

The Emancipation of the Maghrebian Woman in *Le Gone du Chaâba* by Azouz Begag

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the evolving status and emancipation of Maghrebian women in Azouz Begag's semi-autobiographical novel *Le Gone du Chaâba*, using feminist literary criticism within a postcolonial framework. While existing scholarship often centres on the male immigrant experience and bicultural identity in Begag's work, this study shifts the focus to female characters who, though positioned peripherally in the narrative, articulate significant forms of resistance and agency. Set in the socio-historical context of 1960s France – a period of intensified North African immigration and cultural negotiation – the novel offers insight into how women navigate traditional constraints within a diasporic environment shaped by French secularism and evolving gender norms. The analysis identifies three primary pathways to emancipation: education, economic participation, and cultural reorientation through the French socio-legal framework. Female characters such as Zohra and Zidouma engage in subversive acts, from controlling access to language and knowledge to confronting male authority in public and adopting symbolic elements of Western modernity. These acts, although subtle and often mediated through male narration, represent a departure from the expected roles of submissive wives and mothers, suggesting a redefinition of gender identity in diaspora. The paper also incorporates intertextual comparisons with the works of Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar, thereby situating Begag's narrative within a broader literary discourse on Maghrebian womanhood, resistance, and postcolonial transformation. By doing so, it demonstrates that *Le Gone du Chaâba* not only reflects the socio-cultural tensions of its time but also contributes meaningfully to the feminist critique of patriarchal systems in both homeland and hostland. Ultimately, this study argues that Begag's novel, though centred on a male protagonist, participates in a wider literary project of articulating female emancipation in North African diaspora literature.

Keywords: Postcolonial Feminism, Maghrebian Diaspora, Gender Emancipation, Francophone Literature

Introduction

In the landscape of postcolonial francophone literature, the figure of the Maghrebian woman has often been portrayed through tropes of silence, submission, and cultural preservation.

Rooted in traditional patriarchal systems and mediated through colonial legacies, these portrayals tend to relegate women to the peripheries of both narrative focus and historical agency. However, feminist literary criticism, particularly in its postcolonial inflection, has increasingly challenged such depictions, uncovering the nuanced ways in which women resist and renegotiate their roles within oppressive structures. Within this critical movement, Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba* (1986) presents a compelling, if understated, contribution. Although the novel is widely recognized for its exploration of male immigrant identity, bicultural conflict, and social integration in 1960s France, its portrayal of women offers fertile ground for feminist interpretation. The female characters in *Le Gone du Chaâba*—mothers, daughters, wives—may not occupy the centre of the narrative, but their actions, attitudes, and transformations serve as subtle indicators of evolving gender dynamics in diaspora. This paper contends that while Begag's narrative voice remains largely male and autobiographical, his depiction of women reflects an emergent awareness of female agency within the constraints of tradition, poverty, and displacement.

This study locates Begag's novel within a broader tradition of Maghrebian francophone literature that includes writers such as Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar, both of whom have interrogated the intersection of gender, culture, and identity. Drawing upon postcolonial feminist theory, particularly the works of scholars such as Charrad (2001), Mernissi (1987), and Mohanty (1988), this paper examines how *Le Gone du Chaâba* constructs a tripartite model of emancipation for Maghrebian women. These three pathways—education, economic participation, and exposure to the French socio-cultural framework—are not presented as revolutionary ruptures, but rather as gradual openings that allow for a reimagining of gender roles in a diasporic context. The historical context of North African migration to France, shaped by colonial legacies and labor demands, created a diasporic space where patriarchal structures were both reinforced and contested. In this space, Maghrebian women experienced dual marginalization: first, as immigrants in a racially stratified society; and second, as women within a conservative patriarchal order. Yet it is precisely within this contested terrain that the seeds of transformation are sown. Characters such as Zohra and Zidouma embody this transitional moment. Through their engagement with education, their strategic use of economic roles, and their symbolic appropriation of French cultural norms, they challenge the binaries of tradition and modernity, obedience and rebellion, visibility and silence. This article argues that *Le Gone du Chaâba* contributes to feminist literary discourse by portraying how Maghrebian women, even when socially and narratively marginalized, enact subtle but significant forms of resistance. Through a close reading of Begag's female characters and a comparative engagement with feminist voices in North African literature, the paper reveals how diasporic dislocation can serve not only as a source of cultural loss but also as a crucible for gender renegotiation and empowerment.

