

Displaced mothers, veils in motion, and fatherlands in Yamina Benguigui's *Inch'Allah dimanche*

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The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences. Its (in)finitude subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizable one. The differences it brings about are differences not only in structure, in the play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbre and in silence. We – you and me, she and he, we and they – we differ in the content of the words, in the construction and weaving of sentences but most of all, I feel, in the choice and mixing of utterances, the ethos, the tones, the paces, the cuts, the pauses. The story circulates like a gift; an empty gift, which anybody can lay claim to by filling in to taste, yet can never truly possess. A gift built on multiplicity. One that stays inexhaustible within its own limits. Its departures and arrivals. Its quietness. (Minh-Ha 2)

We live in words and beyond them, in stories and outside of them in various degrees of slippages. But who gets to write the stories and how one reads them as they are politicized as acts of power? In *Woman Native Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Trinh Minh-Ha thoughtfully reflects on the writing interventions of Third World women writers and how they illuminate the postcolonial experience and the feminist practices emerging from it in invaluable ways. In so doing, questions about silence, absence, and visibility become inevitable. In a beautifully eloquent TED talk, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks about the problem of a single story as a grand totalizing narrative, which she critiques as being a practice in “the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (“The Dangers of a Single Story”). A single story is an act of power that separates and deepens differences: “It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (“The Dangers of a Single Story”). The postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha explains that narration provides the means of production and knowledge of the nation. According to him, the nation is a non-totalizing and non-homogenizing narrative. As he notes, narratives of the nation can be written from the margins or even from outside the boundaries by “the peoples of the periphery [who] return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis” (6). Stories are shared humanity beyond individual, national, history, and cultural boundaries.

“Daughters of immigration”

This article explores a story that has not been told for more than twenty five years after its inception in 1974 when the French Government passed the Family Reunion Law in order to reunite two waves of immigrants. This law was passed in a moment when France reached a level of immigrant saturation. However, family reunion law was meant to ease the integration of Maghrebi workers who participated in the reconstruction of the country. After World War II, France imported labor force from its former North-African colonies – Algeria in particular, to reconstruct the infrastructure and the cities. The men migrated for work leaving their families behind as they were not needed for the reconstruction of the country after the war. After the realization that these workers have no intention to return to their home countries, the French Government mandated Maghrebi women (and their children) to join their men.

What follows looks at how Yamina Benguigui, the French film director, writer, and politician of Algerian descent documents the family reunion era in her debut film *Inch Allah dimanche* (2001) or *Sunday, God Willing* in English translation. Benguigui’s film draws attention to the stories – many of them still untold, of a generation of migrant Maghrebi women in France facing the burdens of integration. Partly autobiographic, the plot line unfolds the story of a reunited family by placing a particular attention on Zouina, the young mother and wife. The article starts with a brief overview of the political climate surrounding the veil at the time when Benguigui was writing and directing her debut film. It continues with a theoretical discussion of nation formation processes that is followed by a section that analyzes how the film represents the Algerian mother’s initiations in cross-cultural gender and national structures. The final section analyzes how Benguigui’s film envisions an unmediated and depoliticized relationship between the Islamic woman and her veil.

Without closure and the claim to be emblematic for the entire generation of women immigrants from the family reunion era in France, Benguigui’s film affirms the importance of telling the story, especially from the perspective of the Algerian mother and wife who moves across borders to make a home for her reunited family. Her story is a narrative of the French nation as much as is one of postcolonial Algeria. With the crossing of the geo-political border between the two countries, the main character Zouina experiences new identity configurations. Bhabha’s concept of unhomeliness, understood as the postcolonial condition of “extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” linked to the “estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world” (13) is what best describes her new identity status. What follows explores unhomeliness as a series of imaginary acts that fracture monolithic patriarchal and national structures and enable cross-national identity processes. I argue that Benguigui’s film scripts a narrative of integration from the perspective of the immigrant Algerian mother who searches relentlessly to adopt her own agency at the intersection of her two cultures.

Her story of integration is a series of brief and isolated imaginary acts of identification with gender and national structures in her country of adoption. It is an unfinished story that is passed on to the next generation along with the burdens of writing it and integrating it in the larger (and more inert) narrative of the French nation.

