

## The Husband, the Wife, and the Mother-in-Law: Power and Relationships in Yamina Benguigui's *Inch'Allah dimanche*

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During the 1950s and 1960s, the Maghrebian immigrants working in France consisted mostly of men, either single, or married but living there without their families. Every eighteen months, they would visit their country of origin for a month or two, and would return to France alone after their vacations. They sent most of their salary to their families. In 1974, the French government established a *regroupement familial* policy. These workers finally had the legal right to have their wives and children come live with them. These men were first granted an extension of their residency permit, and eventually their residency status became permanent (Harrow 105-06).

*Inch'Allah dimanche* (2001) begins with on-screen text that briefly explains this 1974 *regroupement familial* policy. Then, we see the departure of Zouina and her three children, two sons and a daughter, with her mother-in-law. They are all boarding a ship, which is leaving from the port of Algiers, to join Ahmed, the husband/father/son, who lives in Saint-Quentin, in the Picardy region of northern France. There is a dramatic and striking contrast between Zouina's mother's desperate cries and the harsh words of her mother-in-law, Aïcha.<sup>1</sup> When the customs agent asks, "Who are those children?" Aïcha answers, "They're my son's children," thus rendering Zouina irrelevant or even non-existent.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, when he asks "And her?" (pointing to Zouina), Aïcha answers, "My son's wife." Zouina's mother, devastated, continues to scream, "My daughter!" while the mother-in-law responds, "Keep her. I'm leaving with the children." She continues to walk up the plank while telling Zouina to "Move!" and while insulting her by calling her "hmarra" ("donkey"). The Ahmed and Aïcha versus Zouina dichotomy is apparent in the first letters of the characters' names—A and Z, indicating perhaps that the two groups are far removed from each other and that a mutual understanding is impossible. This first interaction foreshadows the relation between Zouina and her mother-in-law for the rest of the film.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of this scream and of other sounds in the film, see Angelica Fenner's article "Aural Topographies of Migration in Yamina Benguigui's *Inch'Allah dimanche*."

<sup>2</sup> The quotes in English represent the subtitles of the original Arabic. French quotes are provided when French is used in the film.

Yamina Benguigui's work addresses the following questions: what are the stakes for the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law? Is it possible to have an entente between them? Is the presence of a man necessary to regulate or negotiate the relationships among women? And finally, what will be the new role of the mother-in-law within the family and in the home at the end of the film?

Aïcha is a frightening woman to everyone in the family except for her son. In one instance, she scares her grandchildren and one of their friends with a story about an ogress who eats the ears off children and the heads off girls, repeating for emphasis that the ogress slaughters all the little girls. Nicolas (the friend) is frightened and runs away to his home. In the Maghreb, "[o]gres et ogresses des forêts hantent l'imaginaire de l'enfant" (Chebel, *L'imaginaire* 47). Aïcha thereby ensures that her grandchildren will be raised with the same scary stories of her own childhood. She attempts to instill in them the fears that haunted her own psyche, and thus tries to control their behavior.

In doing so, Aïcha also transmits culturally specific myths that she had internalized. Indeed, "Kabyle mythology is peopled with more ogresses than ogres. The ogresses . . . are savage, untamed and dangerous women[;] . . . are mistresses of wild space, where they behave totally at variance with all that takes place in the civilized world" (Lacoste-Dujardin 85). Interestingly, while she is telling a Mediterranean folk tale that had probably been told to her, she seems to become the ogress of her own narration. She differs, however, from the ogress of Kabyle mythology in that she attempts to prevent her daughter-in-law from becoming, in her view, untamed and dangerous—that is, a threat to her Algerian traditions—and Zouina is able to explore the city beyond the confines of domestic space. The ogress in Aïcha's story eats the heads off girls and slices their throats and eats the ears off boys and girls (thus keeping the boys alive). This reveals the inherently sexist nature of Aïcha's story and her storytelling—by letting boys live and by devouring girls, she maims one gender, yet obliterates the other. Benguigui presents Aïcha (which, ironically, means "life") as a kind of ogress who frightens children and mistreats her daughter-in-law.

