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Multiculturalism and Postsecular Feminism: Reframing Moroccan Female Global Identity in Tahar Ben Jelloun's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The present article reassesses the representation of Moroccan diaspora women in Moroccan transnational narratives, reframing the global dimension of transnational identity construction. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach that borrows themes from Transnational Studies and Postsecular Feminist Studies, this critical study dismantles the conventional binary depiction of Moroccan transnational women as either culturally traditional or hybrid, and as either religiously conservative or secular. It blurs such binarism to reconcile the irreconcilable, negotiating Moroccanness and Westernization, the sacred and the secular. Consequently, the study captures the process of transnational identity reformulation as a rapprochement of dissimilar cultural and pious forces. Put simply, Moroccan female global identity promotes transnational cultural interrelations and postsecular religious engagements, which empower Moroccan female expatriates within a Western, multicultural, and secular context. To do so, I focus exclusively on two key components of this global identity: culture and religion, and approach Tahar Ben Jelloun's works, *Leaving Tangier*, *A Place in the Old Village*, and *The Happy Marriage*, from the perspectives of Transnational Studies and Postsecular Feminist Studies. That being said, this critical inquiry liberates Moroccan female global identity from its Eurocentric, essentialist, Orientalist, and relativist misrepresentations to represent it as a combination of traditional Moroccan and Islamic values alongside modern secular principles. It bridges the existing gap in Moroccan diaspora studies that disregards women, marginalizes Islam, and dismisses the global dimension of Moroccan female identity.

KEYWORDS

Moroccan Female Expatriates

Cultural Hybridity

Postsecular Feminism

Moroccan Female Global Identity

Tahar Ben Jelloun

Introduction: Moroccan Female Global Identity at the Intersection of Gender, Moroccanness, and Islam

Moroccan diaspora literature encompasses texts that examine the construction of transnational identity, the post-migration impact on immigrants, cultural hybridization, religious negotiation, and social adaptation. These literary testimonies portray a Moroccan female global identity that transcends conventional binary oppositions between the self and the other, Moroccans and non-Moroccans, Muslims and secularists. Rather than being fragmented or lost, Moroccan female expatriates embody cultural heterogeneity and postsecular feminist agency. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize that literary productions draw on raw materials from diverse social,

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cultural, political, religious, economic, and historical contexts. Each work of fiction arises from conflicts, inconsistencies, and contradictions. For that reason, Moroccan diaspora authors find inspiration in different historical and political struggles, such as the 9/11 events, the Arab Spring, its manifestation in Morocco through the 20th February movement, new media, the Global Financial Crisis, and the European Migration Crisis, to craft transnational testimonies of cultural encounter and spiritual negotiation.

First and foremost, September 11th symbolizes a pivotal moment in Moroccan-American relations. As the terrorist attack leads to the mistreatment of Muslims and Arabs, it heightens the Western interest in Islam in public discourse, academia, literature, and transnational relations. It is crucial to recognize the fact that while 9/11 fuels Islamophobia, intensifies Orientalism, and incites anti-Islam hate crimes, it also significantly encourages global religious compromise and interfaith dialogue. *The Happy Marriage*, *A Place in the Old Village*, and *Leaving Tangier* respond to the political, social, cultural, spiritual, and historical transformations after 9/11. Discussions on migration, immigrants, and transnational engagements become visible in the context of post-9/11th. For example, *Leaving Tangier* highlights the bad treatment of immigrants who suffer social exclusion, harsh political control, and cultural coercion as they dream of trespassing national frontiers. Also, it is worth stating that the theme of culture and religion stands at the forefront of Ben Jelloun's literature. He re-humanizes Moroccanness and reconsiders Islam, defying stereotypes and dismantling anxieties that dominate the Western discourse before the events, as evident in *A Place in the Old Village*.