In the context invoked in *Inch'Allah dimanche*, immigration is a cross-generational process spanning over at least two generations. Benguigui's film is a testament that immigration and integration in France are still open-ended processes for citizens of Maghrebi descent. *Inch'Allah dimanche* ends in a note of slight cultural progress. The final scene shows the young Algerian mother returning home unveiled and affirming her mobility in front of everybody – family, neighbors, acquaintances. Her statement is public and is made like a declaration of freedom (Donaldson). Looking at her husband, Zouina tells her daughter: “Tomorrow I will be the one taking you to school.” These words carry the promise of a renewed identity for Zouina and set different ideological premises for her daughter. She participates a participant in the public space as a mother taking her children to school. In an interview conducted by Linda Alexander, Benguigui speaks about the difficulties encountered in her career as a filmmaker in a landscape dominated by men and taboo topics – such as the integration of Muslim women in the French society. Benguigui sees immigration as an inherited condition:

Yes, it was extremely difficult for me. One price I had to pay was that I had to be willing to cut myself off from my father. My father was not willing for me to follow this career, and it's only recently that I've been able to reestablish contact with him. Because you're cut off to some extent from French society, you have to really impose yourself, you have to really fight to be able to work on subjects like this, subjects and realities that France isn't necessarily willing to acknowledge. It's a constant struggle, and you're constantly juggling several different hats: the hat of a woman, a director, the daughter of immigration. It's not easy. (*French-Algerian: A Story of Immigrants and Identity*)

Immigration is identified as genealogy, as an overarching condition of identity that overpowers other aspects of identity.

Benguigui's film historicizes the family reunion era from a feminine vantage point. It stands as a political and cultural gesture that claims a space of public identity for this wave of feminine migration. Stories of migrant women whose identities are configured at the “intersection of a complex web of ethnic, race, class, and gender relations” (Freedman and Tarr qtd in Weber-Fève 182) are informed by a multiplicity of cross-cultural stories often times difficult to reconcile or place in one narrative. The intertextuality of these stories generates liminal spaces of thought and identity.

Benguigui's film is a testament that women's migration is different than men's. As migrant women move across different patriarchal and gender stratification systems, they are subject to multiple conditioning factors.

The homemaking they are expected to produce in the new home country goes beyond the domestic realm of the family, and is expected to impact the wellbeing of the nation. This generation of women undergoing the experience of displacement and migration is by no means a coherent group as it is multigenerational – often times including three generations – grandmothers, mothers, and children. The generational layering of this wave of feminine migration comes with different ideological stratification and levels of visibility. For example, as Jane Freedman and Carrie Tarr observe, there is generational bias being placed on these women: “older women are generally portrayed as wives and mothers, responsible for the ‘integration’ of the family in French society” (qtd. in Weber-Fève 168). Young women tend to be forgotten and less visible than their older counterparts. However, they become visible the moment they wear the Islamic headscarves in French schools. Integration is apparently a gendered process that subjects veiled women to different regimes of visibility depending on age and access to representation in the public space.

In 2004, France offered a radical answer to the dilemma of integration and voted what is popularly known as the “Veil Law,” which forbids the wearing of religious symbols in elementary and secondary public schools. This law was meant to consolidate the constitutional principle of secularism that separates the institutions of state and religion. As immediately observed, “this law affected Jewish yarmulkes, Sikh turbans, and large Christian crosses, [but] its main effect was to ban the wearing of headscarves, or hijabs, by young Muslim girls” (Richburg qtd. in King and Smith 745). Between a radical response from the state and the extended street protest of immigrants predominantly from former French African colonies that followed the passing of the law, young Muslim women still remained silent in this debate, yet central to it. Yacine Sadi, a Muslim female commentator highlighted Muslim women's lack of engagement in public conversation and noted how the debate was a testament of their extreme marginalization: “the debate is biased in advance, the extremists on both sides have made the decision to think in the place of young girls, without taking into account their opinion, nor respecting the fundamental notion of free will” (qtd. in King and Smith 748). In 1989, when three Muslim middle-school girls from Paris were suspended for wearing the veil at school, the legal interdiction of the veil was seen as impossible because it was an infringement on the republican principle of freedom of religion. This incident known as the “Headscarf Affair” is significant not only for the history of Muslim women and immigrant population in France but also for the ways in which the French state negotiates integration via-à-vis secularism and democracy. These moments of contention around the veil show that the state prioritizes affirmations of French identity to other aspects of identity (Chirac qtd in King and Smith 755) such as religion,

ethnicity, and gender, and identifies the public schools as the ideal site for affirmations of nationality. Moreover, as Wing and Smith suggest, the colonial intentions still reverberate in the hopes entertained by the government that “bareheaded Muslim girls will carry secularist French values to the men in their family and to others in their community” (756).

