

Identity Crisis and Adaptation of A Young Adult Immigrant in Faïza Guène's *Du Rêve Pour Les Oufs* (*Some Dream for Fools*)

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Abstract

Born in France to immigrant parents of Algerian origin, Faïza Guène is a well known francophone writer who earned the label "The Suburban Writer", and writes with a unique rhythm and style, amalgamated with humour and reality. She wrote her first novel Kiffe Kiffe Demain at the age of 19, about a high school girl in the suburbs of Paris, and remains relevant in this age of globalization. The novel has crossed the sale of more than 400,000 copies and been subsequently translated into 26 different languages. Her second work, Du rêve pour les oufs, published in 2006 in France, was translated into English, as Some Dream for Fools and is about a young immigrant Ahlème, who struggles to find a place in the society, both psychologically and economically. This paper is a sincere attempt to analyse the adaptation of a young immigrant to the dual identity crisis she experiences both in France and in her motherland, and how she manages to overcome the harsh realities of life with her light-hearted character and responsibility that arises out of necessity.

Keywords: Faïza Guène, Identity crisis, Suburban life, Immigration

The novel *Some Dream for Fools* is a striking portrayal of the life and adaptation of a young girl who undergoes immigration, loss of identity, loss of loved ones and economic crisis.

Faïza Guène utilizes humour and satire to decode a generation's worth of dreams and passions in the world. The obsession with the desire to immigrate to the United States of America or any other developed country (France, for example), believing it to be the ultimate solution to all the problems of the world, without taking into consideration the fact that they are also countries with their unique set of problems, leads her to present a moment of relevant clarity in her writings through the words of her protagonist Ahlème:

"This legend says that in America there are extraordinary trees. These magic trees produce bills for leaves, dollar bills. These trees thrive under any conditions, they don't need water because they water themselves, and they're in bloom all year long. Everyone has the right to profit from these trees, and it's for this reason that these people know neither hunger nor thirst." Mariatou dreamed of the dollar tree from morning to night until she reached the age of

reason. I think she still believes in it a little and that we've all believed in it once. (19)

Ahlème is mollified at the aspirations of the Algerian population and finds it incredulous that most of them harbour a warped sense of reality of France, far from the cold truth. She finds that this state is influenced largely by the media, and none of them actually know what it means to live there. But she wishes to enlighten them, and at the same time, doesn't want to. This seemingly contradictory line of thought is due to the fact that an empty promise of a better future might be better than that of none at all, especially when taken into consideration the civil war, famine and fear in Algeria.

I would like to tell them that over there, in France, it's not what they think, that through the distorting window that is the television, they know nothing real. The French channels they pirate to watch the TFI summer shows don't show them the truth... These people have known a civil war, hunger, and fear, and even if France isn't what they believe, it's not so bad there, because here it's maybe actually worse. (147-148)

The humour conceals a burning desire to be valued and respected, the desperation in times of crisis, the

frustration at making so little with so much effort, and the regret Ahlème carries, that her dreams never amounted to anything. This has her writing her dreams down in the hope that someone in the future, will read them and feel her emotions, or understand her dreams, since there is no one to confide in the sorrowful present.

Sometimes I write things down in a little spiral notebook I lifted from Leclerc down on the avenue. In it I tell something about my life, what makes me happy and what really messes with my head. I tell myself that if one day I go crazy like my father, at least my story will be partially written, my children will be able to read what I dreamed. I'm kind of like a cat, it's as if I've already lived several lives. I'm twenty-five years old and feel like I'm forty. (33)

The light-hearted nature of the protagonist can only do so much to alleviate the frustration at being denied the right to belong to a country where she feels at home. Ahlème is frustrated at not being recognized as a French citizen, despite being "practically French".

She remarks that all she needs is a citizenship, to be French, and it would give her "the right to do anything," and one could almost hear the irony in her words jump out of the page.

Practically French. The only thing missing for my costume is a stupid piece of laminated sky-blue paper stamped with love and good taste, the famous French touch. This little thing would give me the right to do anything... (41)

Despite all odds, she still finds the energy to get up each morning, she finds the optimism to get going on with her life, firmly believing with conviction that life has its ups and downs, and she is still in the downs part. She waits for the day when her life will get better, just like every other immigrant across the world.