In her study *Remembering the Phallic Mother: Psychoanalysis, Modernism and the Fetish*, Marcia Ian examines the symbol of the phallic mother from a Freudian perspective. She emphasizes the Lacanian notion of the phallic mother as part of symbolic discourse, as a fantasy of the corporeal state of the symbolic reunion with the mother. Ian also states that according to Freud, this phallic mother is a part of the hidden aspect of each individual. She furthers this Freudian concept by claiming that the phallic mother reflects a certain literary and historical culture (7). To this end, Ian investigates the historical construction of the phallic mother in modernist British literature. Of particular interest to us is the manner in which this phallic mother is constructed in order to oppress others.

The phallic mother is an object both of secret fear and deep desire. She represents the absolute power of the autonomous and independent woman, and she demonstrates the castration of all women (but not her own castration, because she maintains power over others). Where Freud saw sexuality, Ian sees gender, and she theorizes that the depiction of power goes beyond the physical constructions of male and female in literature, which deals with more metaphorical issues (15). After her examination of Freud's ideas on the aspects of the phallic mother in the psyche, she returns to the phallus and examines Lacan's interpretation of it. He states that neither the masculine nor the feminine has a privileged relationship with the phallus (thus rendering it more neutral than Freud). Ian disagrees

with Lacan, and argues that he does not take into account the connotative history of the world, that is, within its multiple contexts that are not necessarily universal. She rebuts Lacan's idealized myth of sexual non-difference on which phallographic culture has depended for its power over women and others (28). She sees the phallus as a symbol, and demonstrates the difference between the penis and the phallus as signifier. Ian contends that the penis is not a universal organ of connection (in this she agrees with Freud and Lacan, who see the penis not as an organ of connection, but as an organ of difference), but that rather, it is the umbilical cord that offers a neutral and ungendered model in so far as it connects both boys and girls to the mother (32; 34).

In applying Ian's theory to *Inch'Allah dimanche*, we can assert that Aïcha, the mother, remains connected to her son by the umbilical cord. Because Ahmed has her come to France with his wife and children, and allows her to mistreat his wife, he ensures that his mother holds real and symbolic power in the home, especially over his wife.<sup>3</sup> With his tacit approval, he allows his mother to control the domestic space; she supervises Zouina's chores, including her cleaning, laundry, and cooking. However, Aïcha abuses her power and goes beyond supervising her daughter-in-law's tasks by constantly criticizing her skills as a housewife and by ensuring that Zouina waits on her. An illustration of this idea in the film takes place during a revealing scene when the French widow, Madame Manant, visits Zouina. Not only does the mother-in-law manipulate the situation (just as she had done a few days earlier with another neighbor), so that she herself is the one to visit with the guests, but she treats Zouina like a servant by asking her to make the coffee and bring her a chair for Madame Manant. She orders Zouina to lift it and move it where she wants to sit, particularly when neighbors are in the home, so as to display her authority publicly in the family's private space. The heavy, bulky, well-worn, throne-like armchair (normally reserved for the mother-in-law and therefore under her control) is also an object that symbolizes Aïcha's power and can be seen as a metaphor for her presence in the home. Given its imposing size, the chair is visibly difficult for Zouina to handle, and its gaudy, near-omniscient presence is as disturbing as Aïcha herself. Only she decides when she or guests are allowed to sit in it. Ahmed, who is at times in the room when Aïcha tells Zouina to move the chair, tacitly approves of the chair's physical presence and does not question the unequal arrangement that the two women have regarding its role in the domestic space. This indicates that the umbilical cord between mother and son is stronger than the spousal relationship between Ahmed and Zouina, and that Aïcha (as the phallic mother) is clearly able to maintain power over her daughter-in-law in her son's presence.

What is important in this scene is not only the symbolism of the chair, but also what the mother-in-law reveals about her own past. To Madame Manant, she recounts how she worked for the colonizers and was hit by a cane. She therefore continues the oppressive colonizing system that she lived through, and in a sense, colonizes her daughter-in-law:

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<sup>3</sup> The *regroupement familial* policy in France applies only to the spouse and the children under the age of eighteen, not the parents. Although Benguigui does not state explicitly why she has the mother-in-law join the family, she discusses the comedic effects that this type of character produces in other films she admires (Benguigui, "Entretien" 735). She also realizes that the representation of an Algerian mother-in-law is innovative in French cinema; she thoroughly researched Aïcha as an archetype and attempted to make her as realistic as possible (736). Aïcha serves as a comedic foil and, at the same time, brings to light an authentic, little-known problem the Maghrebian immigrant women had to face.