The social inclusion ideal underlying the family reunion law involved massive displacements of Maghbrebi women. In the article “The Migrant Homemaker: Historicizing Gender between Nations in Yamina Benguigui’s *Inch’Allah dimanche*,” Olivia Donaldson comments on how family reunion was more than a right; it was a legal obligation: “family women were not purely permitted to migrate they were obliged to do so” (4). However, as Benguigui’s film shows, Maghberbi men from France can decide if family reunion is an option for them or not. The double patriarchal imposition on Maghrebi women from family and the French law leaves them minimal space of intervention and mobility. While Benguigui’s film explores the precarious condition of this space, it also shows the tremendous mobilization of the Algerian woman towards defining her own integration and insertion in new gender and national structures. In order for Zouina to fulfill her domestic duties she has to leave behind her mother and motherland. The opening scene shows Zouina being separated from her old mother, who is returned to Algeria as her presence in France is not seen as necessary addition to the family reunion. The dramatic intensity of the displacement is dubbed by two intertwining sound lines: a soothing extradiegetic song in Arabic and mother and daughter’s raw sounds of despair echoing the harbor and resonating in the hearts of the other immigrants.

For Benguigui, the collective history can be apprehended as personal and intimate histories revolving around the maternal figure, which features as a matrix of identity reconstructions. The film opens with a moment of indelible collective memory featuring a mass of migrants. We see close-ups of the French border officers placing the entrance stamp on passports of disoriented migrants carrying their life in a suitcase. The long takes of the sea, the impressive proportions of the ship, the homeland shores looming in the distance, the architecture of the new land have an aura of nostalgia and temporal suspension induced by the use of sepia coloration. Once the liminal space of the harbor is exited the sepia disappears in favor of a color palette that offers representations grounded in realism.

Imagined communities

Modern citizens are born in nations and are taught to perceive the nation as an intimate quality of identity, as intimate and inevitable as biologically-rooted affiliations through gender or family. National subjects are taught to value certain abstract signs and stories as a part of their intrinsic relation to themselves, to all "citizens," and to the national terrain; there is said to be a common "national" character. (Berlant 20)

Benguigui debuts her film in a context dominated by irrational fears about the Islamization of French schools. Colonial anxieties about "the woman who sees without being seen" did not lose their potency, therefore veiled women had to be unveiled (Fanon 169). The traditional function of the veil "to protect, reassure, and isolate" (Fanon 169) that was misunderstood by the French colonizer remained misunderstood. Benguigui's cinematic intervention in a context of hostility toward the veiling of Islamic women, is a nostalgic and emotional document of the journey that many Maghrebi women embarked on during the family reunion era. After more than twenty five years, the film retraces the beginnings of a generation that finds itself in a critical point of searching its own ways of being a community and telling its stories.

State and nation are concepts with fine separation lines. The state is a political collective entity defined by its system of laws, rights, and borders. As its Latin etymology suggests, the state or "status" refers to status or how one belongs to the political and legislative system of the state. As collective entities, nations adhere around political and cultural elements. While the state involves a territory, the nation does not, as it is a set of cultural and emotional affiliations. The reunion law grants the right to integration but does not guarantee it as the national integration is the most complex part of the process. In his seminal study *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson explains that nations and communities are imagined entities or imaginary and emotional constructs that provide affiliations and collective attachments. Anderson claims that capitalism, print media, and the "fatalities of human linguistic diversity" (45) are instrumental factors in the formation of national imagined communities and national consciousness. If the phrase "imagined communities" might indicate that nation is constructed as a static entity, Anderson's historical perspective proves the opposite – nations are imagined continuously in conjunction with the cultural context.

In his essay "Narrating the Nation," Bhabha discusses nation as narration. He writes: "the ambivalent, antagonistic perspective of nation as narration will establish the cultural boundaries of the nation so that they may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of

cultural production” (4). Bhabha’s conceptualization of nation is that of a space of instability, tension, and difference. Benguigui’s film insists that Algerian mothers are entitled to write the story of the French nation from their particular vantage point of veiled immigrants and postcolonial subjects.

