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**Male Wives, Female Husbands:
Immigration, Gender and Home in
Calixthe Beyala's *Le petit prince de
Belleville* and *Maman a un amant***

Nous sommes ici chez nous
We belong here

Mam, in Calixthe Beyala's *Maman a un amant*

The significance of this line stems from the identity of its author: an immigrant housewife from Mali who claims France as home, in response to anti-immigrant rhetoric. The importance and provocative nature of Mam's statement needs to be doubly framed within the context of postcolonial and metropolitan identity discourses and cultural criticism's prototypical migrant who dwells in the past, while being completely divorced from his/her contemporary surroundings. With *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Maman a un amant*, Franco-Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala joins a tradition of Francophone African literature that thematizes the experience of African migration to France. But hardly any of her literary forebears has featured a protagonist who so openly and forcefully affirms the metropolis as home. Mam's statement epitomizes the new face and configuration of sub-Saharan African immigration to France that Beyala captures in her novels. The African immigrants no longer consist of single men who come to France as workers or students, and eventually return home. Since the mid-eighties, settler families with French-born children constitute the new demographics of immigration. Yet proclamations of France as home in contemporary Francophone African

immigrant literature are still not forthcoming¹, and Beyala seems to be almost the exception here. The experience of colonization has generated an emotional and psychic investment in the notion of roots, so much so that decolonization and post-coloniality have often meant landscaping and prescribing authentic, detoxified, triumphant, and hermetically sealed home-identities. In this context where places become ideologically loaded, choosing one place as home over another, or even embracing both places as home becomes a political statement. The critique leveled against the writer for carving new spaces of identity and homes for her protagonists illustrates this politicization of place, home, and identity. Ambroise Kom argues that Beyala writes with her back turned to Africa (68), Susan Carrere similarly calls her an "African who has nothing to do with Africa" (164), and Essombe Mouangue gives her an ultimatum in the tide of his article: "Calixthe Beyala: France or Africa, you have to make up your mind." Through the character of Mam, the writer subverts the traditional and probably politically-acceptable image of the immigrant as a nostalgia-ridden subject reduced to constructing imaginary homelands. This prototypical immigrant may have informed Odile Cazenave's uneasiness with Beyala's declaration that her head is in the West and her feet in Africa, for the critic seems more comfortable with the alternative formula that would place the head in Africa and the feet in the West. Such a configuration, Cazenave adds, would translate the writer's geographical location in the West and her adhesion to Africa and the cultural values of the continent (1996: 146). This is then, the place to investigate the identity of this new subject of African immigrant literature that Calixthe Beyala's work is ushering. In fact, the writer is gendering the existing subject of this literary tradition, for it not fortuitous that she places this provocative line in the mouth of her female protagonist. Mam's attitude towards France stands out both without and within the novels, as her husband displays an opposite

stance. Bringing the female perspective to the forefront of the immigrant narrative of home, Beyala writes a series that offers a springboard to rethink the experience of Francophone African migration and the maps of migrant identity as gendered. In the two texts, she links the location of home to the renegotiation of gender relations and the re-articulations of masculinities and femininities in the context of immigration, and she proposes that home is also constituted and performed through a culture-specific cartography of gender relations and identities.