Another key event that has inspired Moroccan transnational authors is the Arab Spring, through which people protested against years of relentless tyranny, political injustice, social inequality, and economic shortcomings throughout the MENA region. Motivated by the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia via images and videos circulating on social media, Moroccans express acute frustration with the prevailing social, economic, and political inconsistencies. In essence, from a Moroccan nationalist perspective, the Arab Spring is manifested through the 20th February movement, which advocates social, political, and economic reforms, along with improved living conditions. Ben Jelloun's tales emphasize the existing pressures that shape the movement, portraying the tensions it aims to fight. Further, the global economic crisis prompted numerous Arabs to migrate to Europe looking for financial support, exacerbating the challenges of immigration and contributing to the European Migration Crisis, characterized by an unexpected surge in immigration to Europe in 2015 and 2016. These historical challenges capture the fears, delusions, and uncertainties dominating the Western discourse. Ben Jelloun establishes the inseparable line between global events and transnational experiences.

Importantly, in the wake of these historical events, Ben Jelloun's literature foregrounds the distinguished agency of female expats. As a male author, he emphasizes female voices, locates them at the center of his tales, and grants them recognizable enablement, which is often absent in Moroccan diaspora male writings. I sustain that Ben Jelloun's female characters remarkably subvert patriarchy and reconceptualize the limits of traditionalism and modernism. For instance, Amina, in *The Happy Marriage*, Kenza, Siham, and Soumaya, in *Leaving Tangier*, and the nameless wife, in *A Place in the Old Village*, challenge patriarchy, redefine gender norms, and reflect on issues of migration, faith, and marriage. Likewise, they embrace transnational involvements as a step to reshape their global identity, presenting Moroccanness and postsecular Islam as a symbol of power.

Residing far away from home sparks feelings of uncertainty, dislocation, estrangement, isolation, nostalgia, and dispossession; that is why remaining true to one's cultural background and religious affiliation empowers expatriates par excellence. Culture and religion play a central role in the identity formation of Moroccan women living abroad, presenting an international

mosaic of cultural associations alongside a postsecular moderate adaptation of Islam. However, the existing studies address themes related to migration, identity, gender, culture, transnational connection, and spirituality. As a starting point, in *Gender in Transnationalism: Home, Longing and Belonging among Moroccan Migrant Women*, Ruba Salih observes the way Moroccan female expats shape their global identity through transnational influences. In other words, their constant travels to Morocco and the personal effort to bring cultural symbols and signs to the West, undoubtedly, "affect their identity and cultural renegotiation processes" (2). Another prevalent theme is cultural hybridity. For example, Sanae Elmoudden's "Moroccan Muslim Women and Identity Negotiation in Diasporic Spaces" investigates the diverse cultural, social, and political influences that shape Moroccan transnational female identity. Additionally, Cristián H. Ricci's *New Voices of Muslim North-African Migrants in Europe* analyzes the Moroccan diaspora literary canon as a hybrid literary formation that occupies a third space of cultural affiliation. Ricci, hence, "reconceptualize[s] the idea of a Moroccan literature about the transnational and plurilingual experiences from which it arises" (7). Having said that, Elmoudden and Ricci depict Moroccan multinational female identity as culturally hybrid, without addressing its spiritual dimension. As a consequence, the present investigation connects hybridization of identity and spiritual postsecularity, presenting them as key components of Moroccan female global identity.

On the other hand, discussions on the theme of religion remain vague, haphazard, and very limited. Only a few publications condemn the apparent secularization of faith in Moroccan diaspora studies. To illustrate, Benjamin Bruce's "Transnational Religious Governance as Diaspora Politics: Reforming the Moroccan Religious Field Abroad" investigates examples of Muslim-Moroccans' religious networks in the West. Through what Bruce labels as "religious governance" (37), the Moroccan community abroad remains devout Muslim. According to him, Islam "is seen as an integral element of Moroccan identity … [playing] a central role in this broader vision of diaspora politics in which provision of religion services abroad is constructed as part of diaspora citizenship" (50). Therefore, Islam is a paramount feature of Moroccan expats' identity construction, since they "[send] preachers during the month of Ramadan, funding mosques and prayer spaces, and establishing direct links with Moroccan religious associations" (37). Bruce, hence, highlights the significance of Islam in, first, connecting Moroccan expatriates with their homeland and, second, constructing a global religious identity.