Fantasy plays a central role in any identity related practices. Lauren Berlant axiomatically claims that “NATIONS PROVOKE FANTASY” (1). Therefore, the formation of the national subject mobilizes the work of fantasy. In analyzing the inner workings of American national fantasy in Hawthorne’s fiction in *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, Berlant calls this collaborative effort (of the imaginary and the symbolic) of nation formation the “National Symbolic” or the project “to produce a fantasy of national integration” (22) that “sutures the body and subjectivity to the public sphere of discourse, time, and space that constitutes the ‘objective’ official political reality of the nation (34). The idea of suture suggests that the national integration does not operate on the dissolution of individual or property “micro-boundaries” (25). The fantasy of individuality that Berlant invokes in her formulation of nation space is a precondition for the collective fantasy to exist. These “micro-boundaries,” however, Berlant notices, are always defined in conjunction with the national totality appropriated by the “state, civil society, and the ‘people’” (25). Berlant’s spatial view of the fantasy of national integration highlights the utopian nature of the project of national totalization. Her critical agenda focuses on locating the spots where national fantasy fails to fulfill its promise.

The National Symbolic performs a fundamental function in the process of nation space production – “to link regulation of desire, harnessing affect to political life through the production of ‘national fantasy’” (5). This statement sums up more directly the psychological material that is utilized in the constitution of the national fantasy. Berlant offers yet another formulation that will be axiomatic here – “fantasy” or “how national culture becomes local – through the images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness” (5). Berlant shares with Anderson the concern of localizing the culture. Anderson writes: “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6) What Anderson calls “the style” of imagining, Berlant sees as the logic of the “national form” (5). She describes the national form as functioning according to a logic that is “simultaneously ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical’” logical operations that are both “stated and unstated”(5). While Berlant acknowledges that “although the content of this fantasy is a matter of cultural debate and historical transformation” (22), she claims that national form transcends historical and spatial limitations.

While the film follows the daily life complexities of family reunion, it invests significant narrative attention in Zouina’s brief moments of independence and solitude – both outside and inside the house. They happen on Sundays when Ahmed takes his mother to town leaving Zouina and the kids at home with the absolute interdiction to

leave the house. The three Sunday episodes represent Zouina's quest for a meaning of the new cross-national home. What she discovers is a series of sites that evoke a conflicted Franco-Algerian history: the Algerian War cemetery, Madame Menant's museum-like house memorializing the colonial success in Algeria, and the Algerian household that rejects her for being a Frenchified woman. Along with Zouina's illicit explorations outside the house that bring her to sites of colonial trauma, I explore national intimations that she experiences at home. What follows explores Zouina's intimations with new gender and national structures through moments that briefly suspend and overwrite the grounds of her patriarchal system. The French radio breaking the silence of the Algerian kitchen and the chats with Nicole, the French progressive woman facilitate imaginary identifications with the new homeland. These imaginary excursions stage brief moments of integration.

Imagining communities

As Anderson and Berlant have demonstrated, communities exist beyond territories; they are internal imaginary and emotional categories. Zouina's home is a contested territory situated at the confluence of conflicting cultures. The model of domesticity of the newly reunited family attempts to reproduce and adapt practices from Algeria. Zouina stands between the tyrannical matriarchy of her mother-in-law who controls the terms of the family reunion to the finest details and Nicole, her feminist and independent French neighbor who tries to initiate her into the freedoms of her generation. Zouina's mother-in-law abuses her matriarchal position and models an utterly hostile environment in the house. While the mother-in-law polices Zouina in the domestic space, Madame Donze, the French neighbor polices her outside the house, in the garden. As homemaker, Zouina is expected to serve her mother-in-law who threatens to bring a second wife if she disobeys. While matriarchy inflicts emotional abuse, the physical abuse is delegated to patriarchy. Benguigui highlights the seamless weaving of violence in the domestic fabric.

Women have internalized domestic violence and end up producing it. Benguigui's film reflects on the production of domestic violence as a problematic cross-generational continuum. Zouina's little girl witnesses moments of domestic violence against her mother. Her exposure to these moments naturalizes physical violence against women – wives and mothers, as common domestic practice. When Zouina's daughter draws a house, her grandmother asks her to stop. This interdiction can be seen as an act of silencing women about domestic violence. The little girl's artistic experimentation with the role of the homemaker starts with her imagining her house. We did not get to see more than the house. This can be read as an initiation of the girl into women's culture of silence around domestic violence or as opening a space where renewed domestic practices that are not articulated yet are possible.