Historical and Theoretical Framework

Understanding the representation of Maghrebian women in *Le Gone du Chaâba* requires an exploration of the colonial and postcolonial forces that shaped North African migration to France. The immigration of Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians to France is deeply entangled with the colonial history of domination, labor exploitation, and identity reconfiguration. France's colonization of Algeria in 1830—and later, the establishment of protectorates in Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1912)—created both economic dependency and pathways for population movement. While men were primarily recruited for manual labor and military service, the migration of women followed as a secondary wave, often linked to family reunification policies. The post-World War II period intensified these migratory patterns. France's rapid industrialization and labour shortages necessitated the recruitment of low-cost labourers from the Maghreb, culminating in a dramatic demographic shift during the 1950s and 1960s. Immigrant men settled in urban outskirts, such as the shantytown (*chaâba*) depicted in Begag's novel, while women who later joined them were often confined to the domestic sphere under both material hardship and cultural expectations (Charrad, 2001). Despite living in the French Republic—where secularism and gender equality were official doctrines—many Maghrebian women remained bound to traditional patriarchal norms, passed down through Islamic family law, cultural codes of honour, and inherited rural values. However, migration also introduced new contradictions. The French socio-political landscape,

with its republican emphasis on education, individual rights, and *laïcité* (secularism), provided women with ideological and institutional tools to question and challenge traditional gender roles. Within this liminal space of diaspora, cultural hybridity emerged—not only for second-generation youth like Azouz, but also for women navigating the space between tradition and modernity, subordination and autonomy.

Feminist literary criticism has evolved into a complex and dynamic field, extending beyond its origins in Western liberal feminism to encompass a wide range of global perspectives. Early foundational texts such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) laid the groundwork for challenging patriarchal structures in literature and society. However, these Eurocentric frameworks often failed to address the intersections of race, class, and colonial history that shape the experiences of women in formerly colonized societies. Postcolonial feminism, as articulated by scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), Gayatri Spivak, and Fatima Mernissi, critiques the universalization of female oppression and insists on analyzing women's struggles within specific cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts. In the Maghrebian context, this means understanding how Islamic traditions, colonial legacies, and diasporic displacement shape the identities and agencies of women. This framework is especially useful for interpreting *Le Gone du Chaâba*, where female emancipation is neither linear nor total. Instead, it is expressed in fragmented, symbolic, and at times contradictory ways. Mernissi (1987) reminds us that Muslim societies construct female identity around the binary of *fitna* (chaos) and *hijab* (containment), a duality that resonates in Begag's portrayal of Zidouma and Zohra—women who oscillate between social conformity and transgressive resistance. Begag's narrative does not set out to write a feminist novel per se. Rather, his work participates in what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls the "third space" of enunciation, where cultural negotiation allows for hybrid identities to emerge. Within this space, women—though not the central narrators—become figures through whom broader questions of resistance, emancipation, and transformation are explored.

This study also adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on literary analysis, migration studies, and gender sociology to examine the conditions that shape female emancipation in diaspora. Scholars like Valentine Moghadam (2003) emphasize the importance of examining women's labour, legal status, and access to education as indicators of empowerment within transitional societies. UNESCO reports (2018) on gender disparities in North Africa further reveal the structural barriers that persist even as literacy rates rise and educational policies become more inclusive. Literary narratives such as *Le Gone du Chaâba* offer a textured view of these statistics by revealing how social change is lived, resisted, and embodied. They depict not only how institutions shape lives, but how individual agency emerges—quietly, incrementally, and often against overwhelming odds. By placing Begag's work in dialogue with feminist theorists and sociological data, this paper situates the novel within a broader critical discourse. It shows that literature is not merely reflective of social conditions but also constitutive of political imagination—offering alternative scripts for gender roles, cultural memory, and diasporic belonging.