The interchangeable use of home and homeland has traditionally tied home to the geographical space of the homeland, but recent scholarship on home has been emphasizing home as a symbolic space that is not necessarily place-bound. As a "place where personal and social meaning are grounded" (Papastergiadis 2), home becomes a plurilocal and moveable unit (Bammer ix), or, in the words of Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, "something to be taken along whenever one decamps" (27). These conceptualizations elaborate on earlier scholarship by James Berger proposing home as a performance since "home comes to be found in a routine set of practices, a repetition of habitual interactions" (64). Sally Ward's synthesis of the core of current theorizations of home lays out my uneasiness with these new frameworks when she explains that they "incorporate movements into notions of home [and] allow for displaced people to be always emplaced at home" (84). I exercise some caution about this euphoric emancipation of home from physical location and space, and my underlying argument in this essay is that geography is still largely embedded in the notions of home and being at home. Thus, Papastergiadis' above quoted definition overlooks that personal and social meaning are attained through constitutive elements that have a geography. For instance, a black African immigrant in France might not be able to relocate his socioeconomic status and patriarchal privileges because the racial configuration in his new locale constitutes an impending factor, hence "personal and social meaning," and therefore home, become out of reach in France. Taking into consideration such factors as race, class, and gender similarly nuances Rapport's and Dawson's often quoted argument that physical location and space do not determine the fact of being at home or not; instead, they write, "one is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one finds one's identity best mediated—and homeless when such a cognitive environment is eschewed" (10). That homely cognitive environment, far from being divorced from geography, is the result of the mutual interference between space and the material circumstances of race,

1 Where first generation writers came to get an education and went back to serve their home countries, their successors are nowadays staying. This decision to stay causes a different relation to the spaces of Africa and France. The nostalgic narratives of longing for Africa and the detachment from France in the texts of the early generations have been supplanted by disengagement with the continent and the prescriptive mission of the African writer, an aspiration to universalism, or a narrative incorporation of the French space and its African immigrant community. For a discussion of this new generation of French-based Francophone African writers, see Magnier, Jules-Rosette, Waberi, Cazenave (2003). However, an embrace of France as home does not replace the shifting relation with Africa that the four critics document.

gender, and class. The individual who takes home whenever s/he decamps is most likely to be a white upper class male whose material and hegemonic circumstances allow for the "performance of the routine set of practices and habitual interactions" that reconstitute home in any corner of the globe.² In contrast, the spatial disempowerment caused by race, class, and gender often fixes home in a specific, well-delineated and policed geographic location for women, non-Westerners, and individuals from underprivileged classes.

Home is a set of cultural and social values and configurations, and the two texts analyzed in this essay focus on the race and class-based challenges of relocating gender arrangements and identities. Bearing in mind that gender itself is a performance, I argue, through my reading of the two novels, that this performance is spatially determined because not all geographic locations open up performative spaces of the pre-movement gender. Feminist geographers have been developing a similar argument with their observations that gender relations vary not only over time but also over space; this is what Doreen Massey calls the "geographical variations in the construction of masculinity and femininity and the relations between the two" (189). In the immigrant context featured by Beyala, the geographical contingency of gender hinders the performance of masculinity and subsequently leads to a feminization of the male immigrant.

Le petit prince de Belleville and *Maman a un amant* stage an immigrant family from Mali: Abdou Traoré, his two wives and three children. Loukoum, Traore's ten-year old son, narrates the two novels, with Abdou and his first wife Mam respectively serving as co-narrator in *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Maman a un amant*. The entries of the two spouses are in the form of letters addressed to a Frenchman in the case of Abdou, and a Frenchwoman in

2 Smadar Lavie's and Ted Swedenburg's discussion of the discipline of anthropology as a discourse and practice of space complements my argument about the fixedness of home, especially as we bear in mind that the disciplines reflected, buttressed and legitimized existing practices and mindsets. Lavie and Swedenburg present anthropology as both resting on a division of the world into "the world 'Here' (the West) and the world 'Out There' (the non-West)," and depending on a notion that "'they' were supposed to be 'there' and 'we' were supposed to be 'here' - except, of course, when 'we' showed up 'there' as ethnographers, tourists, missionaries, or development experts" (1-2). Taking this observation one step further, the two critics, using as example the phenomenon of capitalist internalization through multinational corporations, make the point that the West can "detach [itself] from place without having to rework (its) Eurocentric identity" (7).