From the space of her home, where Zouina is almost exclusively circumscribed to fulfill domestic functions, she imagines other cultural affiliations. These episodes of imaginary evasions in other cultural spaces are possible mainly through the radio that provides not only linguistic initiations but also historic and cultural knowledge largely shared in the country of adoption. Via Nicole, who may be seen as her western version, Zouina is exposed to a climate of sexual revolution and feminist thinking.

The institution of the radio is a powerful network that connects listeners around shared culture. It is the experience of simultaneity. While preparing coffee for her mother-in-law, Zouina turns on the radio. She listens to Henri Kubnick's show "A Thousand Francs" and becomes so immersed in the experience that she grabs a chair so sit closer to the radio set. She steps out of her domestic world to enter into a duration of playfulness where listeners participate in a series of riddles testing their knowledge about French history and culture. With more than fifty years of activity, "A Thousand Francs" has the reputation of being the radio show with the longest existence in France. As a cross-generational presence, the radio show became a national ritual that regularly revisits a collection of shared knowledge. The first question of the show "What very special invention was made by the French astronomer Ernest Esclangon, born in the lower Alps in 1876?" intrigues and excites Zouina for whom the radio provides a genuine and singular outlet of knowledge about her new country. As she gets interrupted by her mother-in-law's nagging, she returns to her domestic duties, and ends up sharing this moment with her. The camera seamlessly pans from the Algerian kitchen to Madame Donze's living room with the sound signal of the show as an element of continuity between the two spaces. Similarly to Zouina, Madame Donze is absorbed by the radio show and moves closer to the radio set in efforts to find the answer to the question. Almost simultaneously with Madame Donze's answer to the question, the host of the show validates the correct answer. This uncanny moment that transitions from the Algerian to the French home attests to the function of the radio to connect and synchronize experiences. Zouina's desire to fill the void of knowledge about her new country is fulfilled symbolically by Madame Donze who is in the possession of the answer. However, ultimately the radio facilitates the circulation of knowledge between the two otherwise conflicting parts.

The radio has the function of Berlant's notion of the national symbolic that creates the premises for the national fantasy to be produced. Contention is abstracted from this process that becomes fluid and simultaneous. It is perhaps not accidental that the national experience via radio revolves around the scientist Ernest Esclangon who is known as the inventor of the "Time of Day," a phone service that provides the exact time. From the overview of Esclangon's invention from *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers* one can learn that the scientist provided the experience of exactness and synchronicity much sought after by the French people:

At the Paris Observatory, Esclangon responded creatively to an increasing demand from citizens to obtain the proper time by telephone. He created the first “talking” (*i.e.* automatic self-announcing) clock. Esclangon broadcast the time through a series of photoelectric cells, which activated *pistes sonores* located on a rotating cylinder. The corresponding blips were issued from a synchronous clock, driven in turn by a fundamental clock at the observatory. The time service was inaugurated on 14 February 1933, and immediately the number of calls jumped to more than several thousands per day. The accuracy of the time provided on the telephone was better than 0.1. (Hockett et al.)

As the plot line unfolds we get a sense that the Algerian and French neighboring families function according to parallel and similar three-week timetables that are filled with culturally significant events. The reunited Algerian family makes preparations for Eid al-Fitr while the French prepare their garden for a local gardening competition. The proximity of these cultural territories comes with tension, which is significantly reduced in the final scene when the French and Algerians wait together for Zouina and the children to return from their secret Sunday outing. Benguigui suggests that new cultural horizons are possible for the immigrant Algerian mother who challenges the culture of power emulated by her mother-in-law and affirms her right to mobility outside the house.

Mélie Grégoire is another iconic presence in the world of French radio that features in Zouina’s almost exclusively domestic existence. Grégoire is known for shows in which listeners call anonymously to ask for advice in issues related to relationships and sexuality. If the first radio episode initiated Zouina in the production and recognition of national emblems, the second one connects her with other women’s stories and emotions. A new structure of gender stratification is unveiled to Zouina who discovers that a conversation about women’s feelings is a topic of public interest. Moreover, women’s feelings matter, and, as the radio conversation shows, they are not undermined or misinterpreted. They exist and are powerful. As Zouina gets absorbed by the confession of a girl’s first-love disappointment, she transgresses her domestic functions with a sympathetic smile on her face. As she continues to cut the onion, she appears to thoroughly enjoy the solitary complicity with this story. While the family reunion era united families, it also displaced them. Consequently, Zouina finds herself most of the time in the hostile company of her mother-in-law. She is dispossessed of meaningful female companionship when her mother is sent back to Algeria under the paradoxical decision of the family reunion law. This scene is one of the very rare moments when Zouina smiles because she finds the radio to be a form of companionship. This brief moment of evasion and pleasure is abruptly interrupted by

