

## **Article**

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# **Immigrant Identity in *Partir* Written by Tahar Ben Jelloun**

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## **Abstract**

*Partir*, a novel by a francophone writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun tells about a Morocco man, Azel, who has a strong willingness to go out of his country. One of the countries he visited is Spain. Compared to other countries, Spain is the closest to Tangier, the city where Azel comes from. This paper aims to analyze the identity of immigrants as represented by Azel, the main character of *Partir*, by using a postcolonial approach. Azel's relationship with Miguel, as the representation of the West, shows that there is a sharp distinction concerning the view that the West is the superordinate, and the East, as the subordinate. Even though the colonialism period has been over, the domination of the West over the East has been still going on under different levels of periods.

**Key words:** immigrant, identity, colonialism, superiority.

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## **1. Introduction**

Talking about immigrants often involves fundamental motives like poverty and the oppression they experience. By migrating a group of people hope to gain a better life even though it has to transcend national, legal and cultural boundaries. Spelled out by Mantra that everyone has certain needs to be met and if these needs are not met then it will cause stress or pressure. The intensity of the pressure depends on how much needs can be met in the place of origin (Mantra, 1985: 157-159).<sup>[1]</sup> This issue also relates to a person's process of migration which includes selecting destination areas that tend to be close to the place of origin, lack of employment in the area of origin, and young age.

Exploration of the relationship between Morocco and Spain was done by Tahar Ben Jelloun in his novel, *Partir*. The novel speaks of the strong desire of young Moroccans to migrate to Spain for a better life. Azel, the main character of *Partir* and several other figures are obsessed to go across the strait of Gibraltar. To reach the dream they have to sacrifice a lot and make compromise. Higher education does not guarantee young Moroccans can get jobs that promise a decent life in their country. Cultural and religious differences make Azel and other Moroccan figures compromised, especially on matters of religion and culture for the sake of an ideal of prosperity. With a glimpse of the Moroccan immigrants in Spain described in *Partir* above, there will be problems regarding the identity of young Moroccans seeking to seek their fortune to countries with different policies and cultures. The gap between expectations and reality to face keeps their identity moving according to the demands of the situation.

Based on the description on the background and the formulation of the problem, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the reasons for young Moroccans migrating by looking at the socio-economic

construction of Morocco, the socio-economic construction of Spain, and the mimicry done by immigrants so that their identity will appear.

## **2. Methods**

The data used in the analysis is *Partir* novel by Tahar Ben Jelloun with postcolonial approach, especially concerning identity.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

Talking about identity, Hall states that the issue of identity is always associated with representation. A person's position will affect his or her representation. Therefore, identity will be problematic because it is never fixed and always depend on space and time. Identity is the production of meaning that is never finished. This identity problem by Hall is defined as ... "in term of one, share culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common"(Hall, 1997: 25).<sup>[2]</sup> From these statements it can be said that identity shows the existence of historical similarities in cultural experience. Although cultural actors have experienced *diaspora* to various corners but the identity that surrounds a person remains one. The second definition relating to identity is "a matter of becoming as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exist, transcending place, time, history and culture" (Bhabha, 1993: 89).<sup>[3]</sup> In that perspective, identity is not something that is fixed and essential, because each individual has different experiences. Thus, identity is more of a positioning, that is how one strategizes and places himself in a certain space and time. Thus, cultural identity is non-permanent and not essential but the positioning of unstable identification actions made in the context of historical and cultural discourse. In this discussion the definition of cultural identity is interpreted as a process of being unfinished which is shaped by a place, time, history, and a particular culture with the concept of being and being associated with the problem of the past and the future because the identity has a history, origin, and also undergoing transformation. In this sense, identity must be placed in relation to continuity and with experience of discontinuity with cultural roots as a result of colonization. Therefore, in the course of identity one of them will form ambivalence o mimicry.

In a globalized world situation, a person cannot be an autonomous subject. It is always influenced by the space and time that surrounds it. The notion that "global white" has always been a reference to other cultures makes colonialism always a key word even though military occupation has ended (Sianipar, 2004: 10).<sup>[4]</sup> Thus, it appears that Western colonialism over the East is a reinforcement of the condition that the West is the superior who is the savior (Faruk, 2002: 233).<sup>[5]</sup> In this section we will discuss the problems of Moroccan-Spanish relations and immigrants as a result of the inferiority of immigrants experienced by Azel figures as illegal immigrants from Morocco in the land of their dreams of Spain.