Mam's case. These letters constitute an incursion into the son's narrative, and their italicization operates as a visual magnification of this narrative disruption. Loukoum's text reads like a light sociological account and behavioral study of the immigrant community around him, with a focus on his parents whose entries explain the actions he relates and provide a map of their identity and mental itinerary. The act of writing conveys the isolation and loneliness of the protagonists away from their Malian cultural setting. The confident tone of the letters further reveals a desire for communication and dramatizes the cultural dislocation of the couple. In Mali, the presence of close-knit communities of friends, relatives, and age group companions offers diverse avenues for oral expression and emotional support. The impossibility of sustaining such societal arrangements in France causes a shift from the oral to the written medium and allows the author to position the two spouses as migrant writers. In her examination of the two sets of narratives, Odile Cazenave compares Abdou to a griot, contrasts his poetic style with his wife's more pragmatic and direct narration, then concludes that Beyala translates the traditional stereotypes about gendered differences in writing (1997). My conclusion differs from Cazenave's, as I believe that the substance of the two texts inform their stylistic difference. The "griotic" and poetic overtones in Abdou's entries concord with his nostalgia for the past and dissatisfaction with the present, whereas Mam's more forward gaze guides her pragmatic and direct narrative style.

Immigrants are gendered beings with gendered maps of desire and attachment to their old and new places; hence the gendered spatial and temporal orientation of the two sets of texts. Mam's statement quoted at the beginning of this paper locates home in France, but this identity posture conflicts with her husband's disclaim of France as home. Abdou manifests his detachment from France through the recurrence of the word exile in his narrative and his fixation on his abandoned homeland, epitomized by his statement "j'avance la tete renversee" (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 77) ["I go forward with my head turned back" (51)]. This mindset is further emphasized by his wife's complaint that her husband resides "there and then" and is impermeable to the culture of his host society: "Mais l'homme n'a rien compris. Sa peau exilee de soleil s'est ratatinee. Aucune theorie ne s'y infiltre. Rabougri, orphelin du passe, il transforme ma vie en cauchemar" (*Maman a un amant*'291) ["But the man has understood nothing at all. Under exile from the sun his skin has shriveled up. No theory can infiltrate it. He has become a

scrawny orphan from the past, and is turning my life into a nightmare"]³. The shriveled up skin is an apt metaphor for Abdou's cultural inflexibility and for his static identity that feeds in and from his equally static locking of home in the geographical space of the homeland. Throughout the text, Abdou chews cola nut and spits its red juice on the carpet and against the walls of his apartment. The recurrent motif of the red stain standing out on the white walls symbolizes his resistance to adaptation and his mental disconnection from France. The African immigrant approaches the French space as a mere container and shuts out any cultural interaction and emotional bonding. Instead, he attempts to reproduce home through the transposition of his Malian cultural habitus. The writer frequently details the meals of the Traore family and their African parties, thereby pointing to the performance of home in the Traore household.

Beyala's male protagonist resonates with widely accepted yet often gender-blind theories of migration and postcolonial displacement, namely Salman Rushdie's notion of imaginary homelands which echoes the propositions by earlier students of exile and migrant literatures that the trauma of alienation and exclusion in the new locales prompts migrant writers to (obsessively) attempt to recapture their lost homelands in their fiction. As a paradigm for immigrant and diasporic practices of identity, the notion of an imaginary homeland refers to the emotional investment in the abandoned homeland, recreated as an idealized place of belonging. Abdou's remembrance of Mali brings the latter point home:

Je marche dans les rues. J'invente le passé. L'arbre dans la cour, le chat de mon voisin, la bougainvillée qui grimpe contre le mur, les femmes, les enfants qui courent dans les concessions et le hamac tendu entre deux manguiers. Des souvenirs d'un temps effacé par la torpeur sociale que j'ai vécus. (*Le petit prince de Belleville* \\4)

I walk the streets. I dream up the past. The tree in the courtyard, my neighbor's cat, the bougainvillea climbing up the wall, the women, the children running through the compounds and the hammock stretched between two mango trees. Memories of a time that has been erased by social impotence, memories I have lived. (78)