mother-in-law forcefully turning off the radio. The camera's insistence that the story cannot be interrupted, takes us to Madame Donze's living room where the story continues. Madame Donze is literally living the story with physical gestures showing her physical investment in anticipating the outcome of the story. The radio unifies listeners around shared stories and emotions. It also provides initiations into gender structures that Zouina finds liberating. The transition of the camera across domestic spaces articulates a symbolic emotional continuity between the Algerian and French women who share the same pleasure for radio and personal stories.

If for Madame Donze the radio is a free time ritual, for Zouina is a secondary activity that is always linked to domestic work. With this radio moment, Benguigui makes a comment about women's ownership of their feelings and stories. This episode instantiates imaginary affiliations between Zouina and a western public where women have a place and a voice. At the same time, they separate her from those of her home country and the communities that are subjected to them. When she meets Malika, the Algerian woman Zouina was hoping to spend the Eid al-Fitr celebration with, she assumes that Malika has similar cross-cultural experiences as hers, and starts a conversation about Mémie Grégoire's radio show where women share stories and talk publicly about their emotions and sexuality. Mémie Grégoire is the point of irreconcilable conflict between the two.

In the absence of mobility outside the house, the radio remains an outlet towards participation in the public space. Zouina's interest for radio is a form of silent participation in a public space that is not ready to accommodate her. The radio episode is a testament of young mother's desire to evade her patriarchal and national boundaries. Benguigui's film draws attention to the untold stories of Algerian women and opens a space of representation for them in the public space. The radio moments translate Zouina's vital interest for integration. The integration process happens in small but intense imaginary moments of collective affiliations beyond those of her home country.

Perhaps the most significant cultural influence for the young Algerian mother is Nicole, a young and progressive French woman who is constructed as Zouina's western counterpart. Nicole is directly connected with the cultural momentum of her generation undergoing sexual revolution and feminist emancipation. She is divorced and financially independent, and possesses an uncompromising sense of justice, which makes her an uncomfortable neighbor especially when she mitigates conflicts involving the Algerian reunited family and their French neighbor, Madame Donze. She introduces Zouina to ideas and practices related to the body and sexuality that appear radical. Their impracticability makes Zouina smile because she is attracted to them yet sees them as pure theory in her world. Partial references to Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, make Nicole's discourse sound almost like a lecture in feminism. When Nicole offers Zouina a bag of cosmetics from the factory where she works, she understands the

risks involved in this gift but accepts them.

Zouina explores the cosmetics with fear and pleasure of anticipation. She sits at the kitchen table exclusively focused on the transformation she is about to see in the mirror. She puts on a red lipstick, lets the headscarf fall back, and brings a strand of hair to frame her face. The brief and complicit smile with her new dramatic look is followed by tears coming from the realization that this image of herself is utterly illicit and unrepeatable. With this scene, Benguigui invites us to think about veiling and makeup as parallel practices of covering the head/face. Zouina briefly swaps them, without exclusively adopting one of the two. The headscarf remains around her neck and the stain of the lipstick remains on the back of her dress. This is a moment that situates her in a cross-cultural territory where she feels conflicted about two “veiling” objects – the headscarf and the lipstick, and their respective ideologies regarding the female body.

Radio facilitates cross-national initiations through language, information, and stories. It is a medium that allows Zouina to experience intimations with new gender and national structures. Nicole exposes Zouina to the western capitalist discourse of the cosmetic industry about beauty. In another instance, when a door-to-door salesman takes advantage of Zouina’s language barrier and tricks her to sign an installment plan for a vacuum cleaner, she is involuntarily initiated in the western domestic practices. This is a moment of imposition of integration for the immigrant woman. Capitalism is a powerful force of uniformization that effaces a wide spectrum of differences. We never see if this newly acquired object is put to use to assist the Algerian woman’s work. However, there are multiple scenes that acknowledge its presence in the house and suggest the alignment of the Algerian household with many other households in the community and nation.