Traditional Gender Norms and Literary Representations

Traditional gender roles in North African societies, particularly in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, are shaped by a confluence of Islamic jurisprudence, tribal custom, colonial legacies, and socio-economic structures. Central to this configuration is the patriarchal family model, where male authority is unquestioned, and women's social positions are defined primarily in terms of their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers (Charrad, 2001). Female obedience is often linked to the concept of *honour* (*nif*), which structures expectations around chastity, silence, and domesticity. These norms do not disappear in the diaspora. Instead, they are transplanted and preserved within immigrant enclaves—such as the *chaâba* in Begag's novel—where cultural preservation becomes a defence mechanism against assimilation and marginalization. Yet these enclosed communities also become sites of tension, as women and youth encounter new paradigms of identity and autonomy through their exposure to French secularism, language, and education. In *Le Gone du Chaâba*, the protagonist's mother is emblematic of the traditional Maghrebian woman: pious, hardworking, and silent in the face

of male authority. She is described more through her functions—cooking, cleaning, raising children—than her inner life. This narrative marginalization reflects her social marginalization, revealing how traditional roles circumscribe female visibility and agency. Yet even within this limited space, moments of strength emerge. Her quiet endurance and her role in sustaining the household economy suggest an understated resilience. As Mernissi (1987) notes, women in Muslim societies are not powerless, but their power is often informal, exercised through influence rather than confrontation. This duality is echoed in Begag's portrayal of the female characters who, though constrained, are far from passive.

Maghrebian literature, particularly in French, has historically grappled with the image of the woman as both the bearer of cultural identity and the site of ideological contestation. During the colonial era, the female body became a symbolic battleground between the French mission civilisatrice and Islamic tradition. French colonists often depicted veiled women as needing to be "liberated" from native customs, a gesture that served to justify colonial domination (Alloula, 1986). In postcolonial literature, this trope is revisited and revised. Writers like Assia Djébar have sought to re-inscribe the voices of women erased by both colonial and patriarchal narratives. Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) reconstructs the voices of historical and fictional Algerian women who resisted colonization but were later silenced in nationalist memory. Her work emphasizes the necessity of reclaiming voice and bodily autonomy as acts of historical correction and feminist resistance. Similarly, Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade* (1982) portrays a young Maghrebian woman in France who defies both parental authority and societal expectations by living independently and refusing to be reduced to traditional categories. Sebbar, like Djébar, destabilizes binary representations of the submissive Maghrebian woman versus the liberated Western woman, emphasizing hybridity and self-definition. Begag's novel, though written from a male perspective, contributes to this evolving literary discourse. His female characters are not yet radical revolutionaries, but they are positioned at a moment of transition. Their presence in the narrative—often fleeting, sometimes ambiguous—nonetheless marks a shift in how the Maghrebian woman is imagined: not merely as a custodian of tradition, but as a potential agent of change.

A key tension in Begag's novel lies in the treatment of women as secondary characters in a male bildungsroman, while simultaneously using them to stage moments of cultural rupture. Zohra and Zidouma, in particular, exemplify this duality. Their actions—Zohra's mastery of French, Zidouma's sartorial transformation and confrontation with male authority—are not always explored in depth, yet they resonate symbolically. Zohra's scene with her father, where she refuses to read aloud in French and instead offers to translate, reflects a subtle shift in power. Her fluency in the dominant language positions her as a cultural intermediary—one who controls access to knowledge and asserts interpretive authority. This moment subverts traditional hierarchies in which fathers are unquestioned authorities over daughters. Zidouma, by contrast, enacts a more overt form of rebellion. Her refusal to submit to Bouzid's public reprimand, her defiant use of French dress, and her unfiltered speech place her in opposition to the established gender order. She is labelled a threat precisely because she transgresses multiple norms: spatial (appearing in public), verbal (speaking back), and visual (refusing the veil or *binouar*). In doing so, she reveals the fragility of the patriarchal system when faced with female autonomy. Begag does not idealize these characters. Instead, he presents their resistance as fraught, incomplete, and sometimes punished. Yet their very presence complicates the narrative of passive female subjugation and invites the reader to see emancipation as a process rather than a fixed condition.

Pathways to Emancipation

Although the women in *Le Gone du Chaâba* operate within restrictive patriarchal confines, Begag portrays several key moments where these constraints are challenged. Female characters engage in subtle and overt strategies of resistance that reflect broader socio-cultural shifts taking place in diaspora. This section identifies and analyses three key pathways through which women in the novel begin to assert agency: education, economic participation, and cultural reorientation in the French socio-political environment.

