206). Relating back to Doria’s parallel between television and stained glass windows, Doria often mentions watching TV, as well as reading books, throughout the novel as she keeps to herself and uses the media as an escape just like the narrator of *Désintégration*.

Chapter 2

Cultural Binaries and How They Affect Family Relationships and Structure

In his book, *Immigration, 'race', and ethnicity in contemporary France*, Hargreaves says, “For young people born and brought up in France, resettlement in the ‘home country’ would not in fact be a ‘return’ at all, but an act of emigration tearing them away from their deepest roots” when speaking of struggles surrounding identity for children in Maghrebi immigrant families (133). An important point that Hargreaves makes here is that these people, whom the term *beur* is meant to describe, are French citizens whose homeland is France, despite the origin culture of their parents. Unlike their parents, children of Maghrebi immigrants may not claim the Maghreb as their home as the only connection they have to North African countries is their parents who bring North African culture into the home. This theme is found in several of the primary works of my study, predominantly through interpersonal relationships between parents and their children, which highlight not only the generational difference, yet also the cultural difference, that exists in their relationships. While parent-child relationships and their dynamics are a main recurring and overarching theme of the primary sources, manifesting in each work in different ways, the works show the idea of cultural difference within the family in several other, more specific ways as well. Family structure on a larger scale and the idea of the collective, the relationship between siblings and peers, different ideas of success and what will lead to a happy life, and the relationship between children and their parents’ land and culture of origin are all indicators of the binary that exists for *beur* individuals, putting into a dichotomy their French upbringing and North African culture at home.

Metiba’s *Ma mère et moi* is unique among the four novels under consideration here in that it focuses entirely on the relationship between the unnamed protagonist and his mother. As

mentioned in the introduction, this work distinguishes itself from other primary works for several other reasons as well, including its brevity, the lack of detail in the narrative, and the fact that no characters are *beur* but rather immigrants. The way in which this narrative is recounted and displayed allows for the reader to see a very narrow view of the protagonist's life and his interactions with his mother. While the short snippets of interaction that comprise the narrative seem to remain at surface level, the underlying context of their interaction and relationship allows it to be simultaneously meaningful albeit distant and curt. The narrative takes place when the protagonist returns from France to visit his mother where she lives in Algeria. The majority of the text is repetitive dialogue between the protagonist and his mother, consisting of very short and direct questions of a range of topics to include mundane daily activities to heavier subjects like religion and sexuality.

While much of the text is repetitive in nature as there is a routine to the interaction that the protagonist has with his mother, several key themes can be extrapolated between their scant dialogue and what each of them thinks of the other. Religion, marriage, and homosexuality are three key underlying themes that can be teased out of the mother's relationship with her son, and her words to him. The mother, a devout and practicing Muslim, believes that her son will be happy if he gets married. At first when reading the narrative, it is unclear as to whether or not his mother knows that he is homosexual, and if he knows that she knows, yet as the narrative progresses, it is revealed that she does know. This begs the question of why she continues to talk to him about marriage and his future. Is she in denial? If not, does she think she can change him? These views that she holds about religion and what her son's life should look like, are shown through her short yet charged statements towards him concerning God as well as his identity. Collective group labels and identity markers like the *nous* and *vous* dichotomy that we see

primarily in Djouder's *Désintégration* are also present here, yet in a slightly different context as the entire family unit doesn't exist together in France as is the case with *Désintégration*. The labeling dichotomy found in *Ma mère et moi*, *nous* and *eux* is used to demonstrate membership to a Muslim collective as well as to show how the protagonist's identity has changed since moving to France as we see his mother try to put him in the *nous* category yet sometimes tells him that he is now like *eux*. These labels are primarily used by the mother, as she tries to fit her son neatly in to the clearly defined social categories that she has conceptualized. The *nous* collective term is first used in the book when the mother compares the Jewish Sabbath to Muslim tradition. "Ma mère dit: 'Comme le vendredi, pour nous, les musulmans.' Le 'nous' me dérange. Pour ne pas fâcher ma mère, je dis: 'Oui'" (Metiba 14). Throughout the narrative, there is a change in how the protagonist responds to his mother when she makes statements like this one, that label him as something that he does not identify as. Here, he appeases her and agrees in order to avoid an issue. In other interactions however, he resists what she says. Whether or not he agrees with her to please or stands by his own belief, the interaction always consists of one word responses and never escalates into confrontation or even a discussion.

There is a progression in the narrative of the underlying yet continuous conversation involving the *nous* and *eux* labels. At first, these concepts are introduced by what the mother says to her son. The protagonist recounts this when he says "Ma mère me regarde. Elle dit: 'Tu as changé, tu es devenu comme eux.' Je dis qu'il n'y a pas eux et nous. Je dis qu'il s'agit simplement d'une mère et de son fils. Je dis qu'il s'agit simplement de nous deux. Elle, ma mère, et moi" (Metiba 26). Here, the protagonist makes the effort to break down the walls that his mother has built and reinforced surrounding the categories of "us" and "them". Unlike when she first uses *nous* to describe them both as Muslim, she recognizes that in some senses, he is

different from her, and now likens him to those in the *eux* category. Later on in the narrative, as the conversation about labels continues, the protagonist says, “Ma mère demande pourquoi j’ai du mal avec le ‘nous’ lorsque je parle des musulmans. Ma mère dit que c’est pourtant plus simple, il y a ‘nous’, puis il y a ‘eux’, les autres, les non-musulmans, les juifs par exemple” (Metiba 41). The overarching theme of binaries, spanning the four works, is explicitly shown in the mother’s stance in this example. She sees groups of people as clearly defined, black and white categories. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist makes subtle efforts to break down the figurative barriers that separate people, according to his mother, in turn blurring the binaries and the lines that define them.

Because of the disparity in stance that we see with the protagonist and his mother, there is an element of struggle that is latent in their relationship. While the narrative does not show any moments of confrontation or engaged conversation between the two, the underlying tension is constant and is felt both by the mother and by the protagonist. The protagonist says, “Je me demande si j’ai le droit de de lui demander de changer de regard. Je me demande si je ne perds pas mon temps, si mon projet peut aboutir. Je me demande si un jour, ma mère pourra laisser de côté son ‘nous’, son ‘eux’, son ‘vrai’ et sa conception des hommes et des femmes” (Metiba 44). Soon after the protagonist makes this statement, there is a shift in the narration in which the mother becomes the narrator and we see things from her point of view for a short section. She begins by saying that she cared for seven children, the protagonist, who is 37 years old, being her youngest child, and that despite her being illiterate, it is thank to her that her children are educated and can read and write (Metiba 45). Even though we don’t see the protagonist express his view of his mother and whether or not she will ever put aside her strict views to her, she provides a sort of response in her narration by saying:

Je n'ai pas besoin de comprendre parce que je vois. Je vois celui qui parle, je vois ce qu'il fait, ses manières, sa façon de parler. Je vois son regard. Je suis musulmane et vieille. Celui qui parle a changé. Il ne veut pas se marier, il dit qu'il veut vivre avec un homme qu'il présente comme son ami. Je ne sais ni lire ni écrire, mais je sais qui est celui qui parle. (Metiba 46).

There are several significant things about what the mother says here. She calls her son, "celui qui parle", and therefore labels him as the one that speaks in their relationship. This is significant, mostly because it would appear that both the protagonist and his mother want to have more conversation yet pin the responsibility on the other which does not allow for change. The irony and paradox of the situation is shown when, in a typically short exchange, the protagonist approaches the issue surrounding conversation with his mother: "Je me demande à ma mère pourquoi nous ne parlons pas. Ma mère dit: 'Si, nous parlons'" (Metiba 34). It is these types of exchanges between the two that begin to introduce a problem in their relationship yet with their brevity, immediately shoot down any chance of resolution as the problem is then quickly ignored. Returning to the section in which she narrates, by stating that she is old and Muslim and that he is the one who changed, she is in a way standing by her set beliefs, and pinning some blame on him for defecting from what she had in mind for him and holding onto what the protagonist would say are archaic views of gender roles. Also, she lets the reader know that she knows her son is gay and that he wants to live a life that is outside of the constraints that her views had set out for him. She continues by emphasizing that there is a right and wrong way to do things which culminates in her saying, "Je n'accepterai jamais un autre Dieu, une autre façon de se marier, et je ne veux pas en parler" (Metiba 46). Ultimately, while she is unaccepting of his views and lifestyle, she shows that she still accepts him as her son. "Celui qui parle n'a pas

besoin de parler. Je suis vieille, je veux simplement lui faire à manger, le voir satisfait, et savoir qu'il est en bonne santé. Je suis vieille, je ne peux pas changer d'avis, mais celui qui parle est mon fils et sera toujours mon fils" (Metiba 47). Referencing his mother's limited views and in order to show the ways in which their realities are mutually exclusive, the protagonist says, "Les mots de son langage n'expriment pas ma vie" (Metiba 43). Through these sections of the narrative, it becomes clear that both the protagonist and his mother are stubborn in their own ways, both contributing to the underlying tension that exists in their relationship, in the context of identifying with different cultures and view of the world. When the protagonist speaks about how he wants his mother to put aside the black and white ways she sees men and women as well as North African and French people, he refers to her as a project, as something to work on and fix. However, when we see her point of view as she narrates, she explicitly states that she will never change her views and that she is set in her ways.

This narrative is also unique in that it has a mediating entity that both the protagonist and his mother use in order to communicate with each other about charged topics that are harder to talk about. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist is reading a story aloud to his mother. The main character of the story, Albert Cohen, is a gay Jewish man. This story and Albert Cohen in a sense become a mediator between the protagonist and his mother as he is telling the story of a gay man who is not Muslim, not unlike himself, and his mother provides her thoughts on the gay Jewish man and his lifestyle as a way for her to speak her mind on her son's lifestyle and personal beliefs in a less direct manner. The protagonist also takes advantage of the story of Albert Cohen as a mediator in their communication as he identifies with Albert and uses the content of the story he is reading aloud to broach topics of conversation like religion. We see this play out as the protagonist says:

Ma mère me regarde. Elle profite du passage où la mère d'Albert Cohen questionne son fils sur son rapport à la religion pour savoir si je fais toujours la prière. Je décide de ne pas répondre, pour ne pas fâcher ma mère. Je profite du passage où la mère d'Albert parle du 'vrai Dieu' pour questionner ma mère sur la notion de vrai. J'insiste sur sa relativité. Ma mère dit : 'Non, le vrai Dieu, c'est notre Dieu.' Je dis que ça fonctionne pour tout Dieu. Elle dit : 'Non.' Je dis : 'Si.'

(Metiba 22)

While almost the entirety of the interaction that we see between the protagonist and his mother shows how they see the same things and situations differently, one example from the text in particular shows the distance in their relationship that is created by cultural difference once the protagonist moves to France and settles there. Thinking back to a memory of his mother visiting him in France, the narrator and protagonist recounts, "Je me souviens du jour où ma mère est venue se plaindre d'une femme qui l'avait regardée avec mépris. Ça se passe chez moi, en France. Ma mère parle de racisme, je ne la crois pas, je pense qu'elle imagine" (Metiba 33). This anecdote is significant for several reasons. As previously mentioned, this work differs from the other three in that the protagonist himself is the immigrant, not *beur* and his family remains in Algeria. As a result, the cultural and generational difference that exists in his relationship with his mother is not something that he grew up with as is the case for characters in the other works. However, parallels can still be drawn between the experiences of the protagonist of this narrative and the characters of other works that show the immigrant family, with children having grown up in France, rather than immigrant individuals. Several times throughout the narrative, the protagonist's mother makes note of the change that she sees has happened in him since he moved to France. The mother's experience with this other woman when she went to France to visit her

son is seen very differently by the protagonist and his mother, and they disagree on whether or not the other woman was being racist. This difference in perspective engages other concepts surrounding integration into French culture. More complex nuances of the relationship between the protagonist and his mother and how France and immigration play a role in their relationship are also shown through their disagreement. We learn later in the narrative that his mother actually immigrated to France yet returned to Algeria before the protagonist was born, so she is not unfamiliar with what it is like to be a Maghrebi immigrant in France. Her life as an Algerian woman, having had a difficult immigration experience in France and his life, as an Algerian man who has settled in France with no indication of having a negative experience there, shapes how each of them see others, especially in such a charged context, where racism is called into question. While it would be too essentializing to say that he does not see racism in the interaction between the woman and his mother because it could be assumed that he has more or less assimilated to French society to some degree, his mother's experience is just another example of the ways in which he and his mother differ. Some of these differences are rooted in the cultural distance that was created when he relocated to France. Others differences, like his homosexuality, are not. However, his being influenced by French culture and society, as well as the distance from his mother who stayed in Algeria, certainly could have played a significant role in how he lives out his sexuality and actively resists marriage with a woman. Given the brevity of this work and the lack of information given of the two main characters, particularly on their history and relationship prior to the visit that is recounted in the narrative, this anecdote proves significant as it is an indicator of nuances of their relationship that are not otherwise discussed in the text. How they see this one situation differently is a reflection of larger scale differences in how they view the world and their relationship with each other that create more distance between

them. Returning to the notion of immigration, the protagonist and his mother, each had varying experiences of going to France. While the protagonist is not *beur* and did not grow up in France with his family, parallels can be made between themes in this work and themes of the works surrounding *beur* children as the difference in experience in France, although they happened at different points in time, can be compared to how parents and children have difference experiences of France even while existing there together as a family.