“Castratrice, la mère arabe l’est à la hauteur de sa propre castration : ne duplique-t-elle pas la douleur subséquente à la privation de social dont elle est l’objet?” (Chebel, *L’imaginaire* 46). Aïcha, as “castrating mother,” is clearly Zouina’s controlling “phallic mother,” and as such, is treating her the way the colonizers treated her. She attempts to deprive Zouina of any social interaction with the French neighbors. With a twisted, ironic form of nostalgia, she is much more respectful, welcoming and kind towards Madame Manant (the former colonizer) than she is towards Zouina.

However, the relationship between Madame Manant and Zouina and her children cannot be seen in binary terms of oppressor/oppressed, because Madame Manant does not treat Zouina like Aïcha does; in fact, she is much kinder, generous, and interacts with Zouina as her equal. This leaves room for maneuver within the spectrum of relationships between French native and Algerian immigrant. Ironically, it is the Algerian Aïcha who is the colonizer, not Madame Manant, the actual former French *colon*. In her persistent colonizing attitude and her treatment of Zouina, Aïcha also sustains a panoptical gaze on her; she watches and punishes. She watches Zouina from the upstairs window, which gives her a panoptical view of Zouina’s actions when she is in the garden performing domestic duties (such as hanging up laundry). She searches her well-hidden belongings (on top of the armoire) and finds make-up that Nicole, the feminist French neighbor, had given her, as well as a picture book on Algeria from Madame Manant. Instead of confronting her directly, she waits for Ahmed to come home and displays the found objects, and says, “She wants to be like the French women,” so that she can have the sadistic and voyeuristic pleasure of watching Ahmed punish Zouina. In so doing, Aïcha is subversively maintaining her control (through her son and their symbolically connected umbilical cord) on Aïcha’s body and is also attempting to ensure that Zouina stays a colonized Algerian and does not become like the French women. Foucault states, “One must punish exactly enough to prevent repetition” (93). The brutal public punishment of Zouina—that is, being beaten in front of the whole family—is strong enough to cause her to throw the make-up onto the street and to communicate to her neighbor Nicole that she can no longer accept her make-up as presents. The film’s emphasis on Zouina’s cries and on the physical pain that Ahmed inflicts on her demonstrates that the punishment is enough of a deterrent to avoid recidivism.

The mother-in-law not only watches Zouina, but controls the cupboard where the coffee and sugar are kept. Before his family’s arrival, Ahmed had no reason to lock the cupboard because he lived alone. As soon as the mother-in-law arrives, she inspects the house—especially the kitchen—and immediately tells her son that it is necessary to have a key to lock the cupboard. The son willingly obliges and confers upon her the status of food-keeper (literally, *garde-manger*, a French word for cupboard). The key to the cupboard is an important symbol of authority that Aïcha attempts to yield over the daughter-in-law. Aïcha jingles it purposefully and obnoxiously each time she opens the cupboard to retrieve sugar, so as to remind everyone in the house that she holds the power. She changes its hiding place regularly so that no one will discover it. At the beginning of the film, she is seen retrieving the key from behind the stove; she later pulls it out of a cord hidden in her skirts. Whenever she unlocks the cupboard, she is the only person in the shot; the close-up of her hands unlocking the cupboard, opening the box of sugar and counting the sugar cubes during the visits of Nicole and Madame Manant emphasize her separation from Zouina and her friends. Benguigui employs this visual isolation to foreshadow the way in which Aïcha’s

spitefully acquired power will ultimately sever her from the rest of the family and the neighbors.

According to the *Dictionnaire des symboles musulmans*, a key may potentially symbolize several things: “La clé est le reflet de l’Inconnu, de la Connaissance ou de la Découverte et symbolise aussi le secret bien préservé” (Chebel 103). According to the *Dictionnaire des symboles*, “posséder la clef signifie avoir été initié. Elle indique, non seulement l’entrée dans un lieu, ville ou maison, mais l’accès à un état, à une demeure spirituelle, à un degré initiatique” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 262). In the sense that Zouina is only the “son’s wife” (and therefore from the outside), she will never belong to the initiated (in this case, the mother and son who share the same blood and umbilical cord). Aïcha plans to control the knowledge of the domestic sphere and to create a superficial hierarchy in which her own tyranny limits access even to the cupboard. This forbidden access to the coffee and sugar (symbols of hospitality and sweetness) is enervating for Zouina, because Aïcha is the one who unlocks the cupboard to remove them and then orders her to prepare them, whether it be for her or for the neighbors who come to visit.<sup>4</sup> This power is subverted thanks to Madame Manant, to whom Aïcha offers coffee (prepared by Zouina) with sugar. Madame Manant accepts the coffee, but refuses the sugar with a slightly arrogant air, saying “Non merci. Jamais de sucre;” she then leaves. The shocked mother-in-law takes a sip of Madame Manant’s sugarless coffee and exclaims, “Coffee without sugar? I don’t get it! It’s poison!” Therefore Madame Manant, without doing it on purpose, renders Aïcha’s power insignificant, and by neutralizing it, reverses the hierarchy of the power structure within the home.