3 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

The immigrant's nostalgia for his native land fuels a schizophrenic disjunction between his spatial and psycho-temporal location, and his comforting imaginary homeland works well with Frantz Fanon's reading of the displaced colonized subject's obsession with a pre-colonial past (1963). We know from Fanon that these recoveries of an illusory majestic past are therapeutic and generate a sense of psycho-effective equilibrium, an argument Stuart Hall recuperates in his analysis of diasporic imaginative rediscoveries of homelands. But we also know that Fanon's paradigmatic wounded colonial subject is male, and such Fanonian scholars as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Paul Gikoy have inherited his gender-blindness and woven it into their theorization of diasporic and immigrant subjectivities. The deployment of the trope of woman and the treatment of gender issues by cultural nationalists invested in creating and enforcing "Indias and [Africas] of the mind" (Rushdie) to soothe the wounded colonized ego call for feminist vigilance with regards to the notions of therapeutic imaginary homelands. After all, the postcolonial intimacy which gave birth to migrant narratives of imaginary homelands is a legacy of the colonial intimacy which fostered cultural nationalist discourses and their illusory retrieval of pre-colonial pasts. In both cases, these master narratives of postcolonial, immigrant and diasporic identities are formulated by men to theorize their own frustrations, neurosis and anxieties.⁴

The sense of masculinity Abdou achieves in Mali, as opposed to his demotion to a subaltern masculinity in France, informs my reading of both his paradigmatic immigrant obsessive backward gaze and his location of home as gendered. In the above-quoted immigrant's memories of Mali, the images of coziness and nurture firmly locate home in his homeland, and the key image of the hammock in this passage serves as a metaphor for home. Abdou's comfortable position of power and authority in the hammock represents the central status of men in his patriarchal society. As a male prerogative in this scene, the hammock constitutes a social location of power and allegorizes Marangoly George's observation that "home is not equally available to all," but is instead "established as the domain of a few" (9). Home is, here,

4 Cynthia Eloë follows a similar line of argument and exposes the gendered nature of nationalism as a construct: "nationalisms have typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (44). Carole Boyce Davies reaches a similar conclusion in her examination of the male-dominated field of postcolonial theories and discourses.

inextricably linked to the protagonist's ability to secure a sense of uncontested masculinity in his homeland. It emerges as a place where Abdou's gender grants him power and authority, two elements that constitute key components of masculinity. The image of the hammock knits the conditions of home and masculinity together because the socio-material practice of occupying the hammock, a signifier of homeliness, is also a performance and validation of masculinity. By this, I mean that lying in there, as opposed to helping with household chores, Abdou enacts a patriarchal practice which is among a set of culturally coded signifiers that produce him as a man. As a man's space, the hammock becomes a performative space, and Abdou's occupation of it, a socio-cultural acknowledgement of his status as a man, codes masculinity as a social achievement.

Bourdieu's concept of *hexis*, a description of the inscription of the social world on bodies, offers a theoretical handle to read the shifting status of the African immigrant as he moves from Mali to France: "Je suis un bout de différence qui fait rager les imbeciles. . . J'essaye de ne pas peser lourd, d'être un papier froissé. . . Je suis transparent" (*Lepetitprince de Belleville* 77) ["I am a scrap of difference that makes fool angry. . . I try not to weigh too much, to be a crumpled piece of paper... I am transparent" (51)]. His unassertive body language in France contrasts with the centrality of his body in Mali, which validates the French anthropologist's point that "one's relationship to the social world and to one's proper place in it is never more clearly expressed than in the space and time one feels entitled to take from others; more precisely, in the space one claims with one's body in physical space, through a bearing of gestures that are self-assured or reserved, expansive or constricted ('presence' or 'insignificance')" (1984: 474). In fact, the words "scrap," "transparent," "piece," "crumpled," and the notion of being a light weight form part of a register of signifiers that recur throughout the novel to both dramatize his social impotence in France and reverse the image of the hammock. The semantic gap between the imagery associated with the two spaces shows a re-scripting of the male body and ties home to the geography of Abdou's masculinity. His glorious masculine past makes his socially impotent present all the more difficult and painful, and his self-image further deteriorates as the narrative progresses: "Qui suis-je? Un immigré. Une bouche encombrante. Un courant d'air qui passe. Je n'ai plus de repère. Je claudique dans mon infirmité avec l'insolence d'un corps défait" (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 162) ["Who am I? An immigrant. A burdensome mouth. An airstream passing through. I have no landmark anymore. I limp in my infirmity