The cultural difference that can be seen in immigrant families between immigrant parents and their French-born children is particularly dominant in Guène's *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* through the character Dounia, and her relationship with and eventual estrangement from her parents. The tension that exists between Dounia and her parents is apparent from the start of the narrative, as told by Mourad, Dounia's younger brother and the narrator of the novel. The difference in views between Dounia, the eldest of three siblings, who yearns for the upbringing that she sees her white French counterparts having, and her Algerian immigrant parents, leads to conflict, especially with her mother, and the eventual falling out as Dounia decides to leave the family and consequently does not see or talk to them for the next ten years. These conflicts are first made apparent in the novel when Dounia compares her experience to that of her best friend Julie, and thus makes comparisons between her parents and Julie's parents. Hargreaves speaks to the cultural bind at the base of this conflict by saying:

As the children of migrants, the *Beurs* are heirs to a dual cultural heritage. At home, their Muslim parents do their best to transmit to their children the language and religion transported with them from North Africa. But outside the home, these youngsters are immersed in the culture of France, notably through the secular education dispensed by state schools. Through the mass media, particularly

television, French influences penetrate into the home itself. These cultural strands often fit uncomfortably together and it is no easy task for youths from immigrant backgrounds to reconcile them in a harmonious whole. (“Beur Fiction” 661)

While the conflicting spheres of influence can manifest through the media as Hargreaves says, in the case of Dounia in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, Julie is the main representation of the French influence in Dounia’s life. It is her presence that instigates Dounia’s actions which are perceived, especially by her mother, as her wanting to be in a French family. Her mother expresses this by saying, “‘J’ai tout fait pour rendre mes enfants heureux! Son problème, c’est qu’elle aurait voulu naître dans une autre famille! Elle a toujours envié les autres! Elle aurait aimé être une Française! Voilà la vérité!’” (Guène, *Un homme* 26). Mourad recounts memories of their father asking Dounia where she was when coming home late and telling her that he would teach her to respect him. Mourad quotes his father as having said, “‘Tu crois que tu t’appelles Christine?!’” as a way to suggest that she was acting in a way that would only be appropriate if she was in a French family (13). At this point, Julie Guérin, Dounia’s best friend during adolescence is brought up. Mourad recounts, “‘C’est Julie qui a enclenché le processus psychologique de ‘Christinisation’ de ma sœur’” (15). The introduction of Julie’s influence in Dounia’s life, representative of a larger societal influence outside of the Maghrebi culture in the home, blurs the binary of culture that is commonly found in immigrant families with *beur* children, especially as shown through these works. Even though French influence outside of the home and the influence of the immigrant parents’ origin culture at home are dichotomized, boundaries dictating where these influences exist arguably do not exist in the first place. This problematizes the cultural binary as there is no clean line between the two spheres of influence and their respective authorities in the home of an immigrant family in France. In turn, a cultural problem that presents itself as a mutually

exclusive binary, is not really a binary in reality at all. This point is made clear as Dounia's life at home is a constant struggle between the two spheres of influence in which she finds herself. While Mourad and his other older sister, Mina, are also caught in the space between their culture at home and the culture they see outside of the home with their friends and classmates, Dounia's life serves as the culminating example of the extent to which this cultural binary is blurred, by conflicting spheres of influence, and its effects on familial relationships. While Julie's influence on Dounia set things in motion according to Mourad, it is Dounia's views on marriage, her future, and what success looks like, that maintain the rift between her and her parents, a rift which leads to complete estrangement and remaining tension on both ends during the time of estrangement and complete lack of communication. During the ten years when Dounia has no contact with her family, she is even more heavily influenced by French culture and society, which leads to more confusion and pain when she is eventually reunited with Mourad, who sees her as brainwashed by French society, even though he has grown up in France this entire time as well. During the ten years of separation, Dounia morphs her political views and lifestyle to match more closely those of French nationalists. She effectively integrates further into the French society into which she was already born. While she was born into French society as a French citizen, the culture of her parents and the influence that it had over her hindered her from integrating into French society the way that her now French peers would want. During the estrangement, she was entirely influenced by the French social sphere, and no longer had to juggle that outer sphere along with the inner sphere of influence of her parents and their origin culture. This causes even more distance and dissonance with her parents when they begin to see bits and pieces of each other's lives through Mourad after ten years, as compared to the already existing rift that separated Dounia from her family before she left. This widened rift causes

dissonance with her siblings as well. This is significant because although Mourad and Mina were not as heavily influenced by French culture the way that Dounia was in her time away from the family because of the lack of Maghrebi influence in her life, all three of them grew up having to struggle in navigating living in the in-between space of which their home was comprised.

Because they grew up together, Mourad and Mina understand more the struggle of existing in that in-between space as compared to their parents, who were primarily in the space of Maghrebi culture, even as residents in France.

While *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* highlights *beur* issues and a type of *beur* experience, it also tackles issues concerning gender and gender roles, family, and human emotion, showing that while Guène uses an Algerian immigrant family in France as the backdrop and context for the narrative, the main themes of the narrative are those of the human condition. Comparison between Dounia and Mina was prevalent throughout their upbringing. When Dounia sees that Mina did in fact follow the path their mother intended for both of them, she provides more of her thoughts and views of prescribed gender roles and the women filling a domestic role. We see Mourad tell his sister, “...se caser avec un mec de la même origine que toi, avec les mêmes références, les mêmes codes, la même éducation, dans un couple, ça prive de beaucoup d’enrichissement”, to which she responds, “Ou pas. Ça prive peut-être de beaucoup d’emmerdements” (Guène, *Uh homme* 171). Gender roles and how they are viewed by each of the characters, was a large cause of the disagreement and conflict that existed in the relationship between Dounia and her Mother. While issues of gender are specifically discussed in the following chapter, disagreements based on gender roles highlight some of the major problems that Dounia and her mother had. Even after Dounia’s parting from the family, their mother uses

her as an example of what she did not want in a daughter, and references things from her childhood:

Après le départ de Dounia, ma mère, qui avait longtemps cherché à masquer son chagrin, disait : ‘Elle est folle de toute façon ! Je n’arrive pas à croire qu’elle est sortie de mon ventre ! Tu te souviens, Mina ? Elle a essayé de te brûler vive au mariage de ta tante Asma !’ Ou alors : ‘Je savais que je ne pouvais pas faire confiance à une fille qui envoie en crapaud à la figure de sa sœur !’ (Guène, *Un homme* 91-92)

Dounia, who left the family at 20 years old, is still remembered by her family for where she faulted. There are two components to this: her parents feel responsible on some level and are pained by the loss of their daughter, yet at the same time, are still struggling to deal with how they brought up a daughter who held beliefs and acted in a way that was so different from what they expected. While the negative comments stem primarily from the mother, who is by nature very dramatic as is seen throughout the narrative, we also see the ways in which the father deals with the loss of Dounia. While his thoughts on the matter are much more reserved and stoic, it is clear through several interactions with Mourad that above all, he loves his daughter. One of the rare times the father speaks of Dounia after she leaves, he says, “‘De toute façon, c’est comme si elle était morte pour moi...’” (52). Even though the statement carries a lot of weight as the father says that his daughter is dead to him, it’s clear in context that in saying so, he is trying to deflect his pain. When Dounia left with Daniel, a colleague from her law office, her father warned that if she left, that she would never be welcome in their family again. At the end of a dramatic scene in which the family sees Daniel in his car, wearing expensive clothes and accessories, waiting for Dounia who has already packed her bags, her father says, “‘Si tu sors de

cette maison, tu ne reviens pas” (29). Up until this line, her father had not said anything, and was silent while Dounia’s mother did the talking. Dounia replies by saying, ““De toute façon, entre vous et Daniel, j’ai choisi, c’est lui!”” (29). One could assume that watching his daughter persist in leaving after such an ultimatum caused immense emotional distress for the father, especially as we later learn that the mother was the reason Dounia left. While the father deals with his pain in such a way, by deflecting it and brushing it off, later events in the narrative show that his love for her never waned and that despite the differences that the parents had with Dounia, the importance of family reigns.

Following Dounia’s departure, there was an obvious shift in the family dynamic. Mourad recounts, “On avait trouvé un équilibre. Sans l’Autre. C’est comme ça qu’on parlait d’elle désormais, les rares fois où on parlait encore d’elle” (38). It’s significant that Dounia is being referred to as “l’Autre” for two main reasons. Firstly, parallels can be drawn between her being called “l’Autre” to large-scale ideas of *the other*. While the term could be used to describe her as being the other daughter, in comparison to Mina, it also highlights her difference. In the second half of the narrative, as Mourad gets reacquainted with Dounia, the ways in which she is truly different now, after having ten years with solely the French society as her sphere of influence rather than her Maghrebi home culture, are shown. The notion of otherness is further played with as Dounia eventually becomes representative of the Other, which in the context of this immigrant family, is anyone of mainstream French culture. Second, similar to how the father puts her at a distance in order to put his pain at a distance as well, the family separates itself from her, in order to ignore the void that she created. By calling her “l’Autre”, they dehumanize her, separating their daughter from the person who left them in order to impersonalize her action of leaving. Mourad, who was only ten years old when Dounia left, is the one left to pick up the pieces ten

years later and reach out to Dounia, when their father has a stroke and is sick. It's here that we see the father's true feelings towards his daughter, as he wants to see her before he dies. At this point in the narrative, the father has been moved to a rehabilitation unit to work on gaining mobility after having been in the hospital for a month following his stroke. Despite being in the rehabilitation unit, his health is still deteriorating, and he is starting to lose his memory. One day while Mourad is visiting his father, his father interrupts their small talk and eventually says, “Je veux revoir ma fille avant de mourir” (76). Shocked, Mourad responds and exclaims, “Pourquoi tu dis ça?! Tu ne vas pas mourir!” (76). His father explains that he will certainly die, and that he has not even done his pilgrimage to Mecca. Mourad attempts to reassure him by saying that he will be healed and that they will go to Mecca together. His father responds saying, “Je commence à oublier des choses. Ça me fait peur. Je dois voir ma fille. Je dois voir ma fille avant de mourir” (76). Reflecting on what his father has just said, Mourad narrates:

Je ne peux pas dire que je n'y avais pas pensé. J'y avais pensé chaque jour depuis l'accident du padre. Dounia devait savoir. Même si Mina et ma mère jouaient à la perfection le numéro du *comme si de rien n'était*, j'étais certain qu'elles y songeaient exactement comme moi. On ne peut pas tout effacer d'un coup de Tipp-Ex sur le livret de famille. Le padre avait remballé son orgueil. Il fallait saisir l'occasion avant qu'il ne change d'avis. J'avais décidé de ne pas en parler à ma mère ni à Mina pour l'instant. (76-77)

Because the family structure had shifted in response to her absence, any remnants of her in the family were essentially cast out. As a result, it was not easy for Mourad to navigate how to handle reaching out to Dounia after so much time at the request of his father. This, as well as

figuring out how to deal with facing Dounia after having not come after her before is shown in an exchange between Dounia and Mourad soon after they reconnect.

In response to the father's sickness being the reason Mourad reaches out, Dounia says, "Pourquoi tu n'as jamais cherché après moi avant ? Il a fallu qu'il arrive un truc grave. C'est trop bête. T'imagines s'il en avait pas réchappé..." (135). Mourad responds by saying, "C'est vrai. J'y ai pensé mille fois. Mais c'était pas évident. Je me suis toujours dit que t'avais pas envie de nous revoir. Et puis maman l'aurait mal pris. La manière dont tu es partie. C'était pour toujours" (135). Mourad acknowledges the lack of clarity in the situation, explaining that he didn't know what to do and that there was no clear path to follow. This theme of ambiguity permeates Dounia's relationship with the family moving forward in contrast to how she viewed them during the time of estrangement. She asks why they never went after her, and yet, she used her family and her background in order to get ahead in her political career, portraying herself as the success story of a *beur* girl from an immigrant family who was able to fit the French mold. Ultimately, this situation, having no clear path that would have the best result, demonstrates the complexity of the family unit. It also demonstrates that while there is a cultural binary imposed on the immigrant family and what the children in these families experience, the binary is not black and white in practice.

Changes in family structure with additions and losses to the family unit are also seen in Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*. The narrative starts with the knowledge that Doria's father has left to return to Morocco to marry a new wife in the hopes of having a son. The absence of her father, who is not present during any part of the narrative, allows for a closer bond between Doria and her mother, Yasmina, which reinforces feminist themes and notions in the narrative. Another element also changes the structure of the family and how it operates in the case of Doria and

Yasmina. While not entering into the family, social aid workers become a part of daily life for Doria and Yasmina, entering their home and seeing parts of their life typically reserved for family and close friends. Yasmina is welcoming of the aid, since they are in need, yet Doria is constantly showing her disdain towards the social aid workers, up until the end of the novel where her pessimism wanes. “Depuis que le vieux s’est casé, on a eu droit à un défilé d’assistantes sociales à la maison. La nouvelle, je sais plus son nom. C’est un truc du genre Dubois, Dupont, ou Dupré, bref un nom pour qu’on sache que tu viens de quelque part” (Guène, *Kiffe* 17). She is dismissive of the social aid workers that come and while they are not particularly helpful, she tends to not give others a chance, resorting to a dry sense of humor, such as when she is judgmental of the new social worker’s last name in the above quote. This change in the family structure occurs because of the poverty that Yasmina and Doria struggle with. This is only one of the reasons in the narrative that Doria has to feel different from her peers, which fuels her pessimism.

Doria’s experience with her peers in school shows how she was viewed as different because of her Moroccan heritage even though she herself is French. She is made fun of because of the visible aspects of her culture, yet unlike with Dounia and her family in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, this does not cause tension between Doria and her mother. Two anecdotes from the narrative in particular demonstrate this. Remembering when she was younger, Doria recounts:

Quand j’étais petite et que Maman m’emmenait au bac à sable, aucun enfant ne voulait jouer avec moi. J’appelais ça ‘le bac à sable des Français’, parce qu’il se trouvait au cœur de la zone pavillonnaire et qu’il y avait surtout des familles d’origine française qui y habitaient. Une fois, ils faisaient tous une ronde et ils ont refusé de me donner la main parce que c’était le lendemain de l’aïd, la fête du

Mouton, et que Maman m'avait mis du henné sur la paume de la main droite. Ces petites têtes à claques croyaient que j'étais sale. (Guène, *Kiffe* 90)

Having the henna on her hands because of the religious holiday visibly marked Doria as different from the other children and as a result, her heritage caused disparity between her and her peers, even at a young age. Even though these signs of culture get in the way of her socialization, she doesn't resent her mother for the added sphere of influence in her life as a *beur* girl. This anecdote and the way that Doria tells it is also significant as Doria is labeling the sand box and those who went there as "French" while recognizing that she is both French and at the same time, not a part of the category that she has just identified. This is a recurring theme and issue of labeling in Djouder's *Désintégration* as well.