Although we are never told why Ahmed has his mother-in-law immigrate to France with his children and wife, we can surmise from her main activities throughout the film that she is there to help take care of her son, to control the domestic space and to watch her daughter-in-law: “She is there to perpetuate Algerian traditions and customs . . . [and] is an Algerian guarantee against integration in France” (Fauvel 152). In taking her son’s place when he is absent, she becomes the *man of the house* (that is, the phallic woman) and attempts to ensure that her daughter-in-law will fulfill the traditional domestic role expected of her. Any deviation from this position destabilizes the strict hierarchy in the home and threatens Aïcha’s power. She is also “a representative of tradition . . . [and of] the impossibility of maintaining the rigid rules of tradition in the context of migration” (Hollis 208). While Zouina tests these rules and ensures that their boundaries become more fluid as the film progresses, she is able to renegotiate her identity as a wife and mother and free herself from the confines of the limited space and role to which she is expected to adhere, much to her mother-in-law’s dismay.

Aïcha is also destabilized by her surroundings in a new country, and tries to recreate structures and family dynamics from her generation (for her own stability and comfort) that cannot function in France. Her blatant disdain for and mistreatment of her daughter-

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<sup>4</sup> When Zouina visits the Bouira family (the other Algerians living in the same small town), she notices that the sugar is not locked up. There is no mother-in-law living there to dominate and control the family. However, Malika is so traditional that she regulates the morality of the family; her way of thinking aligns with that of Aïcha. For example, she has already promised to marry off her teenage daughter to a cousin. She sees her own role merely as domestic.

in-law are emphasized immediately upon their arrival in their new home. As her son shows them the house, he temporarily disappears from the screen. The camera focuses on the mother-in-law as she exaggeratedly saunters around and surveys the kitchen with proud, haughty eyes, while Zouina looks around with passive resignation with her children.<sup>5</sup> The camera then zooms in on the door frame, which encloses full body shots of Zouina and her three children as they stand motionless, hesitating to enter the kitchen. The mother-in-law walks between them and the camera, which indicates literally that she is able to move around with ease in the house and symbolically demonstrates that she controls the domestic space (with her son's implicit consent). Subsequently, the camera centers on Zouina as she leans against the door frame and takes her point of view, which centers on the peeling wallpaper and the suitcases piled high, a symbol of the transitory nature of the family's status and their working-class budget (they cannot afford storage furniture). However, a comic effect is created immediately afterwards when the mother-in-law praises her son by stating that he lives in a castle; clearly, the shabbily furnished working-class row house is anything but royal. The visual contrast between mother and son, on the one hand, and of Zouina, on the other, manifests the distinction between those who hold the power—the patriarchal duo—and those who do not. Benguigui dramatizes this divide through the characters' interactions. It is indeed the father/husband who exercises authority at home, and during his absence, he hands over this authority to his mother. She therefore displays her patriarchy and takes advantage of her authority, which causes Zouina's suffering. The two women are alone in the house in the daytime when Ahmed is at work and the three children are at school. The mother-in-law is an oppressive character that regulates the morality of the family by trying to maintain the status quo in the family dynamics.<sup>6</sup>

There are passages in the film that show the domination of the mother-in-law, a character which is comedic, patriarchal, and clearly a caricature. However, the representation of this character is not one-dimensional. The fact that Benguigui chose to represent an older Algerian woman in a French film is itself innovative: "Le fait qu'une femme de presque soixante-dix ans se retrouve dans un rôle comme celui-ci est nouveau" (Benguigui, "Entretien" 735). Although Benguigui created the mother-in-law as an older, comic yet unbearable character, she also created other women of approximately the same age who do not share the same traits: the provincial neighbor (Madame Donze) and the widow (Madame Manant), whose husband disappeared while fighting for the French during the war in Algeria. These women are also not one-dimensional. Madame Donze, though preoccupied with her desire to win the prize for the city's most beautiful garden, is a lonely woman who listens to the same radio shows as Zouina. These radio shows vary from game shows such as "Le jeu des 1 000 francs" to the Mémie Grégoire program (which spawned a series of similar programs), during which women callers discussed their sexuality (Cardon 119). These programs of the 1970s were quite instrumental in the French feminist movement; Benguigui chose to place Zouina's arrival "en plein cœur du féminisme" (Benguigui, "Entretien" 733). In depicting these two women listening to the same show, Benguigui is linking the two women of different ages and backgrounds who are