Furthermore, both Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi theorize a quasi-postsecular approach to Moroccan transnational spirituality. Firstly, Ennaji's "Muslim Diaspora in Europe and Cultural Diversity" condemns the marginalization of Islam in the diaspora. He proposes "a European Islam," "a moderate Islam," and "the institutionalization of Islam" (84). Ennaji unshackles Islamic piety from its conventional boundaries, presenting a postmodern and transnational illustration of Islam that is almost postsecular, but not quite. Secondly, Sadiqi recommends, in *Moroccan Feminist Discourses*, a "larger-than-Islam framework" to surpass "polarized secular and Islamic feminisms" (195). She criticizes Moroccan feminist studies for their intentional muteness vis-à-vis the theme of religion, accentuating the significance of Islam to promote agency within a nationalist context and not a transnational one. In addition to that, gender is widely underexplored. Some Moroccan feminists, namely Fatima Mernissi, Souad Slaoui, Fatima Sadiqi, Zakia Salime, Aziza Ouguir, and Asma Lamrabet, to name but a few, scrutinize social, cultural, economic, and religious engagement within the Moroccan setting, dismissing Moroccan diaspora women.

As demonstrated above, the current scholarship has linked Moroccan *émigrés* to fluid identity or moderate religiosity, ignoring the intersection of gender, race, faith, and identity. Nevertheless, the authenticity of this paper stems from, first, discussing the complex process of identity formulation, presenting culture and religion as fundamental markers of Moroccan

female global identity, second, suggesting a postsecular feminist twist to Moroccan diaspora studies as a promising critical theory that grants Muslim women agency within Western secular contexts, and thirdly, proposing a sub-discipline within Moroccan diaspora scholarship labelled Moroccan Diaspora Feminist Studies, shedding light on feminist engagements and subversions. The advised sub-discipline reconsiders Moroccan female expats' involvement in the diaspora, with a special focus on their transnational cultural engagements, interfaith dialogue, and social subversive transformations. It incorporates gender studies, transnational studies, and religious studies, examining the interplay of gender, faith, globalization, and identity in investigating Moroccan female expatriates. As a result, this article features the relevance of transnational studies and postsecular feminist studies approaching Moroccan diaspora literature. It scrutinizes Moroccan female global identity, with a special focus on Moroccanness and Islam, answering the subsequent inquiry: in what way does cultural hybridity and spiritual postsecularity empower them within a Western milieu?

To this end, this study employs an interdisciplinary framework, deriving its central concepts from transnationalism and postsecular feminism. To begin with, transnationalism is a rich interdisciplinary field of critical inquiry that scrutinizes the way globalization, technology, and migration intensify transnational networks of social affiliation, economic remittances, religious negotiation, cultural reformation, and political exchange. It stands for an intangible connection across international borders that combines social, cultural, political, financial, and spiritual aspects. It dismantles the idea that cultural identity advocates fixity, emphasizing the fluidity of cultures. Nonetheless, in this paper, I use the theme of cultural hybridity and mobility to explore the plurality of Moroccan female global identity.

Furthermore, postsecular feminism is an emerging sub-discipline within postsecular studies, feminist studies, and religious studies that examines the marriage between the sacred and the secular from a feminist perspective. I borrow some of its features, namely the spiritual transformation of characters from piety to secularity and vice versa and the compromise of the secular and the sacred to scrutinize Moroccan female expatriates' postmodern adaptation of Islam. I shall clarify that the feminist turn in postsecularism intersects gender and faith, trespassing the postsecular failure to promote the positive role of women in advocating partiality of faith, spiritual pluralism, and pious hybridity. Postsecular feminism, hence, proposes an unprecedented religious marriage between the sacred and the secular, offering women unconventional autonomy, enablement, and freedom. Rosi Braidotti's "In Spite of Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism" signifies a founding text of postsecular feminism. For Braidotti, agency "can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality" (2), and therefore, the sacred is not an obstacle against the prosperity of women. Scattered publications recognize the empowering effect of religion on Muslim women worldwide (Mahmood 2005; Bracke 2008; Braidotti 2008; Butler 2008; Vasilaki 2015; Nilsson 2019). From one perspective, some publications deliberate the postsecular turn in different social contexts, such as Nilüfer Göle in Turkey (2015), Zhange Ni in East Asia (2015), and Rebekah Cumpsty in the context of African Literature (2022). From another perspective, other scholarly debates contextualize the postsecular feminist twist to specific national discourse, viz. Francesca Parmeggiani in Italy (2009), as well as Sadaf Aziz (2005), Masooda Bano (2010), Humeira Iqtidar (2011), Amina Jamal (2013), and Afiya S Zia in Pakistan (2018), to name just a few.