Another anecdote shows that ways in which Doria is criticized by her peers, often because of things that Yasmina is indirectly involved in, yet does not resent her mother or her Moroccan culture in the way that we see with Dounia:

Une fois, j'ai mis un pull mauve avec des étoiles et un truc en anglais écrit dessus. Ma mère, elle l'avait acheté dans une friperie qui pue le vieux. Elle avait réussi à l'avoir pour un euro. Elle en était toute fière. Comme je voulais pas la vexer, je l'ai porté au lycée mais, je sais pas, j'avais un mauvais pressentiment, je le trouvais suspect ce pull. Il l'était. Les poufiasses du lycée, la bande de décolorées, surmaquillées avec leurs soutiens-gorge rembourrés et leurs chaussures compensées, elles se sont bien foutues de ma gueule. Le truc était en anglais sur le pull, c'était '*sweet dreams*'. Ça veut dire 'fais de beaux rêves'. Cette saloperie de pull mauve, c'était un haut de pyjama. Je savais que j'aurais dû être plus attentive pendant les cours de Miss Baker en sixième. (Guène, *Kiffe* 74)

This example is slightly different because it was a result of her not paying attention in school, yet is also the result of their financial struggle, and Yasmina's wanting to do nice things for her daughter regardless. Doria, valuing her relationship with her mother more than the need to be liked and accepted by her peers, recognizes her mother's efforts and also does not want to offend her. We see another example of this towards the end of the narrative when Yasmina is doing Doria's hair. "Elle m'a fait une queue-de-cheval après me les avoir brossés avec de l'huile d'olive. À l'ancienne, l'huile d'olive. Comme au bled. Moi, j'aime pas trop mais je lui ai rien dit parce que ça lui faisait trop plaisir de me faire jolie" (156). Again, she says that while she doesn't particularly like what her mom has done with her hair, she lets it happen because she would rather see her mom happy. Even though she chooses to please her mom rather than hide parts of her culture and her background and the effects of it in order to be accepted by her peers, some part of her does wonder what it would be like to not be different. Thinking about this to herself, Doria says, "Parfois, j'essaie de m'imaginer ce que je serais si j'étais d'origine polonaise ou russe au lieu de marocaine..." (Guène, *Kiffe* 106). When analyzing the relationship between Yasmina and Doria in the context of French media, Kleppinger says, "Doria does not feel trapped in some sort of 'double culture bind'..." (*Branding the 'Beur' Author* 206-207). Kleppinger argues this in the context of saying that Yasmina and Doria share in watching French television together and in doing so, share "a set of French references that allow them to build connections with the French world around them" (*Branding the 'Beur' Author* 206). While it could be argued that Doria does exist between two spaces and two influential spheres with French society and her Moroccan mother and heritage, she does not feel the same conflict that Dounia faces in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*. Dounia was at odds with her family, as Julie and the larger French social sphere seemed to influence her more than the sphere of her home

culture. Doria and Yasmina on the other hand, have a close bond with each other that allows them to navigate French culture and society together which allows for a tension-free relationship as they both experience what it is like to be of Maghrebi origin in French society in similar ways. Furthermore, they are each other's closest relationship as Doria does not have a French friend, the way Dounia had Julie, to influence her in a way that would have created distance between her and Yasmina. Even though Doria does wonder what it would be like to look the same as her peers and to be accepted by them, it is her relationship with her mother that takes precedence.

While Doria and Yasmina have a close relationship, there are also other nuances in their relationship that might not be present in a typical mother-daughter relationship because of factors in their home life such as the fact that Doria's dad left them, Yasmina's illiteracy, their poverty, and the emotional pain that Yasmina carries. In the beginning of the novel as Doria lays out her family situation in the aftermath of her father abandoning them, she says, "Enfin, elle est présente physiquement. Parce que dans sa tête, elle est ailleurs, encore plus loin que mon père" (Guène, *Kiffe* 11). While her mother is still physically there, she is preoccupied by the basic needs of the family, and the pain of having been left by her husband for another woman. In addition, because she is now a single parent, she works long hours in order to provide for Doria and herself. Doria feels this change, and the lack of her mother's presence in her day to day life as a result. Later on in the narrative, Yasmina is given an opportunity to take French classes to improve her literacy to lead to better opportunities. Doria reacts by saying, "Comme ça, je la verrai beaucoup plus et ça me permettra d'oublier moins souvent que j'ai une mère" (Guène, *Kiffe* 80). This statement brings up several themes. She recognizes that she will see her mom more with the new opportunities they have, with the help of the social aid workers, and is happy about it. Yet at the same time, by saying that she will forget less often that she has a mother,

Doria diminishes the role that her mom plays in her life, and perhaps gives herself more importance and responsibility in the family unit than she actually assumes. This statement that Doria makes shows the sometimes contradictory nuances to the relationship between Doria and Yasmina. They are close and have strong bonds, yet Doria also sees her mother as a distant and somewhat absent figure.

Related to the responsibility that Doria is forced to take on in the family, as well as how her family situation has forced her to deal with difficult times, one of the most evident complexities of their relationship is Doria's need to be protective of her mother. When explaining why she doesn't want to partake in a class ski trip, Doria says, "Je veux pas y aller parce que j'ai pas envie d'abandonner ma mère, même si c'est rien qu'une semaine" (Guène, *Kiffe* 39). Even at 15 years old, she is protective of her mother because of their circumstances and feels the need to take responsibility. She strives to be a strong woman, which is evident when she later talks about voting and enacting change towards the end of the narrative, yet in some ways, her relationship with her mother hinders her from creating relationships with people her own age. This is evident also in the fact that one of her only other ties in the narrative is with Hamoudi, who is significantly older than her, until she befriends her classmate Nabil. Even including these relationships, she doesn't have any ties with anyone who is not of Maghrebi descent.

The relationship between Doria and Hamoudi and the content of their conversations also shows the ways in which Doria's role as a child is compromised as she is forced to shoulder more responsibility than her peers because of her family situation. Hamoudi, a man in his late twenties who lives in the same building as Doria, fosters a good friendship with Doria, despite his involvement in drugs and petty crime. When describing him and how their mutual pessimism

connects them, Doria says, “Il est tout le temps déconnecté et je crois que c’est pour ça que je l’aime bien. Tous les deux, on n’aime pas notre réalité” (27). Despite the difference in age, they relate to each other through their unhappiness, especially towards the beginning of the narrative before each of their lives evolves for the better in different ways. While the narrative does not include many details about Hamoudi’s own life, it is clear that they both struggle with living in an in-between space between two cultures, with added pressures from family issues. Because he is significantly older than Doria, he does hide parts of his life from her in order to protect her. When reflecting on this, Doria says, “Entre Hamoudi et moi, c’est comme ça. Il veut me protéger, ne pas me mêler à ses histoires, alors en échange je dois mettre ma curiosité de côté” (76).

However, as the narrative progresses and Doria continues to face issues typically not seen by her peers, she begins to resent Hamoudi’s keeping things from her in order to protect her. She feels that she has had to see and understand struggles that have forced her to mature and that what Hamoudi does not tell her would not scandalize her because of what she has already experienced. How she internally processes this gives more insight to how exactly she has had to take on more responsibility in her family because of her parent’s origin and the cultural and language barriers that follow. When asking herself why he is not more open with her about his life, specifically his relationships, she says, “Pourquoi Hamoudi ne m’a rien dit? Il me prend encore pour une gamine? Il croit peut-être que je comprends pas ce genre de trucs? J’ai été capable de comprendre des trucs plus compliqués. J’ai toujours rempli les papiers administratifs pour Maman et même quand mon père était là, c’est moi qui le faisais” (137). While Doria is referencing a specific situation that Hamoudi did not share with her, her reasoning for why she is able to understand certain things sheds light on the kinds of ways she had to take more

responsibility in the home because of her parents being immigrants. Despite these complexities in her relationship with her mother, Doria does see strength in her mom, and strives to take after her. Towards the end of the narrative, Doria says, “C’est en la voyant aller mieux tous les jours, se battre pour nous faire vivre toutes les deux que j’ai commencé à me dire que tout se rachète, et qu’il va peut-être falloir que je fasse comme elle” (173). By saying this of her mom, Doria is recognizing that she does not actually know everything about how to best handle struggle, and that her pessimism is not the answer. A defining characteristic of Doria, especially in the beginning of the narrative, is her judgmental outlook when thinking and speaking of others: “Elle a peut-être raison Mme Burlaud quand elle me dit que je ne supporte pas qu’on porte un jugement sur moi mais que je le fais tout le temps avec les autres” (64). This however changes by the end of the novel. The iconic scene, in which she comes up with the phrase that becomes the title of the book, highlights this change in her particularly well: “Maintenant, kif-kif demain je l’écrirais différemment. Ça serait kiffe kiffe demain, du verbe kiffer. Waouh. C’est de moi. (C’est le genre de trucs que Nabil dirait...)” (188). By changing the spelling of “kif-kif” the Arabic phrase, holding a negative connotation, Doria drastically changes the meaning, invoking the positive connotations of the slang verb “kiffer”, meaning “to love”. Several things in the narrative led to this newfound positivity in Doria, including her mom’s language education and her no longer having to work long hours, and the relationship that Doria cultivates with Nabil. This change in Doria is not only seen through her narration, but is noticed by others as well: “Mme Dutruc, elle a constaté un ‘véritable changement’ chez nous” (184). Doria also speaks of these changes in herself explicitly as she says:

Avec tous les événements de cette année de toute façon, je me disais que la vie, franchement, c’est trop injuste. Mais là depuis quelque temps, j’ai un peu changé

d'avis...Plein de choses sont arrivées qui ont changé mon point de vue. Le passage de Patrick Dils à l'émission 'Tout le monde en parle'. La situation des nettoyeurs du Formule 1 de Bagnolet. Hamoudi et Lila qui se marient en avril prochain. Et comme dernier truc, le changement de Maman depuis un an. (173)

With this list, Doria is able to articulate how her change in attitude came about as well as what the social aid worker noticed as havin changed within their household. These positive changes concerning Doria's family and home life that are seen towards the end of the narrative contribute to the optimism that the reader is left with, in contrast to the pessimism that dictates the tone of Doria's narration at the beginning of the novel.

In *Désintégration*, Djouder approaches issues concerning the family differently than the authors of the three other primary works of my study. This can be attributed to the book's main point of emphasizing that while *beur* individuals are technically French, they are not accepted as such and are still expected to integrate more than they already have by being born in France and by speaking French as their native tongue. Because this is the overarching theme of the work, family is approached in a defensive manner as the collective *nous* narrator defends how the immigrant family operates to the assumed *vous* audience, comprising of French people of French origin, whose family histories are rooted in France. Discussion of family matters in *Désintégration*, are closely tied with gender issues and the role of women, which will be further analyzed in the following chapter. However, because these sets of issues are so closely related, particularly in Djouder's *Désintégration*, discussion of the family tends to revolve around the role that women play in it, as well as how the family unit exists in the context of being a part of a larger marginalized population in France, relating back to the book's main idea.

Désintégration approaches discussion of the family differently compared to the other works in the realm of immigrant parents and parent-child relationships. Again, the narrator takes a defensive tone, explaining the life that Maghrebi immigrant parents live while trying to handle being part of a marginalized population in France in order to care for their children.

Simultaneously, as previously mentioned, an underlying tone of resentment persists as the narrator, representative of the *beur* category, still finds itself between two cleanly defined social and cultural categories. The existence of such an in-between space itself blurs the cultural binary. In a particularly poignant passage, the narrator says:

Si vous regardiez les yeux de nos parents, vous y verriez leur détresse, leur peur de la vie, leur besoin d'amour et toute l'enfance qu'ils n'ont pas eue. Toute l'adolescence. Toute la vie adulte. On aime bien regarder nos mamans et nos papas dormir. Quelque chose nous y pousse. Les anges nous y poussent pour que, attendris, nous leur envoyions de jolies pensées, à ces petits parents perdus.

(Djouder 16)

This passage in particular highlights the root of why and how Djouder approaches family and parents differently than the other authors. The narrator shows a side to family and parent-child relationships that is not given much attention in the other works, primarily because in *Désintégration*, the goal of the book is to speak about these issues and there are no characters or plots that distract from them. In addition, because the narrator assumes the role of a collective *nous* that encompasses the *beur* generation, multiple sides of immigrant parenthood are shown which would not be possible in a book with characters that could only show a few parents closely. As previously mentioned, the narrator takes the role of defending the immigrant parents against the French society that they do not want to integrate into (by the French definition) on

principle as they should already be considered French as they are French-born citizens, which is reflected in the title of the book. This drastically impacts how the subject of parents are approached in the book. Characters in the other works find themselves more in a cultural bind as they are more influenced by the French sphere of influence. Again, this is shown more explicitly in the other works as there are specific characters who are used as examples of this, rather than the general terms and groups that are referenced in *Désintégration*.

Because the narrator of *Désintégration* feels the need to defend immigrant parents and their ways, there is also an element of feeling protective over them which we have also seen in Doria's relationship with her mother in Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*. To explain the vulnerability of immigrant parents, the narrator says, "Le problème n'est pas que nos parents croient en la famille mais qu'ils s'y raccrochent comme un enfant tient à son doudou" (Djouder 44). Not only does this statement highlight the vulnerability of immigrant parents when living as part of a larger marginalized community in a country where they are not fully accepted, it also shows the role of the family and the relationship between the immigrant parent and the French-born child in this context. They cling to the family because it is what is least foreign to them. This presents a problem, however, when their children begin to create ties with the outer society that is otherwise actively rejecting them. Hargreaves writes:

Immigrants who leave the land of their birth in the hope of securing better economic opportunities elsewhere usually expect to return, even if only when they retire, to the place of their primordial attachments. However, this apparently simple polarity between a place of affective origins and a place of instrumentally defined interests breaks down when immigrants begin to raise children. (*Immigration* 131).