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<sup>5</sup> Isabel Hollis notes the "spatial oppression" (206) of which Zouina is a victim.

<sup>6</sup> For an extreme example of the oppressive mother-in-law, see Myriam Ben's *Sabrina ils t'ont volé ta vie*. For a more positive example of a supportive mother-in-law, see Malika Madi's *Nuit d'encre pour Farah*.

affected by the rising feminist movement.<sup>7</sup> She is also subtly exploring loneliness that can be present within a marriage and exposing the women's identification with the "biographical suffering" of the callers (Cardon 117), thus creating a connection between the Algerian woman and the French woman. This solidarity is even more obvious between Zouina and Madame Manant, who is obsessed by her husband's disappearance (she visits the military cemetery where he should have been buried, she displays a large portrait of him in her bourgeois home, and she talks about him all the time). She tries to befriend Zouina and supports her so that she can find another Algerian family. Therefore, not all of the middle-aged women in *Inch'Allah dimanche* belong squarely in the comedic repertory, that is, they are not all represented as shrews. Just as in Zouina's case, we see the complexities of their joys and pains; this brushes a multidimensional portrait of these women, giving us a more complete and multifaceted picture of their characters in the film and of French women in general.

The mother-in-law's abuse causes pain and sadness for Zouina; she cries often as a result of this mistreatment. She has few escapes, and they are always transitory: she looks at her mother's photo; she dances (alone or with her children); she leaves the house to buy groceries (with the permission of her husband who only allows her to buy bread and milk; unbeknownst to her, the grocer takes advantage of Zouina's poor French and sells her more than she can buy, thus letting her have groceries on credit); she asserts her agency by talking with her divorced feminist French neighbor who works in a make-up factory; she walks around the small urban backyard (under the watchful eye of her mother-in-law and the French neighbors, Monsieur and Madame Donze, who want to win the city's prize for the most beautiful garden); and she listens to the radio when her mother-in-law is not in the same room. The radio serves as Zouina's link to her growing interest in France, and to what lies beyond her domestic space. She is able to improve her understanding of the French language by listening to different daytime radio shows while she attempts to comprehend the representation of French society as it is portrayed through this medium. Zouina's "growing mastery of both written and spoken French represents a threat to her controlling, abusive husband and domineering mother-in-law. The French language serves as a metaphor for rejection of her oppressive patriarchal culture as well as a symbol of her growing independence" (Turek 565). In improving her French, Zouina's is slipping away from her mother-in-law's clutches, thereby reducing the power that the ogress Aïcha is trying to maintain. On several occasions, Aïcha storms into the kitchen to turn off the radio, which is a symbol of control for the mother-in-law; and for Zouina, a symbol of rebellion, feminine solidarity, empowerment, and solitude.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the radio is also an increasing threat to Aïcha's hold on her daughter-in-law.

While Zouina enjoys listening to the radio, she changes her expressions from smiling and laughing to frowning when her mother-in-law enters the room and invades her space. The close-ups revealing Zouina's face emphasize the rapid change in emotions that she

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<sup>7</sup> Zouina rejects her divorced French feminist neighbor (Nicole) because her husband forces her to choose between her and him. This is another way for Ahmed to control his wife's actions and feelings.