There are some days like that where you don't know anymore where you're going, you feel like you don't have any luck at all, and that's just too bad. It's true that it's sad, but fortunately, at the end, there's always this little thing that gets us up in the morning. No guarantee, but you think that one day, one day it will be better. Like Auntie says: "The most beautiful stories are the ones that start badly." (11)

Light heartedness cannot be mistaken for faint heartedness or nonchalance, as seen in the fact that

Ahlème plays the delicate role of a quasi head of the family, since her father is not in his full mental capacity, and is also bothered by the frustration and emotions of her generation. She finds herself walking a tightrope between the generation and mentality of her father and that of her brother, and pulls herself together to do what is right for the sake of her brother and his future.

She finds the courage to threaten him with the fact that she herself will put an end to his misdemeanours, by speaking to his criminal friends. She also attempts to shame him and anger him into doing the right thing, by calling him weak for taking up the easy way out.

Your way is too easy. You're weak. Your money is dirty. You're going to take back all this crap. You're going to give back the cash and tell the big dogs that you don't want to work like that. If you don't do it yourself, I'll go find them and tell them. You hear me? You know me and you know that I'm capable of going to see them, I've got balls, right, but it'll ride better for you if you go yourself! (97-98)

She decides that he has little chance of setting upon the right path himself and decides to give him a little nudge in the right direction. It is her opinion that he has been tempted by the easy way to money and the apparent benefits of a criminalist lifestyle, without being exposed to the ugly consequences of it yet. She decides that she cannot wait for the repercussions on her brother to straighten his path, since some consequences are such that he cannot walk away from.

"I know, Auntie. It bugs me because he doesn't get it. He doesn't see what he's diving into. He loves the take-home too much." (101)

She goes to see the lowlifes herself, amidst great danger, but fortunately they were long forgotten acquaintances and everything works out relatively fine.

She remains reminiscent of the old times that she had so often heard from her father and auntie, but had never come to experience. At one point, she finds herself drawn to her father's old acquaintances, but cuts the meeting short, not wanting to drown in the sorrow and emotions that come with regret of not having born a few decades earlier.

It's possible that the old loon, as monsieur so affectionately called him, doesn't remember them at all, but I will tell him about our meeting anyway. I told them goodbye and ran off because if not, they would

have talked to me for hours about a time I didn't know and had a hard time imagining. Since I'm too emotional, I think I would have been able to shed a little tear or two in front of them. And they would have thought I was the loony one. (128)

This is in stark contrast with the psychology of her brother who thinks he is practical and foregoes morality for material profits, believing it to be the only way to move forward in the society. This saddens her deeply, and moves her to plan an excursion to their native land, Algeria. She hopes that her brother will see kids of his own age, land and village, much worse off than him, and find it in his heart that such desperation to climb up the social ladder is unnecessary, and the right way to do it may be slow but nonthreatening in the process.

Even if we don't stay here long, I hope that Foued will see that money, it's not so easy to get, that these kids who march their dirty, aching feet in counterfeit "Mike" shoes, and who are beaten by adults all day long, including by their parents in the evening when they haven't earned enough dinars, these kids, they suffer but they get by and don't often complain. I hope seeing life here is going to make him think. (148)

Ahlème and Foued struggle to find their place in society. They experience the classic identity construction of the adolescent and the young adult, the rebellion in adolescence, the desire to integrate into the young adult society and the distancing from the path of the parents without disappointing one's parents. They go through the kind of journey that happens in any family, whatever its

origin. But this journey is especially complicated for Ahlème and Foued as they are immigrants with no economic stability.

Stuart Hall has theorised two different kinds of identity, identity as "being" (offering a continuity with the past) and identity as "becoming" (394). This second form views identity as undergoing constant transformation and being "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (394).

Ahlème's father's experiences of the past have provided her with the identity of the "being" but this generation of young adult immigrants are deprived of the second form of identity since they lack a concrete history or culture.

After the Algeria-France journey and the France-Algeria journey, Ahlème has completed a full circle, on the way to her place. Her place, neither in a certain France nor in a certain Algeria, is undoubtedly in the World-City, the new world for all the stateless and the unidentified.

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