Not only do their children create a permanent tie to their new home, making a full return impossible, it also leaves them in an even more vulnerable position within the family as their primary source of support is now compromised by the French sphere of influence in the lives of their children. This continues to pose problems for the parent-child relationship when the children go through the French school system and continually have other factors influencing their lives aside from their parents and culture at home as they make friends and see the lives that their peers are living. In relation to parent-child relationships, Hargreaves says, “As children brought up in France are inclined to expect the same personal freedoms as their French peers, they sometimes find themselves on collision course with their parents” (*Immigration* 111).

As a result of this vulnerability on the part of the parents, the notion of *communautarisme* becomes essential. Value is continually placed on the Maghrebi immigrant collective and group, which allows immigrant parents to have a place where they belong in the midst of trying to provide for themselves in a foreign land with children who are continually anchoring themselves in a culture to which they themselves do not belong. However, this in itself causes further tension in the parent-child relationship. Djouder writes, “Inconsciemment, ils tentaient de préserver les traditions, les principes, les valeurs du groupe. Ils avaient oublié que nous avons grandi avec d’autres valeurs et qu’ici l’individualisme prime sur le groupe. Ils oublient toujours le conflit de générations” (Djouder 51). While the notion of *communautarisme* is beneficial for the immigrants themselves, their French-born family members continue to struggle as further expressed in *Désintégration*. Djouder’s narrator writes:

Notre identité est flinguée. Vous ne pouvez pas imaginer à quel point. Nous n’avons pas la force, la cohésion des Juifs pour dépasser l’Histoire, la souffrance, les malheurs. L’identité est fragile. Elle ressemble à un puzzle. Si vous avez

toutes les pièces, avec un peu d'attention, vous parvenez à reconstituer l'image qui vous définit. Si vous avez le même nombre de pièces mais provenant de puzzles différents, vous aurez beau essayer de les assembler, vous n'arriverez à rien, votre image ne ressemblera à rien. (110)

Here, the narrator uses the analogy of puzzle pieces to express the fragmented nature of *beur* identity, with multiple pieces, coming from their identity as French-born citizens, who grow up with French societal influences surrounding them, as well as from the sphere of influence that emerges from their parents' culture at home. The narrator continues on with, "Nous sommes amputés d'une Histoire héroïque, courageuse. On est algérien ou français, au choix, on bénéficie du statut de double nationalité. On est donc d'origine étrangère. Et même étrangers à nous-mêmes, dès l'origine. Aliénés" (111). After defining what alienation is, and suggesting that he entails conflict he continues on to say, "Le conflit génère la folie, la marginalité, le vide, la violence, la maladie. Que sommes-nous ? Qui sommes-nous ? Et vous, qui êtes-vous ?" (111). By asking these rhetorical questions about identity, the narrator is emphasizing the uncertainty and confused nature of their identity as the French-born children of immigrants in France.

Wadman analyses the connection to history and articulates the reasoning behind it by saying, "While acknowledging the painful history at their very origins, Beur writers also express a sense of disinheritance from history. This lack of grounding in history is a result of several factors, chief among which are the French educational system, an inability to speak Arabic, and the lack of acceptance in Algerian society" (87-88). She continues on to say, "The discovery of their own strangeness in the countries of their parents comes as a rude awakening to many Beurs, who, tempted by what the Beur intellectuals and writers describe now as the myth of the return, travel across the Mediterranean in search of their histories and identities" (88). Finally, she puts

into words the confusing and fragmented nature of their *beur* identity in relation to the family and history: “Rather than guaranteeing a sense of self and a collective identity rooted in history and memories passed down generationally, the family is a source of confusion and displaced self” (88). This juxtaposes *communautarisme* with the struggle of finding an identity that *beur* individuals experience.

Hargreaves and McKinney posit a similar idea: “It would nevertheless be illusory to suggest that diasporic cultures belong in equal measure to each of the spaces in which they participate” (5). In saying so, they articulate the idea that *beur* individuals, because they take part in multiple spaces, cannot fully be in either space, but also that each of the spheres of influence that affect them, influence them equally. This inequality is shown throughout *Désintégration*, as the narrator expresses feeling unaccepted by both groups. Hargreaves and McKinney continue to bring up the idea of cultural baggage by saying, “All immigrants bring with them cultural baggage that differentiates them from the majority population. While the weight of that baggage may lessen as migration gives way to permanent settlement, with second- and third- generation strands eventually outnumbering migrants among the minority population, it continues in varying degrees to influence minority groups” (17). In introducing the idea of cultural baggage, Hargreaves and McKinney express how remnants of immigrant cultures continue to alienate the descendants of immigrants from the occidental culture and society. Whether it is through tangible customs such as food or henna, views on gender and marriage, or how parents interact with their children, each of the primary works shows the immigrant parents as holding onto their origin culture, which is in part passed onto their children who then either accept or reject those pieces of the origin culture. This process however, only adds to the confusion that *beur* individuals suffer through concerning their identity, as it is the origin culture that prevents them

from being seen by the outer French society as fully integrated, despite their status as French-born citizens.

While the narrator of *Désintégration* is representative of children of Maghrebi immigrants, and therefore *beur* individuals struggling with their identity as such, the style of narration in the text posits the narrator as siding with immigrant groups and the sphere of influence that stems from their family and home. This is shown by the purpose of the text which is to defend themselves, and their immigrant family members, against the outer French society that allegedly sees them as less than French despite their legal status. So while struggles of identity are discussed in the text, as previously shown, the narrator in *Désintégration* also sees the value in *communautarisme*, not only for the immigrant parent groups, yet for the *beur* groups as well: “Notre organisation est communautaire. Tribale. L’individu est au service du groupe” (Djouder 46). The narrator continues, “Le bonheur ne se conçoit pas seul. Il est obligatoirement collectif. L’individualisme est une attitude proscrite et diabolisé. Elle est antireligieuse, antitribale. Le bonheur, c’est adhérer aux attentes et désirs du groupe” (47). This passage on the importance of the group not only promotes and valorizes the group and the effect it has, yet actively puts down individualism. The narrator eventually says, “L’égoïsme des Français nous choque” (47). The idea of individualism in general is not appreciated, yet the disdain for it grows when being an individual means having defected from the group. Dounia in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* is a prime example of this. In his book, *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance*, Azouz Begag writes, “I also freed myself from the community-based ‘us’ that is fundamental to social relations in families of Maghrebi origin and that often destroys any attempt at carving an individual pathway” (60). The language used here suggests that the “us” Begag refers to, was limiting and constraining. Dounia also freed herself from the “community-based

‘us’” and as a result, was able to forge her own path. Yet at what cost and what effect on the family? While she gained independence, individualism, and separation from the family that she viewed as holding her back and keeping her from the life she truly wanted, she wasn’t able to fully escape existing in the in-between space. We see this multiple times and in multiple ways when Dounia reconnects with Mourad and they see what has been happening with the side that they had each lost touch with. The most blatant example of this is when Mourad is reading the book that Dounia wrote. It is through reading her book and seeing her political views as well as how she speaks about their family that Mourad truly sees how much Dounia was shaped by mainstream French values.

While not in an active exchange with Dounia, Mourad narrates his thoughts when reading Dounia’s politically charged book, and addresses her as “tu” as if he were talking to her. In response to the language the Dounia uses about her childhood and about growing up with Arab immigrant parent in order to evoke a sort of battle and struggle on her part before becoming as successful as she did, Mourad says, “La vérité, c’est que tu n’es pas forte. C’est même l’inverse. Tu es faible. Tu es la plus faible d’entre nous” (Guène, *Un homme* 241). He continues:

Nous sommes tous soumis, qu’on le veuille ou non. Il y a ceux qui se soumettent à Dieu, dans une soumission totale et visible. D’autres, même malgré eux, se soumettent aux lois des marchés financiers, aux diktats de la mode, ou à l’être aimé. Malgré toi, Dounia, tu es devenue une espèce rare de soumise. Les soumises qui se prennent pour des rebelles. Et qui cherchent d’autres soumises à sauver. Ça me rappelle une histoire de notre grand-père, Sidi Ahmed Chennoun, celle du dromadaire qui se moque de la bosse du dromadaire de devant. Oui, je l’ai lu, ton livre, et c’était pénible. Mal écrit et prétentieux. Et tu fais un peu

comme ton Tartois : tu passes ton temps à cracher. Tu craches sur tes parents, sur les musulmans, sur les Arabes, sur le mariage, sur les traditions, sur toi-même. Tu baves sur tout ce que tu es. Tu es le bourgeon qui scie le tronc. À la fin du livre, tu remercies la République de t'avoir inculqué ses valeurs. Tu dis qu'elle t'a nourrie. Quelle mauvaise nourriture, à voir le résultat. Et tu reproches à maman de t'avoir gavée...Ton ingratitude me dégoûte. (242-243)

Mourad's reaction shows that she did not fully escape the confines of her origins and her family, as they come back to haunt her when she reconnects with her family, even if Mourad does not say these things directly to her. While Dounia sees her leaving the family as her taking a bold step towards reclaiming her life, Mourad views it as an active attack against the family that raised her, and the background from which she comes. This goes back to the point Djouder makes, that individualism is seen negatively in the eyes of the collective group. Ultimately, Dounia is a prime example of how cultural binaries, which in practice, only truly exist as messy pieces of an identity puzzle, as Djouder's narrator might put it, can cause struggle and conflict between parents and their children in the immigrant family context. Not only does Dounia's character and the narrative surrounding her demonstrate the conflict, it also draws to attention the nuanced and complex nature of the struggle itself of navigating the cultural in-between space as well as the effects that the struggle has, not only on the individual, but on the family or group as well.

Chapter 3

Breaking Down the Gender Binary and Examining Imposed Gender Roles

While the themes of marriage and expectations concerning marriage for characters in the works, set out by their parents, are pertinent to discussion of the immigrant family unit, these themes are further complicated by gender and sexuality. The theme of marriage is recurring in both Metiba's *Ma mère et moi* and Guène's *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* and highlights a key difference in how the parents and children conceptualize the future of the children in both narratives yet in different contexts. As previously discussed, marriage is a main theme in *Ma mère et moi* because of the protagonist's homosexuality and his mother's conservative views on gender roles. In *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, marriage is seen as a recurring theme in a way that is different yet simultaneously parallel to the way it is presented in *Ma mère et moi*. The expectations for marriage, defined and expressed by the parents in both narratives, mainly differ for two reasons: the difference in gender between the protagonist of *Ma mère et moi* and Dounia, as well as the difference in length and detail provided by the narratives. The extent of discussion on marriage in Metiba's book is limited to stating the facts that the protagonist will not get married (at least not to a woman) and that his mother believes that he should get married and is therefore upset that he is not following what she believes is the best life plan. Marriage in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* is discussed in a much more involved way as Dounia is not only expected to get married, yet it is clear that she is expected to marry a Muslim from a similar background and fulfill the duties of a good wife and mother, just as her own mother did and as her younger sister, Mina, eventually does. While her upbringing and her character's involvement in the first part of the novel before the 10 years of estrangement do not explicitly bring up exactly how she felt in response to what had been laid out for her by her parents in terms of her

future, her true thoughts come out once she is reconnected with the family. After being reunited with Mourad after 10 years have passed, Dounia reflects back on her upbringing and tells Mourad, ““Je pouvais pas rester et suivre la trajectoire mediocre qu’ils avaient tracée pour moi. Vraiment. Je suis une égoïste à tes yeux, je sais, mais la vérité, c’est que je suis pas juste partie avec un homme. Si je suis partie, c’est à cause de maman”” (Guène, *Un homme* 137).

Similar to Guène’s *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, and Metiba’s *Ma mère et moi*, *Désintégration* discusses marriage as a concept and entity that plays a significant role in family life and that sheds light on differences between how immigrant parents and their *beur* children and how they communicate about such issues. While marriage is discussed in *Désintégration* in a similar context to the other works, it is approached differently, seemingly placing more importance on appeasing parents rather than continuing in the struggle between two spheres of influence, each saying something different about marriage, at least in the cases of these three works that discuss marriage the most. The narrator says, “Nous acceptons de nous marier pour que cesse le harcèlement que nos parents nous font subir depuis notre plus tendre enfance” (Djouder 37). Unlike Dounia and the protagonist in *Ma mère et moi*, Djouder’s collective narrator expresses annoyance and resentment towards marriage and the ways in which it is discussed by their parent’s generation, yet rather than fighting back, the narrator submits. While this doesn’t cause the tension based on disagreement surrounding ideas of marriage that exists in the other two works, there is an underlying resentment that exists instead, as a result of the cultural binary in which the *nous* group finds itself. Discussion of marriage continues as the narrator says, “Le mariage est la clé de voûte. La clé du Bonheur. La clé de la tranquillité. La clé de l’apaisement des ancêtres. La gloire de Dieu. L’immense Plaisir des anges. L’infinie gratitude de votre mère. L’honneur sauf de votre père. Bref, la clé du paradis” (Djouder 40). In creating

this list of all the good things that marriage is and leads to, the narrator takes an almost mocking tone. Through this list, Djouder articulates culturally influenced ideas of marriage and the pressure put on children to marry, yet at the same time, it is understood by the narrator that this is what they are supposed to want, in order to please their families, rather than what they truly want. Despite this tone that the narrator takes, defending the side of the parents remains a priority, in accord with the main theme of the book as it addresses the French public. A perceived main point of the book is for the *beur* population, represented by the narrator's *nous*, to defend themselves, and their parents, from the French ways of which they also are a part, as when it comes down to their identity, they are French citizens who claim France as their *pays natal*. Here, the larger scale cultural binary is blurred because it is not clear which side to take (not only with the issue of marriage although it provides a backdrop for this problematic) the outer French social sphere of influence to which they are exposed in daily life, or that of their home culture. This blurring of the binary is seen through the differences among how these three books deal with marriage.