Moving veils according to personal rhythms

It is perhaps idealistic to think that a representation of the veil that undoes the colonial and postcolonial politization is possible. However, Benguigui’s view of the veil as object undergoing displacement and repositioning determined exclusively by Zouina or resulting from random mundane causes, vaguely entertains the ideal situation when women are the only ones to decide the direction in which the veil moves. Unlike mother-in-law’s veil that is never displaced, Zouina’s beautiful floral scarves are in continuous motion. Her veil is a moving object that dubs the experience of moving between two patriarchal and conflicting realms conditioning the veiling of Islamic women.

In their study of the veil in the context of fashionable wearing in Turkey, Banu Gökarıksel and Anna Secor comment on the particular visibility and agency women have in the construction of this visibility: “[v]eiled women are not invisible; they are visible in a particular manner, and they are active participants in producing that visibility” (178). In this context, the veiling is a practice that allows women to control the kind of visibility

they produce. Benguigui's film contemplates the production of visibility for the veiled woman from two opposing vantage points: Zouina and her mother-in-law. Zouina's headscarves move and change continuously without receiving significant external control or attention about a correct or unique position. Her relationship with the veil is casual – both at home and in public. When she is in public and secretly away from the scrutiny of her husband or mother-in-law, the veil becomes a superfluous object that can occupy multiple positions and roles. It is not intrinsically linked to identity. This relaxed relationship with the veil as a free flowing object is polar to the one that Zouina's mother-in-law has. Her veil is essentially unmovable.

Benguigui invites us to look at culture in the most literal sense – as the practice of cultivating the land. Zouina's neighbor, Madame Donze is a French woman in her sixties, who takes pride in her obsessively manicured garden. Her garden won her the "most beautiful garden in town" award; this recognition only magnified her desire for more attention. The boundaries of Madame Donze's garden are firm and fiercely protected. When Zouina's kids accidentally kick the ball in her garden, she punctures it with a gardening tool and rips it off with her teeth. By extrapolation, the space of the garden is emblematic for the space of the nation-state that is predicated on order and well-defined mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Madame Donze's floral wallpapers and dresses provide a continuum between the space of the house and the garden. Moreover, Madame Donze is endearingly called "a little flower" by her husband. In this climate of compulsive cultivation of order and control of nature, Zouina and her kids feature as an invasive weed, an unwanted presence that would compromise the integrity of the garden. As Madame Donze uses the garden as a surveillance spot, we see images of the flowers in her garden overlapping with the flowers on Zouina's scarves. The imprinted flowers on Zouina's scarves are as beautiful as Madame Donze's flowers. Both of them represent territories of cultural expression. Their proximity however produces tensions. For Madame Donze is culture versus nature. For Zouina, the garden has a practical function with no aesthetic consideration – it is children's playground and laundry clotheslines. The flowers on Zouina's scarf are meant to provide personal expression to a traditional piece of garment that circumscribes her belonging to a collective identity.

Traditionally Maghrebi women are tied to the space of the house; their domestic functions do not involve mobility. Mobility is gendered as a masculine practice and is directly linked to homemaking. However, when Zouina secretly leaves the house to connect with another Algerian family to celebrate feast of Eid al-Fitr, she makes a symbolic gesture towards returning home, to what she recognizes as being familiar home. Her outings remain circumscribed to new configurations of the homemaking experience in the country of adoption. When the three-week quest is completed, she realizes that returning home is not possible. The return is traumatic because it brings her face-to-face with her own home where domestic violence is a normalized practice.

The Algerian home is presented as a site of trauma that is reenacted when Zouina breaks the front window of the house with her fist. The bleeding hand wrapped in her scarf is her own cultural revolution in homemaking. Zouina returns home with a renewed vision of home.

Zouina's arrival in France involves a series of displacements of the veil. The veil is re-purposed as handkerchief, blanket, and bandage. It serves not only a function of cultural representation but also a practical one. It provides emotional comfort. The headscarf is Zouina's garden of flowers or portable home. After Zouina's separation from her mother, Zouina literally places all her grief in the scarf. The scarf stands as a substitute for the lost maternal object. When in the following scene Zouina covers her daughter with the scarf, she extends the maternal care to her daughter. As Angelica Finner suggests in her reading of this scene, the scarf connects three generations of women (103).