### **3.1 Binary Opposition in Context of Morocco-Spain**

In *Partir* it seems stigmatization that Europe is positive whereas the condition of the East is the opposite. Spain is a representation of West and Morocco as East representations. The rich West makes the goal of young Moroccans to earn a better living than in their own country. Western superiority is represented by the character of Miguel Lopez. His arrival to Morocco is to take care of the business of art objects and he has a large house in the Vieille Montagne area with beautiful views of the coast. Miguel is described as:

*C'était un homme très élégant qui s'habillent avec goût et finesse, et il aimait les fleurs au point de consacrer une heure tous les matins à la composition des différent bouquets dans la maison. Le choix des fleurs et le mariage de leurs couleurs renseignaient sur son humeur et ses dispositions. Il passait l'été à Tanger, le reste de l'année à Barcelone et dans des voyages à travers le monde pour l'organisation de ses expositions (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 45-46).<sup>[6]</sup>*

He is a very elegant man with tasteful clothes and he loves the flowers and every morning he spends his time for an hour to put together a different set in the house. The choice of the flowers and the color marriage shows her mood and regularity. He spent the summer in Tanger, the rest in Barcelona and around the world to organize his exhibitions.

In addition to his flamboyant lifestyle, Miguel is also described as a kind man and always helps displaced people including Azel who was stranded on the streets and his mouth bleed after being pursued by the authorities. Behind the generosity shown to the Moroccans Miguel apparently wants the youth to be his servants during the day and to be lovers at night. The unemployed Azel feels comfortable living with Miguel despite having to receive undue treatment. For Miguel, Azel, like other Moroccan men, dull skin is always ready when asked to strengthen the imbalance of their relationship. It is very liked by Miguel who does have a tendency to love same-sex.

As a homosexual, Miguel's position is as an active party while Azel is a passive homosexual. This position shows that Azel is Miguel's sexual orientation object and his European position makes Miguel feel entitled to great anger when he learns Azel is visiting his girlfriend even when he learns that Azel uses condoms when they have sex as they are in quotes: *...Il voit bien que je ne suis pas à l'aise avec lui au lit. L'autre jour, il a piqué une colère terrible quand il a trouvé des préservatifs dans la poche de ma veste. Il hurlait. Tu n'as pas interet à fréquenter d'autre hommes!* (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 90) . . . He knew perfectly well that I was not comfortable in bed with him. On another day, he was furious when he found a condom in my coat pocket. "You are not interested in men" he cried.

The inferiority of Moroccan youths further confirms that Europe deserves to be their goal to achieve the dream of a prosperity and prosperity. It was revealed by Azel in a letter he wrote on an airplane when leaving Morocco for Spain, where Miguel lived:

*Aujourd'hui est un grand jour pour moi, j'ai enfin la possibilité, la chance de m'en aller, de te quitter, de ne plus respire ton air, de ne plus subir les vexations et humiliation de ta police, je pars, le cœur ouvert, le regard fixe sur l'horizon, fixe sur l'avenir; je ne sais pas exactement ce que je vais faire, tout ce que je sais, c'est que je suis prêt à changer, prêt à vivre libre, à être utile, à entreprendre des choses qui feront de moi un homme debout, un homme qui n'a pas plus peur,...* (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 73).

Today is an important day for me, I finally have the possibility, the opportunity to leave, leave you, no longer breathe in your air, no longer experience the oppression and oppression of your policeman, I leave with an open heart, eyes fixed on the horizon, looking at the future, I do not know for sure what I will do, what I know is that I am ready to change, ready to live freely, to be useful, to try something that will make me an upright man, a man who is no longer afraid ...

For Azel, Morocco cannot fulfill his dream as a highly educated citizen, so it is legitimate for him to leave the country. Azel is also very optimistic when leaving his country. For him the important thing is to leave his homeland even though he does not know what to do in the country people.

After arriving at Miguel's residence in Spain, the image of a comfortable life does not appear in sight. Azel was treated unhappily. He had to live alone in a maid's chamber that was closed in the back not inside the main house as imagined. Miguel was not as familiar when he was at his home in Morocco. Although Azel is aware that his departure to Spain is not as he imagines it must still be according to the orders of the homeowner. Miguel behaves as the host of the ruling so Azel did not have time to express his objection. Miguel also kept his distance from Azel when he said that the first thing that Azel had to think about was that the procedure of being a migrant worker was nothing else.

Azel was also forced to understand why Miguel was kind enough to ask him to come to Spain if not as a homosexual couple. Miguel's house manager, Carmen, did not even treat Azel as a guest of his employer.

Azel's discomfort did not make him complain even though he realized that... *du Maroc on voit l'Espagne, mais la reciproque n'est pas vraie. Les Espagnol ne nous voient pas, ils s'en foutent, ils n'ont que faire de notre pays.* ... (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 77) from Morocco we see Spain but not the other way around. The Spaniards do not look at us, underestimate, they only care about their own country ... Azel just wrote in his diary.

The superiority of the West is also shown by Miguel's view of the treacherous Moroccan and Azel's betrayal of Miguel makes Azel merely an object for Miguel and deserves to be expelled when dishonest. Azel's dishonesty is not on material matters but on the issue of his relationship with other women outside Miguel's home.