<sup>8</sup> In showing the two women listening to the same radio show alone in succession, Benguigui connects Madame Donze and Zouina visually and reveals the physical isolation that French housewives also experience. Solitude also belongs to the *insiders* (the French), not only the *outsiders* (the recent immigrants).

experiences, and the silence that Zouina maintains in her mother-in-law's presence. The dialogues between the women are always one-sided. Although Aïcha speaks to Zouina, the latter hardly ever responds or speaks directly to her. The mother-in-law's constant harassments and insults include, "You can't even peel [the vegetables] properly," "I have no trust in you," and "Damn you, mad woman, the devil sent you!" She criticizes Zouina when she (Zouina) allows the children to draw instead of doing their homework (thus stifling their creativity); she claims that Zouina is a bad mother because she did not prepare their dinner one evening; and she threatens to bring a second wife from Algeria.<sup>9</sup> She insinuates that she is a woman of loose morals, because she, the mother-in-law, considers herself to be the custodian of the family's morality and honor. This is evidenced by her surreptitious spying on Zouina and her subsequent revelations and distortions of Zouina's actions. For example, Aïcha tells her grandchildren, "[Y]our mother opens the door to everybody" when Zouina had merely opened the door to a vacuum cleaner salesman, and tells her son, "Today your wife lifted her skirt in front of the neighbors and disgraced us" when Zouina had physically scuffled with the neighbor when the latter destroyed the ball that her children were kicking around in the backyard. This becomes a scene of comedic irony after the neighbors call the police and Ahmed thinks they have come to check on his papers. The family's residency status is not what is in question; it is the scuffle between his wife and Madame Donze. When Aïcha keeps on screaming about Zouina lifting her skirt, therefore implying that she is immoral, the police officer says "J'ai rien sur la jupe," thus negating what the mother-in-law has just repeated. Despite this oppressive environment, Zouina is finally able to liberate herself ever so gradually by reacting against her mother-in-law (subversively and later openly) and asserting her agency within the household.

An unhappy Zouina must attempt to negotiate her identity as a double stranger—in France, as an immigrant and outsider, and in a family in which she is treated like a servant by her husband and mother-in-law. Though she possesses no real influence within the family, she does nevertheless manage to exert agency through subtle actions, not the least of which was deciding to join her husband in France. She has left behind her entire support system, and she desperately tries to recreate one within her new community. The relationship between Zouina and Ahmed is cold at best (he does not know or understand her, nor does he try to), and violent at worst. Benguigui explains in an interview, "les effusions n'appartiennent pas à la sphère publique dans leur pays d'origine" ("*Inch'Allah dimanche* : Entretien" 136-17). Ahmed has been in France for ten years, and Zouina barely knows him. They never look each other in the eyes (except at the end of the film), and no visible tenderness exists between them. Ahmed beats her three times throughout the course of the film. According to Benguigui, "La violence d'Ahmed sur sa femme, c'est aussi le reflet de toutes les humiliations qu'il peut subir à l'extérieur" (137).<sup>10</sup> Ahmed had lived alone for ten years in France as a factory worker, and he has to renegotiate his position as a son, husband, and father who is now constantly present (outside of his workday) in the

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<sup>9</sup> According to the French Senate website, bigamy and polygamy were outlawed in France in March 27, 1803 (article 147 of the French Civil Code). However, it was as recently as 1993 that the Pasqua Law was passed, formally outlawing those in polygamous marriages from the *regroupement familial* policy.

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed study of the humiliations and difficulties that Maghrebian men had to face as immigrants in France, see Tahar Ben Jelloun's study *La plus haute des solitudes : Misère affective et sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains*.

lives of his mother, his wife, and his children. Although the film shows him in the home and not at work (he is not, after all, the main focus of the film), it nevertheless problematizes the way he acts at home and invites the viewer to question his aggressive, brutal reactions towards his wife.

The first time Ahmed beats Zouina, their daughter watches in shock after having witnessed the troubling scene. The way the camera films the daughter is strikingly similar to the way it filmed Zouina at the beginning of the narrative, when she enters her new home for the first time. The daughter is framed in a close-up by the door, and is standing to the side of it. She is hugging the door frame, crying. After he has finished hitting Zouina, Ahmed tells his daughter, "Get out of my way." This indicates that at that time, he thinks that she is no more than a nuisance to his anger. The second time the daughter witnesses the spousal abuse, she hugs her mother to show affection in a protective and comforting way. Clearly, the daughter is acutely aware of her parents' troubled relationship.<sup>11</sup> Maryse Fauvel notes that Zouina "treats her three children the same, without distinguishing between the two boys and her daughter (unlike the father, who barely looks at his daughter, yet sees his sons as future equals; they must take his place during his absences, including watching over their mother)" (153). Although Ahmed is a violent and objectionable husband and seems to pay more attention to his sons, nevertheless he is the one who buys the school clothes and supplies for all three children (because he receives and controls the family income). He takes them all to school (because he knows the way); he teaches them not to run around in the street, and he vigilantly ensures that they complete their homework.