Zouina's three-week quest for Bouira family to share the Eid al-Fitr celebration with is paralleled with Madame Donze's preparations for "the most beautiful garden in town" competition. Zouina's first Sunday away from home finds her running across fields and getting lost in an Algerian War memorial cemetery. In her rush to find the Algerian family and be home before her husband, her headscarf falls off her head. The scarf repositions itself around the neck. This unveiling is presented as a powerful moment of liberation from all the cultural burdens revolving around the veil. Zouina and her kids appear as spots of color between a clear blue sky and a green field. She experiences a moment of plenitude with nature. The plenitude with nature is also a moment of maternal bliss that happens when Zouina shares the smell of a fresh leaf with her youngest son.

In Zouina's second Sunday outing she runs the city streets to visit Madame Menant where she is served tea in the finest porcelain cups. Embarrassed at the thought that Madame Menant might see her curiosity and fascination with the cups, she removes her scarf, which remains around her neck. This emotional impulse to remove the scarf happens as an act of self-correction and proof of innocence. She places the cup back on the table and continues to stare at other objects in Madame Menant's museum-like living room. She observes the perfectly aligned books with golden binding details, the sofa, the furniture. From objects, Zouina's gaze stops at the pictures on the wall, where she sees Madame Menant's deceased husband and his military distinctions. From Zouina's first encounter with Madame Manant at the cemetery, she learns that Madame Menant's husband died in Algeria – most likely during the Algerian War, and his body had never been repatriated. Madame Menant's impossibility to come to terms with her husband's body remaining in Algeria, connects her with what she imagines as being Zouina's longings for her home country. When Zouina glances at the pictures of Madame Menant's husband she observes that most of them contain details about his military career, and feels that it is not right for her to be in that space because that

implies a vague complicity with the colonizer. The removal of the scarf that she performs echoes the colonial history of unveiling the Algerian women. For the European colonizer the veil is seen as something meant to hide as it obstructs gaze and knowledge. Fanon's essay "Algeria Unveiled" explains how the veil was central to the colonial agenda: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must, first of all, conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where men keep them out of sight (163-4).

The third Sunday, Zouina finds Bouira family with the help of Madame Menant. The encounter with Malika comes in a variety of emotions ranging from joy to despair. The thought of finding a connection with Malika brings radiant smiles on Zouina's face. She removes her headscarf. As the conversation progresses in parallel with Malika's making of the couscous, she realizes that fear and silence prevent the two from having a connection. They are connected through a history of domestic violence and fear. When Malika forces the unexpected guest to leave her, Zouina experiences a mix of anger and despair that leads her to break Malika's window with her fist. The scarf is used as bandage for the wound and Zouina is unveiled. Zouina's violence against the house is a statement that condemns the culture of silence and women's confinement in the domestic space.

The three Sundays episodes reflect on Zouina's mobility across domestic and national borders. They are accompanied by three situations in which she is unveiled – in the first episode, she experiences communion with nature and the presence of the veil is seen as futile. In the second Sunday, she reenacts a colonial history of unveiling in Madame's Menant's perfect French house. The third Sunday takes Zouina back to an Algerian home where she naturally unveils herself only to discover that it is just like her own home that she is running away from.

Benguigui's film achieves more than telling the cross-generational story of Algerian integration in France; it opens a collective cinematic space for the much-contested Algerian mother to tell her story of integration:

We have been raised by our parents in a society let us say Algerian, while living in France, where one considered us as strangers. We were not from here, not from there. I think that one also begins to exist when one sees images of oneself. It was necessary to put this story and this memory in images because we found it difficult to situate ourselves: we didn't exist no where. The first generation lived in the antechamber of France, and was almost invisible, in any case to cinema and to television, not even in the outfield. (Benguigui)

The effacement of the Algerian immigrant mother from public spaces is a double patriarchal imposition. According to the culture of one fatherland she is circumscribed to the domestic sphere. According to the other, she has to lift the veil and conform to the homogenizing ideal of the French nation-state. Benguigui's cinematic story is a place of community gathering when other spaces – imaginary or real, are unavailable.

Oana Chivoiu s'intéresse aux problématiques de la migration, de la maternité, des rapports entre les peuples et du régime postcommuniste dans les cinémas européens. Ses publications sont parues dans les séries éditoriales *Short Film Studies*, *Film International*, *World Film Locations* (volumes sur Paris, Las Vegas, et Marseille), *Senses of Cinema*, *Directory of World Cinema* (volumes sur la Belgique et l'Écosse) et dans le recueil d'articles *Disjointed Perspectives on Motherhood*. Elle finit sa thèse de doctorat en Théories et Études culturelles à Purdue University et enseigne des cours de littérature, de cinéma et d'écriture à South Louisiana Community College.

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