Education plays a pivotal role in the emancipation of Maghrebian women within Begag's narrative. It offers a symbolic and practical means of challenging traditional gender roles that have historically excluded women from the intellectual public sphere. In North African societies, particularly during the colonial and early postcolonial periods, female education was often seen as unnecessary or even dangerous, associated with moral corruption and the loss of cultural identity (UNESCO, 2018; Mernissi, 1987). However, in diaspora, the institutional emphasis on universal schooling—and its role in French citizenship—begins to disrupt these assumptions. Zohra, the protagonist's sister, becomes a focal point for this educational shift. In a key scene, she refuses to read aloud a newspaper article to her father in French, instead offering to translate it into Arabic. This moment encapsulates her negotiation of linguistic and cultural authority. Her ability to mediate between languages places her in control of knowledge and representation—roles traditionally reserved for male figures. The exchange also demonstrates a quiet act of defiance: while appearing respectful, Zohra subtly undermines her father's dominance by assuming interpretive power. This linguistic maneuvering can be seen as an early act of *intellectual emancipation*. Zohra's bilingualism not only reflects academic success but symbolizes her navigation between worlds. She does not fully reject her heritage, but neither does she submit to its patriarchal codes. In this sense, she exemplifies what Souad Eddouada (2010) identifies as the "battleground of education," where the identities of women in traditional societies are redefined in the classroom, rather than the home. Furthermore, the fact that Azouz's father allows his daughters to attend school—even if reluctantly—marks an important cultural compromise. While his support is initially rooted in the desire for male upward mobility, it inadvertently creates access for girls to benefit from the same institutions. This layered dynamic reinforces the idea that change does not always emerge from overt rebellion; sometimes, it occurs through gaps in tradition that diaspora life makes visible.

In patriarchal societies, economic dependency has long been a mechanism of control over women. When denied access to financial resources, women are forced into reliance on fathers, husbands, or male relatives, which severely restricts their autonomy. *Le Gone du Chaâba* foregrounds this tension, illustrating how economic participation—however modest—becomes a mode of resistance and survival for women in the immigrant context. While most women in the *chaâba* do not hold formal employment, they engage in informal labor strategies that provide them with a degree of economic influence. One such strategy involves sending their children, particularly sons, to participate in market activities to supplement household income. The money earned is then managed by the mothers, which shifts economic control away from husbands who are absent during the workday. This informal economic structure challenges conventional gender roles by repositioning the mother as the financial decision-maker in the domestic space. Begag illustrates this dynamic through Azouz's experiences selling flowers in the market. When he encounters his teacher, Mr. Grand, he is overcome with shame—not merely because he is selling in public, but because this role has revealed the hidden labour economy orchestrated by his mother. The moment underscores the tension between public dignity and private necessity, revealing how women manage survival under constrained circumstances. Characters like Mme Bouchaoui and Zidouma further underscore the economic dimension of female agency. Although not depicted as formally employed, they are shown to assert decision-making power and independence, especially when compared to more submissive female figures in the community. Melenotte (2017) points out that the invisibility of immigrant women's labour in literature and policy often masks their real contributions to economic life. Begag's narrative acknowledges this contradiction, showing that women may be marginalized in public narratives but remain essential to household survival.

The French cultural and legal framework also serves as a catalyst for the renegotiation of gender roles within the Maghrebian immigrant community. Republican ideals such as *égalité*, *laïcité*, and *liberté* promote individual rights irrespective of gender, offering a stark contrast to traditional patriarchal norms imported from North Africa. While these ideals are unevenly applied and frequently contradicted by societal racism and exclusion, they nonetheless create a normative space in which women can imagine and pursue greater autonomy. Zidouma is the character who most dramatically embodies this cultural transformation. Her rebellion against Bouzid—both verbal and physical—is unprecedented in the *chaâba*. She dares to speak

back, to call into question male authority, and to challenge the implicit social contract that women should remain silent and obedient. Her declaration—"Je suis libre!"—echoes Enlightenment ideals of autonomy and human dignity. Yet, within her community, such a proclamation is read as transgression rather than liberation. The violent backlash Zidouma receives from Bouzid and others reveals the community's resistance to change. She is accused of "wanting to become a man," illustrating how emancipation is coded as gender deviance. Still, her actions mark a rupture. She forces a confrontation with values long considered untouchable and, in doing so, becomes a symbolic figure of cultural transition. Zidouma's physical transformation also plays a crucial role. Her adoption of French-style clothing—pleated skirt, heels, fitted blouse—visually separates her from the other women of the *chaâba* who wear traditional binouars. This sartorial shift is more than aesthetic; it is a semiotic rebellion. Clothing becomes a language through which she asserts modernity, independence, and alignment with French values of female visibility and self-expression. As Bhabha (1994) suggests, the hybrid subject in diaspora is never fully assimilated nor entirely traditional. Zidouma's transformation exemplifies this hybridity—she is simultaneously within and outside both cultures. Her resistance is therefore both a product of her exposure to French norms and a disruption of both French and Maghrebian expectations about womanhood.