with the shamelessness of a ravaged body" (111)]. The airstream stresses his lack of allegiance and attachment to France, projected here as a temporary shelter. The lightweight of the airstream also points to his experience of social insignificance and strengthens the image of his weak and non-masculine body which, in fact, bears the marks of his socio-cultural emasculation. In Beyala's text, the male body is transformed by immigration: there are occasional mentions of her protagonist's skinny and frail body, the complete opposite of the culturally valorized strong and muscular masculine body. Loukoum documents his father's efforts to put on weight and develop a masculine body, but these efforts are in vain, the son writes, since his father is besieged with many problems. Abdou loses his bearings because his exclusion from spaces of authority amounts to isolation from performative and validating spaces of masculinity. His detachment from France and attachment to Mali as home needs then to be framed within his inability to relocate his masculinity to his new geographical environment. Abdou's memories of his very masculine past serve to recapture his eroding masculinity, and his investment in an imaginary homeland, as well as his attempts to enforce it, provides a shelter for his wounded masculine ego.

Maman a un amant further exposes the gendered natures of the notions of imaginary homelands and backward immigrant gazes. By bringing the female perspective to the forefront, Beyala fractures the totalizing immigrant narrative of home and identity. The gendered experiences of the spouses in Mali yield different recollections of the homeland and put memory to different tasks, as Mam's souvenirs serve to disengage home from her homeland. Her backward glance offers the same depressing and negative images of Africa that Beyala offers in her novels set in Africa, especially in her depiction of women (Coly). In Mali, writes Mam, "la femme est née à genoux aux pieds de l'homme" (*Maman a un amant* 27) ["woman was born on her knees at the feet of man"], a position which certainly contrasts with Abdou's central position in the hammock. Her summary of the balance of power between genders in her native land provides insights into the different gazes the two spouses cast on their homeland: "La-bas dans mon pays, j'ai baissé les yeux devant mon père, comme ma mère avant moi, comme avant elle ma grand-mère. Les hommes ordonnaient: prends-donne-fais. Les femmes obéissaient" (*Maman a un amant* 47) ["In my country, I have lowered my eyes in the presence of my father, just like my mother and my grandmother did. The men would order: take-give-do. The women would obey"]. Mam further reinforces the point made earlier that authority and social significance are male prerogatives in

Mali. She additionally introduces the idea that men are at home in Mali while women, as homemakers, make home for men. Accordingly, Abdou is able to nurture warm memories of nonchalant and sunny days in Africa, whereas Mam can only remember the continent as a prison house for women:

Pourtant nous sommes réputées. Femmes africaines, réputées parce que révolues, assurées de tester sans équivalentes contemporaines. Femmes noires en grilles. Des grilles aux portes, des grilles aux fenêtres, des grilles dans nos corps, dans nos âmes. Nous nous affairions a des travaux ou la colline et le roc surgiraient des mains. Prisonnières, esclaves des croyances. Et qui s'évaderait? (*Maman a un amant* 48)

And yet we are famous. We African women are famous because we have the firm assurance of remaining without a match. Black women behind grills. Grills at doors, grills at windows, grills in our bodies, in our souls. We are doing chores that would make the hill and the rock come out of our hands. Prisoners, slaves of beliefs. And who would escape?