The discussion of marriage in these works sheds light on further issues concerning gender and sexuality. The ways in which gender and gender roles are discussed in the primary works and how the main characters serve as examples for how these issues play out in the immigrant family setting of these works, demonstrate how another binary, the gender role binary, is blurred and broken down. The characters of these works and the situations that are discussed serve to not only demand discussion on feminism, yet issues concerning masculinity as well. In many cases, the characters in the primary works find themselves in a bind concerning their identity as either a man or a woman as the ways in which they are expected to fill that gender role as defined by

their parents, differs from how they personally fill that role, or how the outside French society encourages them to fill that role.

Gender roles and gender expectations are primarily prevalent in Guène's *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*. While the narrative involving Dounia's defecting from the family certainly has underlying themes of gender attached to it, themes of gender concerning Mourad and his role as a man is an overarching theme that is present throughout the entire narrative. This is demonstrated by the title of the novel itself, which is then repeated several times throughout the text in order to emphasize the idea that men do not cry and men are not supposed to cry. As previously mentioned, while this narrative uses immigrant and *beur* issues involving culture and in-between space as a backdrop, these issues in this narrative are often used merely as the context for more specific and emotionally charged problems concerning the family and family relationships. The phrase "un homme, ça ne pleure pas" is used throughout the narrative in several different contexts and references several specific instances where Mourad was told this phrase by his father. However, at the end of the novel, the raw human emotion that emerges from the hardship that the family endures throughout the narrative eventually trumps this ideal that is held in the family, which will be discussed later. While this aspect of the narrative is not directly tied to specifically *beur* or Maghrebi issues, the significant role that this phrase plays in the narrative sheds light on how the family conceives of gender, and how culturally motivated ideals might play a role. Throughout *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, we see Mourad repeat the phrase to himself as he narrates events that would cause an emotional reaction in him. When Mourad sees Dounia walk into the restaurant where they planned to meet for lunch after not seeing her for 10 years, he is filled with emotion and says, "C'était vraiment émouvant, je dois avouer. J'étais au bord des larmes, mais le padre a dit qu'un homme, ça ne pleure pas..." (Guène, *Un homme* 165).

Even with his father far away, he is constantly reminding himself that men are not supposed to cry. We see this again when Mourad begins as a student teacher in Paris and in a moment of stress and anxiety at the beginning of the school day, thinks of his father and is imagining what he is doing at the same moment. He says, “Je l’imaginai mal réveillé après une nuit passée à faire des cauchemars pleins de cris d’oiseaux à l’aube. C’est peut-être le trac, mais, du coup, ça m’a beaucoup ému et ma gorge s’est serrée. Évidemment, je n’ai pas pleuré, car, comme chacun sait...Bref” (184). This example engages the phrase in a different yet still significant way. While Mourad doesn’t actually utter the phrase, it is implied because of how much he thinks of it. Furthermore, at this point in the narrative, it has been discussed enough, that the reader also does not need the actual words in order to understand what Mourad is thinking and why. The fact that he doesn’t repeat the phrase here also gives the sense that he is tired of the phrase, and that its use has been exhausted. However, even if he feels this way, he still is unable to stop thinking about it and continues to fixate on this masculine ideal of not crying, as assigned to him by his father.

The relationship between men and crying is also briefly mentioned in Djouder’s *Désintégration* as he narrator analyzes the roles of immigrant mothers and immigrant fathers, particularly looking at their relationships with each other and with their children. The narrator says:

Nos pères ne dorment plus la lumière éteinte. Des hommes pourtant, des vrais, avec la voix rauque, la distance, la froideur, la gueulante facile, la violence, de vrais bonshommes. Nos pères pleurent parfois. On est surpris. On se dit qu’ils ont un cœur. Évidemment qu’ils en ont un. Nos pères sont froids. La tendresse ? Pour quoi faire ? Elle ne sert à rien. La tendresse des pères. Quand on doit trimer.

Bosser toute la journée à l'usine. S'oublier. Quelle place pour la tendresse ? (15-16)

There are a considerable number of key differences between how crying and emotion is discussed in *Désintégration* and *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*. Regardless, each work offers significant analysis of the relationship between showing emotion and a masculine ideal. Unlike Mourad's commentary on the subject in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, this notion of tenderness and emotion is not an explicitly recurring main theme. Another difference is that in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, Guène provides a sense of resolution by the end. Mourad is able to, in some ways, overcome his fixation on the idea of not crying by challenging the idea after enduring the emotional pain of seeing his father die, who he actually saw cry himself. Because there is this added element at the end of the narrative, the reader can assume that Mourad, as well as his father, ultimately valorize accepting and experiencing the emotions that come with enduring hardship, especially related to family, over a masculine expectation to bury tangible and visible markers of emotion. No resolution factor to this particular issue is seen in *Désintégration* so it seems that the narrator continues to stand by valorizing the stoicism that is described here. Also, because there is no real plot that would motivate a change of perspective, this example differs from how we can see the Mourad's change in mentality which in turn directly affects the discussion of emotion in the novel. This quote from *Désintégration* also directly ties the idea of showing emotion to the struggle that immigrant father's face, as well as their fears. Mourad's father does not directly link anything with the idea that men should not cry, and so as a recurring and overarching theme of the narrative, it is seen as a general value that he holds and passes onto Mourad. The relationship between immigrant struggle and showing emotion as demonstrated by this passage is a complex one. The narrator says that their fathers do cry, because of the struggle

and fear they face. Yet at the end of the passage, the narrator states that there is no time to have tenderness because of that same struggle. This contradiction conveys how the fathers crying is an anomaly, and that it doesn't coincide with the stoic image they normally portray out of necessity because of their struggles and their obligation to work hard in order to support their family. On a different note, even though this passage highlights that their fathers do in fact cry, rather than the suppression of emotion in the way that Mourad's father emphasizes, it still adds a valuable facet to the larger conversation about masculinity and emotion because of the added commentary that when their fathers cry, it is a surprise, and it is a sobering reminder that they do in fact have a heart. This line speaks to what we could assume their fathers are like otherwise, that would lead to the belief that they do not have a heart.

This passage is also significant because the narrator is demonstrating what the masculine ideal is by listing qualities that "true" or "real" men have. Again, even though they say that their fathers cry, they are saying it in the context that it is opposite what true men do and that their tears are outside of the image they hold of their fathers. The use of the word "vrai" in this passage is problematic because it essentially discounts any man without those qualities, saying that he would not be masculine. We see something similar in *Kiffe kiffe demain*. Towards the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to Doria's Aunt Zohra, Yasmina's longtime friend who lives nearby with her sons, and whose husband spends half of every year back in Morocco. While thinking of her, Doria says, "Je l'aime beaucoup, parce que c'est une vraie femme. Une femme forte" (Guène, *Kiffe* 34). The word "vrai" is used again here in order to convey a certain ideal for a gender role. While in the case of this specific example in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the definition of a real woman is not given or explained, it begs the question of where Doria would

get this idea and how it was formed, especially in the context of comparing her Aunt Zohra to other women in her life, which will be discussed later.

The connection between men and crying is also briefly shown in *Kiffe kiffe demain* with an example from Hamoudi and his father. When describing Hamoudi and his family, Doria says, "...dans sa famille, il a toujours eu pas mal de liberté, il pouvait faire tout ce qu'il voulait. Y a un seul truc qu'il pouvait pas faire : pleurer. Parce que c'était un homme et que le père d'Hamoudi dit que les hommes ne pleurent pas. C'est peut-être ça qui a joué. On se rend pas compte à quel point c'est important de pleurer" (Guène, *Kiffe* 104). The theme of not being able to cry that is evoked here resembles very closely the conversation surrounding crying in Guène's other work. This example also hints at an element of resolution, suggesting at the end that there is in fact a point at which it is important to accept experiencing emotion, even if we don't know where that point is.

Another event in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* sparks conversation about men not crying, yet with that idea coming from a random character who is not personally connected to any of the main characters. Mourad is out with his cousin Miloud, who has recently moved on his own to Paris from Algeria, when a song causes Miloud to sob in the night club and they encounter a transvestite. The transvestite approaches them and says, "Hé, toi! Arrête de pleurer! Reprends-toi! Tu es un homme! Merde!" (Guène, *Un homme* 155). In a short exchange, the transvestite essentially tells Miloud that he is different, after Miloud asks if the transvestite has seen himself, implying that he has no room to judge Miloud's masculinity. The transvestite continues to say "J'ai horreur des hommes qui pleurent, c'est dégueulasse" (155). He continues by consoling Miloud and telling him that it will pass before returning to his own table. While this exchange involved Miloud more than Mourad, the transvestite's words, similar to those of Mourad's

father, resonated with Mourad. When Mourad saw Dounia for the first time in ten years in the restaurant and was overcome with emotion, telling himself that he was about to cry but couldn't because men don't cry, he continued to say, "...et le travesti du *Saphir bleu* avec sa perruque rousse, a même dit que c'est dégueulasse, un homme qui pleure" (165). When reminding himself in this scene that he is not supposed to cry, it's significant for a couple of reasons that he is not only replaying his father's words in his mind, but also those of a stranger that he met once. Mourad's internal monologue and the way in which he narrates the story reveals that he is an anxious person who has many fears about his future and who gives a lot of importance to what people around him say, perhaps more important than his own thoughts and opinions at times. While it makes sense why Mourad would constantly remind himself of his father's words, "un homme, ça ne pleure pas" as this message was engrained in his mind throughout his childhood, the fact that he uses the transvestite's words to convince himself that he shouldn't be crying demonstrates how much weight he gives to the thoughts and opinions of others. On one hand, the transvestite's words accord with his father's and reinforce what Mourad is already thinking because of his father and therefore he doesn't question them. Yet on the other, this is just another instance where Mourad takes to heart the words of a stranger and lets them define how he feels.

The phrase also comes up in other instances where it is explained and extrapolated on more explicitly. Mourad explains and gives context to his internal monologue by saying, "Le padre dit qu'un homme, ça ne pleure pas, et ça m'était resté dans la tête" (Guène, *Un homme* 38-39). Later on in the narrative, we see just how deeply engrained this idea has become in Mourad's mind and mentality. As he describes a nightmare he had, Mourad narrates, "L'angoisse me presse la poitrine et les sanglots montent. J'ai envie de pleurer. Inévitablement, je pleure, je pleure un flot des larmes salées comme de l'eau de mer. Le padre se met à hurler: 'Non!!! Non!!!

Ne pleure pas! Ne fais pas ça! Un homme, ça ne pleure pas!” (Guène, *Un homme* 224). Mourad, who often has nightmares about his future and in general is very anxious about the person he will become, gives this example to show the extent of his fear of crying because of what it would make him: an inadequate man in the eyes of his father. This notion isn’t further explored in the narrative and it is not a main conflict that Mourad worries specifically about what his father thinks of him, yet it speaks to how profoundly Mourad believes that he should strive for the standards set out for him.

Towards the end of the narrative, Mourad challenges this idea. Thinking back, Mourad tells an anecdote of when his father cried because of a sports game on TV, and says, “Ce jour-là, le padre a pleuré. J’en suis certain. Je suis sûr de l’avoir vu pleurer, même s’il a prétendu le contraire” (304). At the very end of the narrative, as Mourad’s father is dying, and emotions are running high within the family, Mourad revisits this phrase that his father continually told him as he was growing up. By doing so, he is able to continue to challenge it, and put it aside, as dealing with his father’s condition and eventual death becomes more important than sticking to this ideal of what a man is. This new idea is reinforced further as he sees even his father break the standard of not crying. “Sa figure s’est déformée, alors il s’est mis à pleurer, mettant sa pudeur de côté, libérant ses sentiments profonds, allant pour une fois contre son commandement fondamental: *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*” (308). This internal analysis of the idea that men do not cry culminates in Mourad asking himself an important question at the end of the novel after he gets word that his father has passed away: “L’annonce maladroite d’un infirmier au téléphone, mes larmes qui coulent sur l’écran tactile de mon téléphone, des torrents de larmes, et la question que je me pose inévitablement: ‘Mais pourquoi un homme, ça ne pleure pas?’” (314). By asking this question and challenging the idea, Mourad is questioning larger constraints on gender and gender

roles. We see this throughout the novel in other ways as well, such as how Dounia handles the gender expectations placed on her by her family, as well as through several of the characters in Guène's first novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*. After seeing his father cry, Mourad narrates, "La maladie, la mort, la gravité de la vie font oublier les rancœurs, temporairement" (Guène, *Un homme* 308). Here we see again the recurring theme of the human condition and the raw emotion that it entails, which transcends the boundaries of what could be considered to be a *beur* issue, as well as the characters' own self-imposed rules or beliefs. Several pages later, this same line is repeated, yet in reference to a moment between Dounia and Djamila. Just after the death of the father, the family is in Algeria for the funeral. Mourad narrates, "Lorsque je me suis retourné, quelques mètres derrière Mina, ma mère et mes tantes, j'ai vu Dounia sécher ses larmes dans son foulard. Sa djellaba, trop longue, traînait dans la boue. Ma mère lui a tendu la main et l'a tirée vers elle, affectueusement. Oui, la maladie, la mort, la gravité de la vie font oublier les rancœurs, temporairement" (311-312). While these concluding pages show resolve among the characters, especially after the father's death, the conflict that precedes is essential to each of the characters and their personal journeys through being raised by immigrant parents in France and dealing with the emotional pain of losing two members of the family – Dounia in a figurative sense, and then the literal loss of the father through his death. These two losses that the family endures work in different ways to motivate and drive the narrative. The father's sickness and death is what brings the family back together, whereas Dounia's leaving is what caused the physical rift that had always existed in a latent and figurative way among the family members because of the cultural and generational differences. These differences however are not purely cultural or generational, as we see the Dounia compared often to her sister Mina, both of whom grew up with immigrant parents yet also had the separate French sphere of influence.