### **3.2 Immigrants as *Other*.**

The presence of immigrants in the developed world has had an unfavorable impact on immigrants. The geographic proximity between Tangier in Morocco and Spain makes the Moroccan population obsessed with going to a country that will live up to their expectations. In the *Partir* novel Morocco's youth is described as a generation dissatisfied with the state of his country that does not promise anything about their future when they are highly educated. They then assume that the homeland no longer wants their "children" presence as revealed in the following quotation:

*Quitter le pays. C'était une obsession, une sorte de folie qui travaillait jour et nuit. Comment s'en sortir, comment en finir avec humiliation? Partir, quitter cette terre qui ne veut plus de ses enfants, tourner le dos à un pays si beau et revenir un jour, fier et peut-être riche, ...* (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 23).

Leaving this country. It is an obsession, a madness that works day and night. How to get out of this country, how to solve it with humiliation? Go, leave this land that does not want a boy's son, turn to a very beautiful country and come back one day, with pride and maybe rich.

State situation filled with corruptors and mafia make young people feel pessimistic to meet their idealism. Azel had never tried to work in the field of law in accordance with his education but the fraud by law enforcers made him desperate and disgusted. This situation encouraged migration as expressed by Malika to Azel:

*La petite Malika, ouvriere dans une usine du port de Tanger, demanda a son voisin Azel, sans travail, de lui montrer ses diplomes.*

*-Et toi, lui dit-il, que veux-tu faire plus tard?*

*- Partir.*

*- Partir ... ce n'est pas un métier!*

*- Une fois partie, j'aurai un métier.*

*- Partir où?*

*- Partir n'importe où, là-bas par exemple.*

*- L'Espagne?*

*- Oui, l'Espagne, Franca, j'y habite déjà en rêve.*

*- Et tu t'y sens bien?*

*- Cela dépend des nuits.* (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 98).

Malika, a factory worker at the port of Tanger, asked his neighbor, Azel, unemployed, to show his diploma.

- And you, he said, what will you do?

- Go away.
- Go...it's not a job!
- Once I leave, I'll get a job.
- Go where?
- Go anywhere, go there for example.
- To Spain?
- Yes, Spain, France, I've lived there in a dream.
- And you feel comfortable?
- It depends on the night.

Morocco is a country located on the Northwest African continent and is facing directly to the strait of Gibraltar that divides Morocco and Spain. This country by Ben Jelloun is described as a country filled with corruptors as seen in the sentence :..... *dans notre pays bien-aimé, la corruption, c'est l'air que l'on respire, oui, nous puons la corruption, elle est sur nos visages, dans nos têtes, elle est enfouie dans nos Coeur, en tout cas dans vos coeurs* (Ben Jelloun, 2006: 18).

Although most of the young Tangier city dreamed of leaving the country but the reality they had to face was not easy. They managed to get a job but in a less important field. Soumaya, after his girlfriends a Kuwaiti, becomes a bistro waitress and then dating Azel. Siham succeeded in getting a job as a caregiver with special needs but also being Azel's lover.

Azel's relationship with the two countrymen he met in Spain angered Miguel. He felt betrayed by the man he had loved so much. With his well-controlled anger, Miguel was able to deceive Azel by holding their celebration party. He made Azel unshaven and dressed as pink as a doll. In front of Miguel's guests Azel's half-male appearance and half the women were able to make the guests of Miguel fascinated but they could only touch without possession. Azel also had to submit to all of Miguel's words that he felt so offensive.

Miguel's way of expressing his anger over Azel's betrayal is not explosive but very subtle and degrading to humanity demonstrating his superiority over Azel as a representation of immigrants. Miguel also understands the weakness of his lover who can not control himself when dealing with wealth, women, and liquor. His marriage with Kenza, Azel's sister only he used as a tool to further weaken the position of Azel and strengthen his position as ruler. In addition, with the marriage he has a reason to become a convert and facilitate him in the adoption of adopted children in Morocco.

Miguel's generosity over the Moroccan population is certainly not without the rewards that give him an advantage. He really hopes that adopting children from his old age Morocco is not as sad as many lonely elderly people in Spain do.

#### **4. Conclusions**

From the discussion that has been made on *Partir* above it is clear that the disparity between West and East relations is represented by the characters of Miguel and Azel. As a young man with higher education Azel is desperate to get a job and position in accordance with his bachelor's degree. His high dream of prosperity led him to Spain for the good of Miguel, a Spanish homosexual who picked Azel up on the streets of Tangier. Miguel's treatment of Azel based on the assumption that Azel was his sexual object made Azel's position an immigrant more inferior. Miguel's decision to marry Kenza, Azel's sister and an adoption of Moroccan child is solely for his benefit. Thus, although the period of colonialism has passed but the superiority of the West (white) is still ongoing.

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