The homeland evokes different images, sensations, and emotions for Abdou and Mam. The recurrent metaphor of the grills, in stark contrast with Abdou's spacious description of the continent, conveys closure, entrapment, violence, and subjugation. In fact, Mam describes her life in Africa in terms commensurate with Abdou's description of his French experience. The two immigrants have divergent motives for leaving the continent, and the distinct and gendered circumstances of their immigration affect their location of home. Abdou's reasons are purely material:

La fortune a ouvert ses ailes, l'exil a commence. Je suis venu dans ce pays tenu par le gain, expulse du mien par le besoin. Je suis venu, nous sommes venus dans ce pays pour sauver notre peau, acheter le futur de nos enfants. Je suis arrivée, nous sommes arrivés par ballots avec, enfouie au fond des coeurs, une espérance grosse comme la mémoire. (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 20)

Fortune has opened its wing, exile has begun. I came to this country in the grip of material gain, expelled from my own land by need. I came, we came to this country to save our skin, to buy our children a future. I arrived, we arrived in bundles with a hope as an enormous as memory itself, hidden deep into our hearts. (11)

The shift from the singular "I" to the plural "we" inscribes Abdou in a larger movement of mass migration, a global phenomena of economic refugees chosen by exile. This contrasts with the individualistic, elitist and romantic exile of intellectuals and artists who have the luxury of choosing exile and the material authority of experiencing the world as home. It is significant that Abdou refers to himself in his narrative as "une étoile exilée" (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 77) ["an exiled star"(51)]. The passive construction reflects his forced removal from his homeland and contrasts with Mam's agency and initiative:

Je voulais partir. Abandonner cet horizon de boue et de suie, ou le crime se justifie par le bonheur de suspendre. Je voulais partir, acheter ma liberte, un reve de naive eternite. J'ai profite de l'occasion que m'offrait Abdou. . . J'ignore si je l'aurais epouse me sachant condamnee a vivre comme toutes ces femmes du Mali. (*Maman a un amant* 62)

I wanted to leave. To abandon this horizon of mud and soot, where crime is justified by the happiness of suspension. I wanted to leave, to buy my freedom, a dream of naive eternity. I took advantage of the opportunity that Abdou provided for me. . . I do not know if I would have married him if I had known I would be condemned to live like all these women from Mali.

Mam's movement is a flight from the tight space women are made to occupy in her homeland. She is driven by what Avtar Brah describes as a "homing desire" which, Brah stresses, is not to be confused with a "desire for a homeland" (197). It is instead a desire for a space where one could be at home. In that respect, home becomes a "desire that is fulfilled or denied" (George 2), and Mam finds her homing desire denied in her homeland but fulfilled in France: "Et pourtant enfant, je pressentais que nulle prison n'existe qui ne soit un temple donnant sur une prairie" (*Maman a un amant* 148) ["However, I knew, when I was a child, that all jailhouses open on a garden"]. The opposition between the African jailhouse and the French garden reverses Abdou's experience of France as an oppressive environment and Africa as a nurturing space.

These conflicting locations of home chart divergent cartographies of identity, and the wife's non-investment in her husband's imaginary homeland has repercussions on his sense of home. The critical insights on gender and nationalism, namely the function of women as reproducers of the boundaries of the nation and transmitters of its culture (Yuval-Davis and Anthias,

McClintock), can be carried over to the immigrant environment and its resistance to women's overture to the host society. Abdou reads Mam's location "here and now" as a vulnerable permeability with disruptive consequences for his household: "Elles n'ont rien compris les femmes. Leur peau exilée de soleil s'est craquelée. Les théories de ton épouse s'y sont infiltrées à leur insu, hors de ma volonté. Elles transforment ma vie en cauchemar (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 162) ["The women have understood nothing at all. Under exile from the sun their skin has cracked. Something has become unhinged. Your wife's theories have infiltrated without their knowledge, behind my back. They are turning my life into a nightmare" (111-12)]. If the home is a sanctuary and a refuge from exterior aggression, then it becomes a safe for native values in the context of immigration. Consequently, the exposure of women to the foreign culture is fatal and prevents the reproduction of home within the immigrant household.