Resistance to Female Emancipation

While *Le Gone du Chaâba* reveals emerging pathways toward emancipation for Maghrebian women, it simultaneously depicts the significant resistance these women face—both from patriarchal figures and from within their own communities. Resistance is not simply a reaction to individual rebellion; it is embedded within the structures of power, tradition, and gender ideology that define Maghrebian diasporic life in France. The novel demonstrates that acts of female autonomy, however modest, are perceived as destabilizing and are met with various forms of repression, ranging from social ostracization to physical violence. This section analyses the mechanisms of resistance that work to contain female agency, focusing on male guardianship, communal surveillance, and internalized patriarchy. It argues that the novel does not idealize emancipation but instead presents it as a contested, dangerous, and often isolating process.

The most explicit resistance to female emancipation in the novel comes from Bouzid, a male authority figure who functions as a representative of traditional Maghrebian patriarchy. Bouzid's violent reaction to Zidouma's public confrontation exemplifies the ways in which male honor is intricately tied to the control of female behaviour. When Zidouma openly challenges him—verbally, physically, and sartorially—his response is not only an assertion of personal dominance but also a defence of an entire gendered social order. In a climactic scene, Zidouma confronts Bouzid in public, refusing his command to "rentre chez toi, femme!" ("go back inside, woman"). Her response—"Je suis libre!" ("I am free!")—is met with a brutal attempt to physically silence her. Bouzid grabs her by the hair and drags her into her hut, screaming that she "wants to become a man" and threatens to "slit her throat" (Begag, 1986, pp. 125–126). This outburst is emblematic of what Mernissi (1987) describes as the patriarchal fear of *fitna*—the chaos that occurs when women refuse containment. Bouzid's reaction is not merely emotional but structural. In his mind, Zidouma's defiance threatens the entire patriarchal order of the *chaâba*, where men maintain control through fear, ritual, and public dominance. His invocation of violence is a performative reaffirmation of male supremacy. He seeks not only to punish Zidouma but to restore the symbolic boundaries she has transgressed. From a psycho-social perspective, Bouzid's violence can also be interpreted as a symptom of the crisis of masculinity in diaspora. Displaced from traditional sources of authority—such as land, extended family, and tribal systems—Maghrebian men in France often experience a sense of emasculation due to their marginal status in French society. As scholars like Hargreaves (1995) note, this displacement sometimes results in a reassertion of control within the private sphere, particularly over women and children. In this context, the assertion of patriarchy becomes a compensatory mechanism for lost status.

Resistance to female emancipation also takes on more insidious, communal forms. The *chaâba* is not simply a physical space—it is a moral and cultural surveillance apparatus. Women are not only regulated by their male relatives but also by the collective gaze of the community,

which polices behaviour through gossip, ridicule, and ostracism. Begag portrays this communal regulation through the divided responses to Zidouma's actions. After she confronts Bouzid and begins dressing in French styles, the women of the community split into two groups: those who quietly admire her courage, and those who condemn her for violating tradition. This ambivalence illustrates what Mohanty (1988) calls the "double bind" of postcolonial female subjectivity – women are judged both for adhering to oppressive customs and for defying them. The novel uses the phrase "elle a brisé l'indestructible" ("she broke the indestructible") to describe Zidouma's rebellion (p. 131). This line reflects both admiration and fear. Her defiance is perceived as revolutionary – yet also dangerous, because it fractures the illusion of stability that patriarchy constructs. Through Zidouma, Begag reveals that communal cohesion often depends on the subjugation of women. When that subjugation is disrupted, the entire social order is destabilized. Moreover, female surveillance is internalized. Some women, having absorbed patriarchal values, become enforcers of tradition. They critique Zidouma not because they are personally offended, but because they fear the consequences of her rebellion for the group. This form of internalized patriarchy illustrates that oppression is not always top-down; it is often horizontally reproduced among women themselves, particularly in communities under stress.