Because she has such stark differences in comparison to not only with her parents, but also her sister, Dounia's narrative as well as her character as a whole, begs commentary on gender and gender roles assigned to her as a female. She not only rejects the path set out for her by her parents – marrying a man of North African descent and being a wife and mother – yet she actively seeks out the opposite, as we see when Mourad and Dounia get reacquainted. We see early on in the novel that Dounia's desires for her life differ from those of her family. In an exchange between Dounia and her mother Djamilia, each character is comparing the other to someone else, showing the already existing disparity between their views and how they view the role of the mother and role of the daughter respectively. Comparing her mother to her *français de souche* best friend's mother, Dounia says to her mother, ““La mère de Julie, elle lui demande jamais de faire la cuisine ou la vaisselle! On dirait qu'il y a que ça qui compte dans la vie!”” (Guène, *Un homme* 19) Continuing with comparisons, her mother responds by saying, ““Ta sœur Mina, elle adore m'aider à la cuisine, et toi...”” (19). This comment sets Dounia off and sparks a conversation about larger, more important issues concerning gender roles and the relationship between Dounia and Djamilia. Dounia responds by saying, ““Et voilà! C'est reparti avec les comparaisons...”” even though she was also engaging in comparing her mother to Julie's mother (19). Djamilia escalates the conversation by bringing up marriage and the role of a wife by asking, ““Et quand tu vas te marier?! Hein? Tu veux que je t'envoie chez ton mari sans avoir rien appris?”” (19). Djamilia's question raises several important issues concerning gender roles and provides insight as to what Djamilia believes Dounia should be, as a woman. First, by asking Dounia about cooking when she is married, we see that it is implied that Dounia will be a wife. Second, by implying that Dounia wants to be sent off to her husband without having learned domestic skills, we see more of Djamilia's views on the relationship between a man and a woman

and what role the woman fills. In the latter part of this exchange, Djamila essentially conveys to Dounia that not only will she be a wife, but she will be a bad wife because she doesn't take the time to fulfill domestic duties at home the way Mina does. Dounia responds to this question by saying, "Je m'en fiche! Je me marierai jamais, de toute façon!" The exchange ends with this strong statement from Dounia, yet Mourad continues to recount that these conflicts grew to happen more frequently. He says, "Les conflits sont devenus de plus en plus fréquents. Avant ça, on n'avait jamais entendu une porte claquer à la maison. Et puis, il y a eu une période où ça claquait si souvent que mon père, furieux, a dévissé la porte de la chambre des filles pour accrocher un rideau à la place" (19-20). This is where we begin to see the later stages of Dounia's decreased involvement in the family while she is still living at home. The escalation of conflict leads to Djamila forbidding Dounia to see Julie, yet this did nothing to solve the problems between Dounia and her parents. Mourad recounts, "Les années suivantes, la situation avec Dounia a empiré. Le monde extérieur était plein de Julie Guérin, et les tentatives de mes parents pour retenir leur fille au sein du cocon ont toutes été vaines. Les intimidations et les punitions ne fonctionnaient plus" (20-21). The purpose of these statements in the narrative is to give context to what ensued, yet it is significant that Mourad makes this comment using Julie Guérin, Dounia's best friend, as a symbol for the outer world and larger French sphere of influence that Dounia was exposed to outside of the home. In doing so, we see once again how the cultural and special binary plays out in this work. It didn't matter that Djamila forbid Dounia to interact with Julie when Julie was not the root of the problem, it was Dounia's desire to connect on a deeper level with what she saw and was influenced by outside of the parent's influence at home.

While these troubles between Dounia and Djamila are complex and involve more than the different ways in which they see the role of women, gender issues are certainly highlighted in their conflict. Several moments before the exchange in particular where Dounia compares her mother to Julie's mother and Djamila compares Dounia to Mina, Dounia mentions to Djamila that Julie's mother is a modern woman who works in an office and drives a car (18). Djamila responds by asking, "C'est la mère de Julie ou le père de Julie dont tu parles?" (19). Djamila not only imposes her beliefs of female gender roles on Dounia in the subsequent exchange concerning marriage and domestic duties, yet she also imposes her beliefs on others, outside of the family. By sarcastically asking if Dounia is talking about Julie's mother or father, Djamila is relaying the idea that a woman could not be both a woman and work and drive.

Themes of marriage and more widely, female gender roles, are revisited after Dounia et Mourad reconnect and Mourad sees that Dounia pursued the independent life she dreamed of while living under her parents' roof, while Dounia sees that Mina got married, had three kids, and followed the path that Djamila wanted for both of her daughters. Dounia tells Mourad after learning about how Mina turned out, "Je sais pas, moi, ça m'angoisse, ces parcours tracés d'avance. Pourquoi mener une vie monolithique, marcher dans les pas de maman ? Travailler à la maison de retraite, épouser un blédard..." (170). Dounia maintains for almost the entirety of the novel that she pursued the right path for her and that Djamila was the reason she had to leave as shown through published interviews as well as what she wrote in her book that Mourad eventually reads, and what she tells Mourad on the phone before they meet in person:

'Je pouvais pas rester et suivre la trajectoire médiocre qu'ils avaient tracée pour moi. Vraiment. Je suis une égoïste à tes yeux, je sais, mais la vérité, c'est que je suis pas juste partie avec un homme. Si je suis partie, c'est à cause de maman.

Pour lui fait plaisir, j'aurais pu devenir la fille parfaite, faire le ménage, les lessives, l'accompagner au bled tous les ans. Évidemment, elle aurait continué à m'engraisser à coups de tajines et de gâteaux à la pâte d'amandes jusqu'à ce qu'un jour elle finisse par me trouver un bon petit mari dévoué et pas trop regardant sur le physique. Elle voulait me garder à côté d'elle pour toujours et faire de moi une vieille fille obèse et déprimée.' (137)

The beginning of this quote was previously discussed in the context of marriage, as this conversation involves Dounia previously informing Mourad that their parents were about to marry her off and have her stop her education. Yet the full quote of what Dounia says to Mourad in this phone conversation reveals more about the circumstances under which Dounia left. What Dounia says to Mourad here not only demonstrates what Djamila holds to be the feminine ideal, and what Dounia assumes her life would have been if she hadn't left, yet also proves to be a bonding moment with Mourad. Despite the 10 year age difference between the two as well as the 10 years that they were estranged, they are arguably the two characters that have the closest bond with another, each other, in the narrative. They were close and shared many memories together when Mourad was a little boy and he is also the one who brings her back into the family after the period of estrangement. After Dounia tells him all these things, he thinks to himself, "C'est fou. On partage les mêmes cauchemars, Dounia et moi" (137). Having spent those years of estrangement not fully aware of why Dounia left or under what circumstances because he was too young, he assumed that they had to have been so different from each other. However, he sees here, that her reasons for leaving aren't so different from his own nightmare of being obese with salt and pepper hair, which will be later discussed.

However, towards the end of the novel, she reveals to Mourad that she often views Djamila as having won:

‘C’est sûrement con, mais j’me dis souvent que maman à gagné... parce que je pense à sans arrêt, à ce qu’elle aurait fait ou dit. Et tu sais, il y a quelques années, il y a eu cette grossesse que je ne désirais pas et c’était mon corps après tout. J’ai avorté, c’était pas le moment, j’en voulais pas, pas de cette manière-là, tu vois... Et aujourd’hui, j’entends la voix de maman qui me ricane dans l’oreille :
‘Tu es punie ! Tu paies pour ce que tu as fait !’ (290)

Dounia tells this to Mourad after sharing that she had a health problem that caused her to become infertile. Many facets of Dounia’s character, the narratives that directly involve her, and how she interacts with others, are connected to larger conversations about gender roles, and Guène uses her, along with many other main characters in both *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, and *Kiffe kiffe demain*, to break gender stereotypes and blur the binary of gender roles. This added piece that Dounia is now infertile evokes further discussion of gender roles, what the role of a woman is and becomes another way that Dounia diverts from what her mother wanted for her. The notion of having kids and becoming a mother is throughout *Kiffe kiffe demain* as well yet manifests differently. When discussing stereotypical gender roles assigned to women, Catherine Raissinguier calls on the image of the “overly fecund African mother” (73). Dounia’s infertility can be seen as a way to break down gender role binaries and maintaining that she is still a successful woman on Guène’s part. This notion of the “overly fecund African mother” is broken down by Guène in *Kiffe kiffe demain* as well through Yasmina’s character. The narrative is driven by the event of her husband, Doria’s father, leaving them in order to marry someone else in the hopes of having a son. Yasmina was unable to fill that role for him and so he leaves them,

essentially seeing them as useless means to an end they could not provide. However, out of this event and his absence, comes the strength of female solidarity that develops over the course of the novel. In this way, Yasmina breaks the same stereotype that Dounia does, yet through a different path.

Aside from characters that break stereotypes themselves, Guène also confronts gender issues in *Kiffe kiffe demain* with Doria's situation that drives the narrative. The absence of Doria's father has an immense impact on how Doria feels about herself, as she is essentially a child he did not want. In the beginning of the novel, she says, "Papa, il voulait un fils. Pour sa fierté, son nom, l'honneur de la famille et je suppose encore plein d'autres raisons stupides. Mais il n'a eu qu'un enfant et c'était une fille. Moi." (Guène, *Kiffe* 10). By listing these reasons and expressing that she feels unwanted, Doria sets the tone for many of the events to directly follow the start of the narrative and also gives insight to her mentality and why she is not only closed off to others but is pessimistic as well. The premise of the narrative, her father leaving in order to marry someone else in Morocco with the hopes of having a son, sheds light on the importance of having a male heir and on her father's views of gender. However, the absence of her father is also what sets up the context for the female solidarity that is found among the characters later on in the narrative which would not otherwise have a place in the narrative or in Doria and Yasmina's lives. Mehta writes, "Faiza Guène transforms an ordinary story into a noteworthy demonstration of the human search for exemplarity within disempowering circumstances. In the novel, the women and girls take lead in redefining and reclaiming their lives as a reaction to their circumscribed social existence in the projects in particular, and France in general" (180).

The solidarity that develops among the female characters, of which there are plenty in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, does not always follow an easy path. While Doria and Yasmina are very close, there are complexities in their relationship, as discussed in the previous chapter, that cause hiccups, and that are further complicated by other female figures that Doria sees often. The evolution that occurs within Doria and her character throughout the novel translates to how she sees the women in her life, especially her mom. As previously mentioned in this chapter when analyzing gender role ideals, Doria says, “Je l’aime beaucoup, parce que c’est une vraie femme. Une femme forte” while thinking of her Aunt Zohra (Guène, *Kiffe* 34). Doria’s defining Zohra as a “real woman” is problematic as previously discussed, yet it also implies comparison with Yasmina. While there is not explicit comparison here between Aunt Zohra and Yasmina, coming from Doria, it’s implied that by using these terms to describe Aunt Zohra as a strong woman, Doria is implying that her mom is not a strong woman the way that Aunt Zohra is. There are multiple factors that could contribute to Doria’s complex view of her mom, which is related to her need to protect her as discussed in the previous chapter. It’s also possible that Doria sees the two women in very different lights just because one is her mother and the other is a more distant female figure that she doesn’t know as deeply. We can contrast this with the end of the novel when Doria shows an active and explicit positive view of her mother. When talking about school pictures, Doria says, “M’en fous. Du moment que j’étais jolie dans les yeux de Maman. Quand les gens disent que je lui ressemble, je suis fière” (157). While there is almost no explicit negative view that Doria has of her mom throughout the narrative, and they are close throughout, their relationship significantly changes by the end of the novel, and Doria expresses more often how proud she is, rather than the need to protect her, or that she is mentally and emotionally absent. This does not mean that earlier in the novel, we do not see positivity in Doria and Yasmina’s relationship.

Rather, it speaks to the complexity of their relationship, especially as it evolves. Despite the hardship they endure together, and handle in their own ways, we see how Doria is proud of her mother throughout the narrative. At one point when the social aid worker is at their house, Yasmina makes her a cup of tradition Moroccan mint tea. The social aid worker barely drinks it, then says that it's good but too sweet and that she has to pay attention to her figure (67-68). Doria and Yasmina both find this to be rude but Doria is amazed at how gracefully her mother handled the situation. "Maman, elle s'en foutait. Elle rigolait avec elle quand même. J'ai l'impression que tout ça, ça l'atteint même pas. Je la regardais parler, assise à côté de l'autre Miss France, et je me suis dit que c'est comme ça que je voudrais être" (68).