Zouina seems to give them more freedom in the street; she does not watch over them when they visit neighbors, and she allows them to stray from their homework by encouraging their more creative sides and letting them draw pictures. However, the sons do not replicate the patriarchal system in which they were raised; they seem to side with their mother rather than with their father. For instance, when Zouina leaves the house with all three of her children against the directive of her husband, the sons do not mention their mother's disobedience. She convinces them to keep quiet about their Sunday escapades in two different ways: by scheming a secret between mother and children—"Chut! Faut le dire à personne"—and by depicting Ahmed as a menace to her—"Si tu lui dis, il va me tuer" she says, when the children remind her, "On n'a pas le droit de sortir." In using excitement and a special bond (a secret), and a threat (danger), she intensifies two different types of strong emotions in her children, thus making them feel special on the one hand, and scared on the other, thereby ensuring the silence of their adventure and their solidarity with her.

Toward the end of the film, after having escaped with her children from the house a third Sunday in a row (thus the title of the film) while her husband and mother-in-law have left in search of a sheep for the Aïd, Zouina comes home. She had left to find another Algerian family with which to celebrate the Aïd, but the mother of the other family, Malika Bouira, is anchored in a conservatism from which she refuses to separate and rejects her friendship because Zouina tells her she had left her house without her husband's knowledge and talks about the love and sex that feature prominently in the radio shows to which she listens. In a tragic and poignant scene, Malika forces Zouina and her children

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<sup>11</sup> The daughter's reaction is not shown when Ahmed beats Zouina the third time.

from her house. On her way home, Zouina takes the bus for the first time. As she steps from it, her husband, her mother-in-law, the sheep for the Aïd, and the French neighbors are waiting for her in front of the door of the house. Aïcha says, "You idiot, we've been waiting for four hours! We were sick with worry! Shame on you!" Ahmed, for the first time, talks back to his mother and tells her, "Shut your mouth! From now on, you don't say a thing. Laisse la tranquille ! Dégage !" and he walks toward Zouina. After this unambiguous change, Zouina states, while talking to her husband and her children, "Demain, c'est moi je vous emmène à l'école." The film ends with Zouina smiling back at her husband, thus indicating that she will have a more prominent place in the household and that she will be able to assert her agency openly, without having to hide it from her husband.

As this is happening, the neighbors (the Donzes and Nicole) push Aïcha and the sheep into the house. The irony of this scene reminds us of the beginning of the film when the mother-in-law pushes Zouina onto the boat, calling her a donkey. At the end of the film, it is the mother-in-law who is shoved into the house with the sheep. In allowing his mother and the sheep to be pushed together into the house, the son symbolically cuts the umbilical cord, avenges his wife, and demonstrates his solidarity with her. He associates his mother with the animal world and sacrifices her, thus reversing their previous roles. The power has clearly shifted from Aïcha (at the beginning of the film) to Zouina (at the end). The mother-in-law has finally been symbolically dethroned. Nevertheless, "[b]y ridiculing Aïcha, and by depicting Ahmed's final decision to side with his wife, Benguigui clearly promotes the fluidity of boundaries and the need for malleability in the negotiation of cultural codes, especially gendered roles, in migration" (Hollis 208). The cinematographic details emphasize as much by coming full circle: at the film's beginning, Zouina was inside the home standing to the side of the kitchen doorway; in the end, just before she is pushed into the house, Aïcha is captured in a blurred shot (thus indicating that she is no longer the primary focus of Ahmed's attention and affection) at the side of the doorway to the house. Zouina's neighbors, with Ahmed's approval, silence the ogress Aïcha. We finally see the evolution of Ahmed and Zouina's characters as they look at each other and smile with tenderness and complicity, while Aïcha is anchored in her unflinching conventionality: "...Ahmed finally favours the progressive negotiations of his wife over the stagnant traditionalism of his mother" (211). However, this last scene also leaves us wondering whether the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law can ever coexist peacefully, or whether one always has to maintain power over the other. It is certainly the progression of this neutralized power that bestows upon Zouina her gradual independence. When her husband chooses to cut the umbilical cord, he gives Zouina her autonomy in relation to her mother-in-law. This optimistic ending leads us to believe that Zouina and Aïcha's roles will be reversed in the home and that this role-switching will end Ahmed's symbolic castration, but still leaves us with unanswered questions regarding patriarchy and power.

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