Begag does not portray emancipation as an unambiguous victory. Instead, he reveals the emotional and social cost of resistance. Zidouma's bravery isolates her. She is alienated from the collective, vilified as deviant, and ultimately left vulnerable to violence. Unlike male protagonists who undergo a coming-of-age arc with community support, Zidouma's growth is solitary and dangerous. This depiction challenges triumphalist narratives of liberation. It underscores that resistance, especially for women in patriarchal diasporic contexts, is rarely met with celebration. Instead, it often results in loss – of safety, of reputation, and of belonging. Yet Begag also suggests that these sacrifices are not in vain. Zidouma's defiance, though punished, disrupts the narrative of female passivity and introduces a model of womanhood that is active, vocal, and unafraid. Her final image in the novel – walking in the street dressed like a Frenchwoman – is not only a symbol of cultural hybridity but of resilient subjectivity. She chooses visibility over invisibility, even when that choice invites danger. Her act is not only a personal rebellion but a symbolic claim to space, autonomy, and self-definition.

Comparative Intertextuality: Djebbar, Sebbar, and the Francophone Emancipatory Tradition

Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba*, while often classified within the corpus of " beur literature " focused on second-generation North African immigrant identity, reveals profound thematic intersections with feminist literary traditions in the Maghreb francophone canon. Authors such as Assia Djebbar and Leïla Sebbar have long foregrounded the Maghreb woman as a site of ideological conflict – caught between colonial memory, religious conservatism, and the modernizing impulses of the postcolonial state. While Begag's approach is more implicit and mediated through a male narrator, his portrayal of women like Zohra and Zidouma aligns with the broader literary endeavour to represent the silent, the resistant, and the socially liminal Maghreb female subject. This section explores how *Le Gone du Chaâba* participates in a shared literary discourse with Djebbar and Sebbar by addressing three key intertextual themes: voice and narrative silencing, cultural hybridity and gendered mobility, and symbolic acts of resistance.

Assia Djebbar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985) is a landmark text in postcolonial feminist literature. It weaves autobiographical memory, historical fragments, and oral testimonies of Algerian women to re-inscribe female voices erased from both colonial archives and nationalist discourses. Central to Djebbar's project is the notion that voice is power – that reclaiming the ability to narrate is a fundamental act of emancipation. In contrast, Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba* does not grant women full narrative autonomy. The story is filtered through Azouz's male perspective, and female characters are often relegated to the margins. However, this narrative structure becomes part of the commentary itself. The silencing of women in Begag's text mirrors the historical and cultural marginalization Djebbar seeks to undo. Yet Begag offers cracks in this silence – moments when women speak back, assert knowledge, or interrupt male authority. Zohra's refusal to read French aloud to her father, offering instead to translate, is a subtle assertion of control over language and meaning. It is, in Djebbarian terms,

a refusal to speak on patriarchal terms. Both authors reveal that the struggle for voice is not merely metaphorical but structurally embedded in language, literacy, and history. Whereas Djébar reclaims silenced women through a polyphonic textual form, Begag portrays the beginnings of such reclamation within a patriarchal narrative framework. In doing so, he extends Djébar's project by showing how even male-authored texts can gesture toward feminist consciousness.

Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade* (1982) introduces a different archetype of female resistance: the mobile, sexually autonomous, and intellectually curious young woman who navigates urban space on her own terms. Sebbar's protagonist is a stark departure from the veiled, domestic female figure often associated with Maghrebian identity. Her exploration of cities, relationships, and radical politics signals a refusal to be fixed—either spatially or culturally. In *Le Gone du Chaâba*, Zidouma represents a comparable, though less overtly politicized, figure. Her rejection of traditional dress, her public confrontation with Bouzid, and her alignment with French sartorial and rhetorical codes signify her departure from the domestic sphere. She walks through the neighborhood in a pleated skirt and high heels, visually marking herself as different, modern, and defiant. Like Sebbar's *Shérazade*, Zidouma claims the right to occupy public space—physically, socially, and symbolically. Her visibility becomes a form of power. In a community where respectability is often tied to female invisibility and containment, Zidouma's very presence on the street is an act of defiance. Sebbar argues that urban mobility is crucial for female subjectivity; Zidouma's walk becomes a similar claim to movement, freedom, and autonomy. Moreover, both authors use clothing as text. In Sebbar, Western clothing is a marker of sexual and political modernity. In Begag, Zidouma's fashion choices are a site of symbolic rebellion. Through such visual semiotics, both authors emphasize that the female body is inscribed with meaning and contested through both visibility and dress.