Certain passages in the novel that demonstrate various aspects of Doria's relationship with Yasmina also tend to reveal information about Doria's relationship with her father and how she views him. When Doria speaks of being proud when people tell her she looks like Yasmina, she continues on to explain how she doesn't resemble her father by saying, "J'ai presque rien pris de mon père. Sauf mes yeux, qui sont verts comme les siens. Dans ceux de mon père, il y avait toujours de la nostalgie. Alors quand je me regarde dans la glace, je le vois lui et sa nostalgie. Tout le temps. Mme Burlaud m'a dit que je serais complètement guérie le jour où je me verrais moi dans la glace. Juste moi" (157). While Doria's father is absent throughout the entire novel, we learn about him through anecdotes and memories that Doria recounts, as well as through seeing the hole he left in his family by leaving. It is significant that towards the end of the novel, Mme Burlaud, Doria's therapist, says this about Doria and her father. It's rather obvious that a family would still be recovering from a father leaving months before, yet this statement from Mme Burlaud is a reminder that over the course of the narrative, Doria is healing from the emotional pain of an absent father and that it is a process she is still taking part in. This

process, while not often explicitly talked about in the novel, is a main way that Doria's father is in a way still an active agent in the narrative as he still has a deep impact on Doria and Yasmina even without contact. The things we learn about him through Doria mentioning him shed light on his own conception of gender roles and the role that women would fill. When thinking about how Yasmina is doing better and is even taking classes to become literate, Doria says:

C'est vrai que de temps en temps, je remarque qu'elle est soucieuse quand même, genre quand elle regarde la télé éteinte. Mais ça arrive moins souvent. Et puis elle est active et libre maintenant alors qu'avant c'était loin d'être le cas. Quand Papa habitait chez nous, il était même pas question qu'elle travaille alors qu'on était grave en galère de thune. Parce qu'une femme pour Papa c'était pas fait pour bosser non plus. (114-115)

Not only do we see Yasmina's progress here, but also a clear view of Doria's father's views on women. Doria and Yasmina certainly suffer as a result of his leaving them, yet the evolution that both Doria and Yasmina go through throughout the narrative shows that his absence is ultimately a good thing for both of them. While they are still working to recover from the shift in the family unit, it's clear that many of their struggles from his absence are because neither of them had the skills to take care of themselves as it's stated that he didn't believe women should take that on. Furthermore, as Doria says, he believed that women were not made to work. This statement begs the question: what were they made for? His actions would allow us to conclude that he believes women were made to be mothers and produce heirs for men. These ideas concerning women are further unpacked when Doria compares her father to Hamoudi's father. In the context of thinking about how she, the only literate member of the family, would help with paperwork and documents, Doria says:

Une fois, j'ai demandé à mon père comment ils faisaient, lui et Maman, avant que je sache lire et écrire. Il a pris ça pour de l'insolence. Il m'a frappée. Mais pas juste un peu. Frappée fort et longtemps. Mais je pleurais jamais. En tout cas, pas devant lui, parce que mon père était comme celui d'Hamoudi : il pensait que les filles, c'est faible, que c'est fait pour pleurer et pour faire la vaisselle. (137)

In this situation with her father, Doria refrains from crying to avoid giving him the satisfaction of seeing a girl do what girls are supposed to do, in his opinion. In turn, she is fighting against the stereotype of women that her father holds, and as a result, is actively breaking down the binary of gender roles and blurs the dichotomy by acting outside of what is expected of her according to the limited view that her father has. While she recognizes that her father is wrong to think these things and that she does not agree, on some level, there is a personal aspect that still haunts her, as ultimately, she was left by her father because she was not a boy. This resonates with her throughout the narrative, despite her dismissive attitude towards her father, which could be her masking her hurt just as Dounia's father did after she left in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*. While the female solidarity found among the characters provides an element of resolution, especially by the end of the narrative, the emotional pain within Doria runs deep, resulting in her pessimism, cynicism, and judgement of others, which certainly affects how Doria views herself.

After thinking about how no one remembered her 16th birthday, not even Yasmina, Doria goes into some of the ways in which she feels she falls short. This discussion becomes about gender when she says things would be different if she were a boy:

Mais si j'étais un garçon, ce serait peut-être différent... ce serait même sûrement différent. Déjà, mon père serait encore là. Il ne serait pas reparti au Maroc.

Ensuite à Noël 1994, j'aurais sûrement eu les rollers alignés Fisher Price et par la

même occasion une réponse à la lettre que j’avais envoyée au Père Noël. Ouais, tout se serait mieux passé si j’avais été un mec. J’aurais eu plein de photos de moi étant gosse, comme la petite Sarah. Mon père m’aurait appris à chiquer du tabac. Il m’aurait raconté pas mal d’histoires salaces qu’il aurait entendues sur les chantiers et puis même que de temps en temps, il m’aurait mis des petites tapes sur l’épaule en signe de complicité, genre ‘t’es un bon gars toi !’. Ouais, ouais. Je me serais même amusée à me gratter souvent entre les jambes pour affirmer ma virilité. J’aurais bien aimé être un garçon. Mais bon, il se trouve que je suis une fille. Une gonzesse. Une nana. Une meuf quoi. Je finirai bien par m’y habituer.

(170)

A lot of the things that Doria lists here are not exclusively specific to being a boy, such as having baby pictures of herself, yet these things point to how unappreciated she felt by her father because she wasn’t a boy. The concluding sentence of this passage, Doria saying that she will get used to being a girl, may seem to contrast with otherwise feminist perspectives in the narrative, coming from the characters. However, Doria is still journeying through recovering from the loss of her father in the family, regardless of how badly he treated her, as it is a symbol of her inadequacy to him as she was a daughter and not a son.

Guène not only uses female characters to break gender stereotypes, yet male characters as well in both *Kiffe kiffe demain* and *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* as shown by the characters of Nabil, Hamoudi, and Mourad. Nabil is consistently referred to by Doria as abnormal in some way or another. We even see the breaking down of the gender role binary in descriptions of his parents, who we could assume passed down these values to Nabil. When Doria described her father as being similar to Hamoudi’s father, she continues to say, “Heureusement, tous les pères

ne sont pas comme ça. Celui de Nabil, il est gentil par exemple. Il l'a jamais frappé et il parle avec lui tout le temps. Ils vont même se balader ensemble quand il fait beau" (Guène, *Kiffe* 137-138). Nabil, Doria's classmate who is also of Maghrebi origin, becomes her tutor during the narrative. At first, Doria doesn't like him, often calling him "Nabil le nul", which she continues to use towards the end of the narrative when she is annoyed with him. Our first impression of Nabil is when Yasmina first tells Doria that her friend has offered for her son to tutor her. Doria narrates, "Nabil, c'est un nul. Il a de l'acné et quand il était au collège, tous les jours ou presque, il se faisait racketter son goûter à la récré. Une grosse victime. Moi je préfère les héros, comme dans les films, ceux qui font rêver les filles...Al Pacino, je suis sûre que personne pouvait lui tirer son goûter" (46). Here, we get a glimpse of what Doria sees in Nabil, but also some foreshadowing of how Nabil is used to break male stereotypes. This happens through Doria's judgement of him as she compares him to Al Pacino and implicitly imposes gender ideals on him, essentially saying that he is soft or weak. He eventually kisses Doria which surprises her, and after some awkward distance between the two, the narrative ends with the possibility of them dating. While he doesn't occupy a large role in the narrative, Nabil breaks stereotypes of what boys are like, *beur* boys in particular as he excels in school and is ambitious. He comes into the narrative because of how well he does in school as he tutors Doria. Doria eventually says of him, "J'en ai pas encore parlé à Maman mais je crois qu'elle aime bien Nabil parce que c'est un mec plein d'ambition" (130). Speaking of Nabil and Hamoudi, Kleppinger writes, "Both of these characters destroy stereotypes: Nabil demonstrates that there are indeed youth from within the North African immigrant population who take education seriously and who genuinely wish to share their knowledge with their female peers; Hamoudi may be a more recognizable character for readers familiar with the stereotypes of *beur* males in the *banlieue*, but he is also extremely

caring and encourages Doria to pursue her studies” (*Branding the ‘Beur’ Author* 207). As Kleppinger notes, Hamoudi coincides more with the image of a stereotypical *beur* male as he deals drugs and is involved in petty crime. However, the relationship between him and Doria humanizes him. He progresses throughout the narrative, just as Doria does, and eventually gets married and holds down a job and gives up illegally making money by selling drugs. Kleppinger continues to say, “Even the neighbourhood ‘criminal’ has settled down and found happiness as a law-abiding citizen” (*Branding the ‘Beur’ Author* 207). Hamoudi’s relationship with Doria, discussed in the previous chapter, is unique because despite their age difference, they still have a close bond. While he does engage in petty crime and other stereotypical behaviors of *beur* males living in the *banlieue*, his protection of Doria and mentorship in a sense adds another facet to his character that works to break against the stereotype he portrays and allows the reader to see that he as a person is more than he may seem at first. In discussion on gender stereotypes and their relationship with characters in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Mehta writes, “By resisting the stereotype of Arab-Muslim men as the universal oppressors of women, the novel focuses on the social conditions that motivate human behavior rather than subscribing to prefabricated misrepresentations of Arab men based on hegemonic bias and media intentionality” (194). Both Hamoudi and Doria’s father are clear examples of Mehta’s analysis. While Hamoudi does fit many stereotypical criteria of *beur* men, he is also plays a very supportive and important role in Doria’s life. Furthermore, Doria’s father is not portrayed as a stereotypical Arab man whose actions are justified by the family he left behind because of who he is. Rather, the novel focuses on his wrongdoings rather than his identity as an Arab male with authority in the family and the need to bear a son for his family honor.

Hamoudi's character and situation also brings up gender issues outside of his relationship with Doria. Towards the end of the novel, Hamoudi marries Lila, the mother of the girl that Doria babysits. His mother's relief when he gets engaged speaks to gender issues concerning sexuality:

Avec Lila, ils ont même des projets de mariage. C'est la mère d'Hamoudi qui doit être contente. Elle aura réussi à marier tous ses enfants. 'Dernier niveaux atteint. Bonus. Vous êtes un winner.' Elle a rempli sa mission la daronne. Et puis ça arrive au bon moment. Vingt-huit ans, c'est bien, c'est juste avant que sa mère ne commence à se poser des questions... 'Ya Allah, mon Dieu, peut-être mon fils c'est une pédale ?! Hchouma'. (165)

Hamoudi's sexuality isn't actually being questioned, but by saying that if he had waited longer to marry, his mom would make comments about him being gay, Doria is emphasizing the importance in marriage and the expectation to marry, saying that if he didn't marry soon, the only explanation would be that he is gay. It's also important to note that when Doria projects what his mom might say in that situation, it's not simple curiosity, but a stigma and shame that is attached, shown by the Arabic term "Hchouma". The connection between sexual orientation and marriage is strong in Metiba's *Ma mère et moi* as previously discussed in this chapter with protagonist being gay and his mother pushing marriage on him. The references to homosexuality in *Ma mère et moi* differ in that the protagonist is actually gay, while that identifier is just assumed to be projected onto Hamoudi if he were not set to marry soon. When analyzing gender based expectations, Aronsson writes, "Ce n'est donc pas seulement la liberté de la femme qui est restreinte dans cette société traditionnelle: il y a des règles strictes aussi en ce qui concerne la conduite des hommes. Et l'homosexualité n'est pas une orientation tolérée dans ce milieu" (8).

Comments about Mourad's sexuality are also made in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* in a similar way, not in an effort to comment on his actual sexual orientation but rather to comment on his masculinity. Miloud, Mourad's cousin with whom he lives in Paris, makes a short comment in passing saying, "Tu sais, si c'est parce que tu es pédé, je te jure de ne rien dire à ta mère" (146). The way in which Miloud makes this comment is in a joking manner, and he goes on to say that he would not judge Mourad if it was the case that he was gay. Even though Miloud doesn't make the comment in a hurtful or aggressive way, it is still significant that he makes a comment about homosexuality in the first place, especially in this context. The conversation that led to this comment had nothing to do with Mourad's sexuality, but rather was about Mourad's love for literature, which Miloud does not understand. Because the conversation had nothing to do with sexual orientation, we can conclude that the label "pédé", in this case, is used for the stigma that is attached to it.

Mourad and Miloud have many differences between them, which also point to gender issues and Mourad as breaking a male stereotype. Mourad, the anxious person that he is, compares himself often to Miloud, and tells himself in certain situations that Miloud would have acted in a different (and better) way. These situations usually involve women, an area of life that Mourad has significantly less experience with. Once Mourad becomes acquainted with several of the other teachers at his school, one of them, Héléne, invites him to her house for dinner. He assumed that it would just be them, and brings flowers, but is surprised to see that it was a group gathering, and other teachers from their school are also there. At the end of the night, when everyone else has left, Héléne asks him if he has to go. He doesn't understand the underlying meaning of her question and leaves, only to understand when it's too late that she wanted him to stay and ruminates, thinking to himself about how he was so stupid but also blames Héléne for

being too coy. He uses this as an opportunity to compare himself to Miloud, who is more of a womanizer, and says, “Miloud, lui, n’aurait pas hésité, il est plutôt du genre à rester jusqu’au lendemain matin, à traîner en caleçon dans l’appartement en sifflotant et même à manger les restes de poulet froid au petit déjeuner” (Guène, *Un homme* 263). While gender roles aren’t discussed as explicitly here as in other parts of the novel, they are evoked as Mourad compares himself to his cousin, and criticizes how he reacted in the situation with Héléne.

As previously mentioned, Mourad is an anxious individual with a lot of fears, especially what he refers to as his nightmare of being obese with salt and pepper hair. In a moment of hope that he will make something of his life, he refers to this specific fear by saying:

Je pourrais enfin effacer ce film angoissant qui me hante. Ce cauchemar où je n’ai aucune vie sociale, ni métier ni amis. Dans cette vision, je suis un vieil obèse triste et j’ai les cheveux poivre et sel. Je me baigne dans de l’huile de friture et je vis toujours dans la maison de mes parents à plus de 50 ans. Ma mère lave mes slips à la main et elle me coupe les ongles de pied, car je suis devenu trop gros et trop paresseux pour m’en occuper moi-même. Je passe mon temps à relire des livres que j’ai déjà lus, car il m’est devenu bien trop pénible de traîner dehors mon corps gras pour en emprunter de nouveaux à la bibliothèque. J’ai chassé cette image ignoble. Et j’ai prié Dieu de m’épargner les cheveux poivre et sel. (39)

This passage gives a clear idea of what Mourad’s exact fears are when it comes to his future and what he will become. This also gives insight to how his mind works, as the realities of the narrative show that while he is not social, he is far from becoming the image of his nightmare. When he says at first that he could erase this fear from his mind, he is speaking hypothetically, and that possibility rests on his success. Because of this, the nightmare continues to haunt him

throughout the narrative and is a deeply engrained fear. While not directly related to gender issues that come up in the novel, this recurring nightmare is what is most insightful of what is revealed about Mourad in his narration of the narrative. Seeing this intimate view of how he sees himself and his future reveals that he is struggling with fitting the ideals that he sees others having, especially Miloud. His interactions with others and how he thinks about them also reveal his passivity which would go against stereotypical images of masculinity. For example, when he is at Hélène's house having dinner with the group of other teachers, he wishes to avoid having to participate in the conversation. When the group is talking about certain matters related to teaching and their school district, Mourad recounts, "Je mangeais sans bruit en craignant que quelqu'un ne me demande mon avis" (26). Moments later, his fear comes true and Gérard, another teacher with whom he has conflict says, "Et toi, le nouveau! C'est quoi, ton avis? Hein? Toi qui viens de te lancer! Avoue que tu tombes de haut!" (261). Mourad, still unsure of himself, responds with, "...Euh...Pas vraiment. Je ne savais rien. J'apprends. J'ai pas de méthode, pas d'a priori, je fais avec" (261). While he is a new teacher and he is still learning just as he states, the way he interacts with the other teachers and fears being asked his opinion in the first place sheds light on his passivity and how unsure of himself he is. As shown through this example, he does not give his own opinions or thoughts the same value that he gives to those of others around him. This relates back to why the words of the transvestite who told Miloud not to cry in the nightclub resonated with him. Actively showing this struggle in his narration contrasts the masculine stereotype of stoicism and outward strength and confidence that is an overarching theme in the realm of gender issues in Djouder's *Désintégration*.