In her study of the importance of home for black South African men, Thembisa Waetjen remarks that as "a context where each man is king," home serves as "a refuge from the humiliations of being a man in the workplace whose masculinity is continually beaten down by the limitations and orderings imposed by powerful white men" (658). Abdou "unbecomes" a man in the public sphere, and his household remains the only space where he can exert authority and where he "becomes" a man again. Consequently, he strives to maintain its native (Malian) configuration, but the lack of cooperation of his wives prevents the reconstruction of his gender identity: "Depuis que les femmes boivent de longues rasades d'indépendance dans ma maison, depuis qu'elles boivent de cette sève, j'apprends à ne plus être un homme" (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 162) ["Since the women have started serving glasses full of independence in my house, since they've been drinking that sap, I am learning how to become a man any longer" (111)]. In the two texts, the writer draws her readers' attention to Mam's shifting dress style, from the traditional African "boubou" to more revealing Western fashions that expose her body to the public/foreign eye. Through the inscription of the foreign culture on the female immigrant body, the latter is transformed from a maternal to a sexual body. Loukoum's comparison of Mam to a whore (*Maman a un amant* 144, 187) reflects this transformation, a treacherous surrendering of Mam to French culture, and thematizes the female immigrant body as a battlefield between indigenous (French) and foreign (African) patriarchies in the context of postcolonial immigration. This conceptualization gestures towards Frantz Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled," a study of the French colonial administration's

resolve to unveil Algerian women and the reactionary clinging to the veil by the Algerians as a result, with the subsequent construction of the unveiled woman as a traitor:

Every new Algerian woman unveiled announced to the occupier an Algerian society whose systems of defense were in the process of dislocation, open and breached. Every veil that fell, every body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the haik, every face that offered itself to the bold and impatient glance of the occupier, was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer. (42)

Fanon's imagery of conquest and penetration echoes Abdou's equally phallic imagery of permeability and infiltration cited earlier in this paper. The Fanonian intertext is strengthened when Mam's available body becomes the target of French male gazes and she pursues an adulterous relation with a Frenchman, thereby becoming an active collaborator of French patriarchy. This takeover of the female body by the foreign culture and hegemonic patriarchy represents an emasculating defeat for the husband. The incident quickly reaches the proportion of a challenge to African manhood when Abdou's fellow African immigrants organize a "commando operation" (*Maman a un amant* 193) to confront Mam's lover and get her back to her husband's house.

Parallel to the collapse of women with land and nation by cultural nationalists, the female body is conceptualized here as a site for the reproduction of home. Accordingly, its transformations leaves Abdou disoriented, and his recourse to geographic imagery to describe his mental state reinforces the collapse of women with land:

O l'ami, la catastrophe a sonné à ma porte. Les femmes se sont vidées à mon insu. Elles ont ôté leurs pagnes et revêtu leurs corps de mousseline. . . Je ne reconnais plus la géographie du pays dessiné dans MA MAISON. . . Et elles prennent l'initiative. Elles me font l'amour et j'ai honte. Depuis quand, l'ami, dans quel pays gouvernent les femmes? (*Le petit prince de Belleville* 133)

Oh my friend, disaster has rung my doorbell. The women have gutted themselves behind my back. They've taken off their pagnes and dressed themselves anew in muslim. . . I no longer recognize the geography of the land drawn in MY OWN HOUSE. . . And they take the initiative. They make love

to the questions of what, when and where home is, simultaneously addresses the epistemological masculinism and classicism prevalent in the critical apparatus on home and movement. As Mam describes herself as "un oiseau apatride" (*Maman a un amant* 22, "a homeless bird") and revokes her affirmation of France as home, the writer challenges us to append the notion of home with a question mark that expresses anguish and not the playfulness and multiplicity of options that are the privilege of caste. That question mark and the barriers faced by the immigrants are a reminder that, now more than ever, home is still firmly grounded in geography and control over space.

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