Despite differences in genre, narrative voice, and thematic emphasis, Djébar, Sebbar, and Begag all articulate a shared literary ethos: the commitment to depicting Maghrebian women as active agents navigating the dislocations of tradition, migration, and modernity. Their female characters, though differently framed, disrupt the monolithic image of the submissive North African woman. Djébar does this by excavating historical trauma and foregrounding collective memory. Sebbar does so through youthful rebellion and urban liberation. Begag, while more restrained, uses fiction to show how diasporic space itself creates contradictions that Maghrebian women can exploit—through language, through dress, through economic strategy—to loosen the hold of patriarchal structures. Thematically, all three writers interrogate cultural hybridity—a condition that, while fraught with alienation, also enables new subjectivities. Zidouma's character is a hybrid figure: Arab in heritage, French in style, liminal in social placement. Like Djébar's veiled revolutionary or Sebbar's streetwise adolescent, she resists categorization and occupies the uncomfortable but productive space between worlds. Importantly, these intertextual connections situate Begag within a broader feminist and postcolonial tradition, even if his narrator does not explicitly identify as feminist. His work underscores that feminist interventions in literature need not always be authored by women, nor overtly ideological. By representing women who speak, defy, and act, Begag participates in a literary resistance that aligns with Djébar's call to "write the bodies of women" back into history and with Sebbar's demand for female self-definition in diaspora.

Conclusion

Le Gone du Chaâba by Azouz Begag is often positioned within the genre of *beur* literature, primarily recognized for its depiction of the immigrant experience, male coming-of-age, and the struggles of bicultural identity in postcolonial France. However, this paper has demonstrated that beneath its male-centred narrative lies a critical and underexplored dimension: the evolving status of Maghrebian women navigating the intersection of patriarchal tradition and diasporic displacement. By foregrounding characters such as Zohra and Zidouma, this study has shown how Begag's novel subtly articulates the possibility of female emancipation within a context historically marked by gender subjugation. These women, while not always centrally featured, engage in acts—both symbolic and material—that resist the normative boundaries imposed upon them by both their cultural heritage and the immigrant enclave they inhabit. Their participation in education, informal economic

structures, and cultural adaptation through dress and language reflect a growing female agency shaped by exposure to French republican ideals, legal egalitarianism, and institutional opportunities. At the same time, the novel does not present this emancipation as linear or unopposed. On the contrary, it acknowledges the intense resistance such transformations provoke. Bouzid's violent reaction to Zidouma's defiance, and the community's divided response to her actions, underscore the deeply entrenched nature of patriarchal authority and the collective anxiety stirred by any rupture in gender hierarchy. This depiction adds complexity to the novel's feminist undercurrent: it reminds us that emancipation, particularly in diasporic settings, is a fraught, contested, and often painful process.

Moreover, the intertextual comparisons with Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar situate Begag's work within a wider francophone literary tradition committed to representing the struggles and voices of Maghrebian women. While Djébar reclaims the silenced voices of Algerian women through historiographic metafiction, and Sebbar offers urban portraits of rebellious female youth, Begag contributes a subtler but equally important perspective. He captures a transitional moment, where women are not yet fully emancipated but are beginning to assert presence—through language, through defiance, through the mere act of being seen and heard. In doing so, *Le Gone du Chaâba* disrupts simplistic readings of Maghrebian women as passive bearers of tradition. Instead, it portrays them as subjects of transformation—negotiating their identities in hybrid spaces, challenging inherited norms, and laying the groundwork for future forms of autonomy. While Azouz's journey remains the focal point, it is the peripheral female characters who gesture toward deeper shifts in the diasporic imaginary. This analysis has also reaffirmed the value of postcolonial feminist criticism in literary studies. By applying this framework to Begag's novel, the paper has not only uncovered previously overlooked dimensions of the text but has also expanded the scope of feminist literary inquiry beyond female-authored texts. It shows that the representation of women's agency can emerge within male narratives, provided they engage ethically with the structures of power and transformation at stake. Ultimately, *Le Gone du Chaâba* should be recognized not just as a novel about assimilation and childhood, but as a critical cultural document that reflects the complex gendered realities of North African diasporic life. It adds to the ongoing conversation about how literature can illuminate the tensions and transitions experienced by marginalized groups—particularly women—caught between inherited customs and the demands of modernity. In amplifying these voices, however subtly, Begag contributes to a literary tradition that insists on the visibility, complexity, and agency of Maghrebian women.

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