Themes concerning gender, gender roles, and sexuality in *Désintégration*, are presented differently than in the other works. The previously mentioned example of men crying,

juxtaposed with the recurring theme of men not crying in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas*, highlights the gender binary that is found throughout *Désintégration*. The limited way of viewing masculinity found in that example translates to the limited view of femininity and the roles that women occupy, particularly within the family. While it seems that the other works strive to break down the gender role binary and blur the lines that define the dichotomy, discussion of gender in *Désintégration* reinforces it. A misogynistic tone is found throughout, as the narrator, who often assumes a collective male persona, speaks about women in *beur* families. The language used in these passages shows the dominance that the males feel they have over female family members. While at some points, the collective *nous* narrator includes women and talks about problems that teenage girls would have, the narrator reverts back to the encompassing male persona that then criticizes the same girls and women that also take part in the *nous* narrator at times. The differences in narrators is then only distinguished by context in the book. Gender and how it is portrayed in *Désintégration* becomes particularly problematic when the collective narrator speaks of their sisters who act out because of the influence that the outer French sphere has on them. One section of the text in particular takes an especially misogynistic tone, essentially giving the message that their sisters are influenced by Satan and need protection, as they are the ones causing problems:

Nous, les fils d'immigrés, devons protéger nos sœurs de Satan qui leur souffle de mauvaises idées. Nos sœurs ont des problèmes. Elles se maquillent. Elles commencent à regarder les garçons. On ne les tient plus. Elles cachent des choses. Même les frapper ne suffit plus. Elles deviennent violentes [...] Nous, les fils d'immigrés, nous nous survirilisons, nous nous surmasculinisons car ajouter à une faiblesse économique, sociale, environnementale...les faiblesses de la féminité,

c'est nous mettre dans une position d'hypervulnérabilité qui pourrait nous rendre fous [...] Nos femmes sont soit des putes qui nous répugnent, soit des saintes qu'on respecte. Nos sœurs sont faibles [...] Notre peur, la pire, c'est celle du déshonneur. Qu'elles salissent la famille, qu'elles souillent notre nom [...] Nous sommes attentifs au moindre de leurs gestes, à la moindre conversation téléphonique qui les trahirait. Leur émancipation nous gêne. Nous les voyons se transformer à la période de la puberté et nos cerveaux se mettent en alerte. Les seins qui poussent, le corps qui se féminise, tout ça c'est pas bon [...] Pourquoi sommes-nous comme ça ? Nous sommes très possessifs. Nos sœurs sont nos sœurs. Nos filles sont nos filles. Nous les voulons pour nous tout seuls. (Djouder 31-32)

All of these very strong and charged statements towards women are made within two pages of the text. There are several key problems with what is stated here by the narrator. Perhaps most shocking is the sexual objectification of family members on the part of the narrator. In doing so, the narrator is reducing the personhood of the women, which in conjunction with the other troubling and misogynistic statements that are made, reinforce the notion that women are weak and that men are superior. In the beginning of the passage, the narrator needs to protect their sisters from Satan. By suggesting this, the narrator is further implying that the sisters are easily influenced and need the male figure to intervene. Later in the passage, we see them explicitly call the sisters weak. The narrator says that as the sons of immigrants, they need to respond to this weakness by being hyper-masculine out of necessity, which they resent. The narrator refers to this weakness as being "economic, social, environmental" yet essentially blames these weaknesses that the immigrant families suffer on the women and their inherent weakness they

add to the family. By saying that the family suffers these weaknesses because of the women, the narrator reduces the women to that weakness. The collective narrator then puts its own group, the sons, on a pedestal, effectively taking the tone of a martyr by saying that this hyper-masculinity that they are obligated to take on could seem crazy, yet they do it out of necessity for the family. While Mehta is focusing on *Kiffe kiffe demain* in her study, the points she makes concerning the role of *beur* daughters in the family is pertinent to the discussion found in *Désintégration*. She writes, “The transculturality of the daughters ironically poses an immediate threat to the cultural and religious integrity of the disfavored immigrant family by providing the scope for assimilation into a non-Muslim, non-Arab social reality in France through schooling, friendships and interactions with children of other ethnicities, and interfaith activities” (192). We see this threat with Dounia after the effects of the influence that Julie has on her become visible and affect the family. A different side of this threat is shown through the above passage from *Désintégration*. The passage shows the male reaction to this threat, and one could argue that this volatile reaction to the behavior of *beur* girls, who are also struggling to navigate being in between two strong spheres of influence, is an expression of fear and the desire to assert themselves as hyper-masculine males who dominate over the females of their family in order to compensate feeling emasculated in other areas of their lives. When speaking generally about the role that young *beur* girls, or *beurettes*, occupy in the immigrant family, Mehta writes:

The sense of Maghrebi community has particular bearing[s] on gender ideologies and their regulation by cultural norms, identity, and social adaptability. The continued marginalization of Maghrebi men in the public sphere through racism, discrimination, unemployment, and poverty creates a Fanonian ‘nervous condition’ acted out on the female body. Daily aggressions against Arab-Muslim

men find their source in criminalized representations of them as terrorists, fundamentalists, and militants. (192)

Mehta continues by listing historical events and situations such as the rise of Islam in Europe and the “postmodern media vilification of Arabs after 9/11” to explain how these images and representations of Arab-Muslim men came about. She continues:

...the sense of hopelessness experienced by young Arab men in the projects and their ‘defiant delinquency’ as a response to social marginality and continued police harassment have given rise to a corresponding policing of gender; this is an attempt by the men to reclaim their threatened masculinity in France. A father-son complicity to reinstate authority within the home in the face of an increasing loss of control on the outside manifests itself in punitive domination over daughters ‘who continually walk a swaying tightrope in being the transcultural teenagers that their social locations have fashioned,’ according to Tricia Keaton (6). (192)

Of the four primary works, this phenomenon is most evident in Djouder’s *Désintégration* as shown through the narration and how female family members are described.

The narrator discusses this implicit emasculation on the part of French society against Arab men by defending immigrants and *beur* individuals and expressing frustration towards the stereotypes that are maintained:

Quand cesserez-vous de nous regarder comme des immigrés, des étrangers, des voleurs, des terroristes ? Imaginez un monde où l’on parle de vous en termes de quotas, d’intégration, d’immigration, de marginalité, de criminalité, de délits, d’insécurité... Imaginez ce monde, vous, les partisans des droits de l’homme.
(Djouder 107)

In this passage, the narrator effectively lays out the socially marginalized position that they are put in, in French society, that could cause feelings of emasculation. After providing an analogy to explain the hardship of being an immigrant, the narrator continues by saying, “Les étrangers ne sont pas faibles. Ni psychiquement, ni physiquement. Ils ne se victimisent pas. C’est l’histoire qui les affaiblit. Comme les FEMMES. Elles ne sont pas faibles, leur position est affaiblie” (Djouder 107). Here, the narrator, while not wanting to be categorically considered an outsider by French terms, defends “les étrangers” in order to demonstrate that while the terms that French people use to describe them are not accurate, it also should not be taken as an insult because those that are immigrants are in a tough position. This passage brings up gender in way that has its own nuances, especially when juxtaposed to the earlier, more misogynistic passage. Here, the narrator uses the idea that women are not weak, but rather their position in society as women is weakened, in order to rationalize to the French that immigrants themselves are not weak, yet it’s the position they hold in society that is weak. This differs with how gender and women are conceptualized earlier in the text. The weakness of their societal position, the economic, social, and environmental weakness that is mentioned earlier, is the weakness that the narrator blames the women for. Because of this inconsistency, it is arguable that the narrator uses this example of women having a weakened position in order to rationalize to the French that male immigrants are not a weak category, the way that the French may define them as. However, in the context of just the immigrant family in dialogue, it is still the women who are blamed for the weaknesses that the men have to overcome in the larger outside society. This creates a cycle as the narrator is blaming women and the *beur* girls as being too easily influenced by the French sphere of influence which requires the sons to be protective and hyper-masculine. That position that they feel they must occupy as a result, leads to the need to defend themselves against being called

weak by the outer society. This is because they see themselves as strong and masculine, because of the role they must occupy in relation to their sisters, yet French society, through its rules, both formal and informal, concerning integration, posits immigrants and their families as weak. As Mehta demonstrates, the notion of fear is also a factor as by being influenced by the French social sphere outside of the home, the *beur* girls create a threat to the family and the culture that it aims to maintain.

Conclusion

As the introduction describes, the term (and therefore category) *beur*, aims to solve the problematic that cultural binaries create, by forging a third space in which the French-born children of Maghrebi immigrants can reside. The various other binaries that present themselves in each of the four primary works, such as that of gender roles, are dichotomized when abstractly conceptualized. However, when people are put in the context of these binaries, as they are in the works, the binaries are problematized, as the *beur* characters do not fit on either side of the binary, and are constantly struggle in searching for their own third space that defines their personal experience. As shown through the characters of the works, this third space is not easy to find, and therefore, the characters exist in a constant state of conflict of some sort. This conflict that is seen in the characters, coincides with the problematic nature of the term *beur*, the third space of the French-Arab binary, as it remains ambiguous and unstandardized in both meaning and use. While these infinite third spaces that emerge in response to binaries in which the characters of the novels do not fit, rather than provide clear solutions to the binaries, they reveal the problematic nature of the binaries.

In the context of integration and engaged citizenship, these binaries present themselves in the form of the problematic surrounding labeling. This is best demonstrated in Djouder's *Désintégration*. Those who identify as *beur* find themselves in a unique position when it comes to their status as "French". While they are French-born French citizens, they are influenced by the sphere of their home culture where their immigrant parents have brought in their own culture originating from North Africa. Because they have this influence, they are seen as existing in a different sphere than French citizens of French origin, or *les Français de souches*. The third space is hard to navigate here and Djouder demonstrates this struggle as his narrator, throughout

the text, is actively struggling between identifying with the immigrant parents, and coming to terms with the fact that France is their homeland.

The dominant and overarching French-Arab binary that allowed the creation of *beur* as a third space, and also leads to the binary and problematic in the realm of integrating into French society as a French-born citizen also presents itself as a problematic binary in the home. Cultural binaries and conflicting spheres of influence cause conflict within the family, just as the French-Arab binary can also cause conflict within the individual, providing the need for the *beur* category. Dounia in Guène's *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* is a prime example for how the conflicting spheres of influence in which *beur* individuals may find themselves can cause problems within the family. While she is raised by immigrant parents from Algeria who have strict views of what role she should occupy as a daughter and eventually as a wife and mother, Dounia is also heavily influenced by her French peers, particularly her best friend Julie. She draws comparisons between her life and what she sees of Julie's life as well as Julie's parents, and grows resentful of the Maghrebi culture sphere of influence that she exists in. Even though Dounia eventually leaves and is separated from the family for ten years, almost entirely influenced solely by the French societal sphere during that time, she still struggles to find her own third space in between both spheres, as she is still influenced by the memory of her family and the emotional pain that leaving them, and the circumstances that led her to make that decision, caused.

Metiba's *Ma mère et moi* also serves as an example for how cultural binaries affect familial relationships. As previously discussed, this work differs from the other three in that the protagonist is not *beur*, but rather an immigrant himself. Nevertheless, cultural binaries are seen within the context of his family and the role that he plays as he has integrated into French

society, which clashes with his mother's Algerian culture when he returns to Algeria to visit her. Because they each exist in different cultural spheres of influence following his immigration, the protagonist seeks to forge his own third space outside of the cultural binary when he is in Algeria with his mother, yet has ideas and ways of thinking that are influenced by his changed identity as a French resident.

Lastly, third spaces arise in response to and problematize binaries concerning gender roles, particularly those that are imposed on individuals. The breaking down of gender binaries is particularly evident in Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*. While gender is not the predominant theme of the novel, it is inherent in the main themes of the novel as the premise of the narrative is that Doria's father leaves their family because he wants a son. This leaves Doria feeling worthless as a daughter and as a result, she speculates what her life would be like, and how much better it would be, if she were a boy. While Doria's personal journey through conceptualizing her own gender and what it entails for her life and her relationships with others does not directly relate to the idea of binaries, several characters in *Kiffe kiffe demain* actively break gender stereotypes. These characters, including Hamoudi, Nabil, and Yasmina, and their roles in the narrative, go against societal expectations of them and in turn, provide their own respective third spaces. In the case of Yasmina, Doria's mother, she forges her own spaces as a Maghrebi immigrant woman by essentially transforming from a subservient wife with no ability to contribute to the family's income because of her misogynist husband, to a single mother who is able to support herself and her daughter and even takes language classes to improve her literacy.

Each of these binaries, and the third spaces that arise as a result of the problematic nature of the binaries, point to how these novels use *beur* issues and experiences as the context for matters concerning status in the state of France, family relationships, and gender.

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