The present works of fiction are set in the secular West, which explains the collective silence of such an approach within North African or Middle Eastern contexts. Diasporic literary productions offer an adequate socio-cultural and religious setting to discuss the coexistence of secular and sacred principles. This article opens doors to incorporate postsecular feminism in

Moroccan diaspora literature or any other Middle Eastern literary publications that are set in the West. Thus, it encourages thinking outside the box to scrutinize transnational identity construction as a process of positive cultural hybridity and empowering postsecular piety, instead of focusing solely on the impurity of diaspora identity construction. However, the prospect of proposing a feminist twist within postsecular thoughts inspires myriad scholars to inspect its literary dimension, outlining its key themes in creative writing (McClure 2007; Deo 2018; Cumpsty 2022). As a consequence, I shall note that postsecular feminist literature articulates a critique of secularism, recognizes the importance of inter-faith dialogue, reconciles the secular and the sacred, disseminates unorthodox religious transmutation of female characters moving from utter religiosity to complete secularity and vice versa, expresses partiality of faith, and celebrates religious plurality – all reshaped from a feminist standpoint.

Nevertheless, utilizing conceptual terms from transnationalism and postsecular feminism is necessary to detangle transnational anxiety, applaud the intersection of different faiths and cultures, and shed light on the richness of Moroccan female global identity, which is fluid, flexible, and hybrid, shaped by transnational movement, religious affiliation, and cultural heterogeneity. Moroccan female émigrés combine tradition and modernity, Islamic heritage and secular norms, which engenders their undeniable enablement. This paper is divided into two parts; the first part deals with the theme of culture, whereas the second part revolves around the theme of religion. I scrutinize Moroccan female global identity via exploring examples of transnational mobility, the existence of Moroccan cultural symbols in Western settings, unconventional pious transformation of female characters, and religious reconciliation in Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier*, *A Place in the Old Village*, and *The Happy Marriage*.

Cultural Hybridity: Moroccan Female Global Identity across Transnational Frontiers

Although Europe's need for cheap labour motivates the exodus of thousands of Moroccans to the metropole, it stimulates transnational remittance, cultural linkage, and religious interrelation with the homeland. In fact, the diaspora is a space of cultural exchange, compromise, and flexibility, promoting new cultural forms that surpass national inflexibility, restrictions, and convictions to constitute a hybrid identity. Indeed, the diaspora is de facto "a site for thinking beyond the confines of the nation" (Kalra et al. 36). Transnational experiences *per se* promulgate transnational "ties … with their collectives" as a way "to reproduce their culture, values, language, and religion as much as possible" (Faist 19; Oonk 285). Such cultural reproduction reconciles accustomed and unaccustomed cultural signs to incorporate a global identity that is quasi-nationalist. Exilic subjects are "ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan" (Knott and McLoughlin 11) who inhabit two cultural realities, expressing original cultural preferences and embracing new cultural values. The construction of Moroccan female global identity is a multi-layered process, since it incorporates myriad cultural forces that hybridize their experiences, specifically through mobility and bringing Moroccan cultural signs abroad. Certainly, transnational links "are maintained [and] enforced through mobility" (Dahinden 52), which signifies a "tool for coping with the negative effects of an extended separation, in terms of both time and space" (Boccagni 195). The dislocation of Moroccans brings them one step closer to their roots. An illustrative example is the expatriates' persistent trips to Morocco and the different souvenirs they bring with them.

The prevailing studies on Ben Jelloun's accounts inspect cultural hybridity as an example of utter acclimatization. Nonetheless, in this article, I affirm that the Moroccan female global identity is harmonious and does not favour one culture over another. To begin with, in *Leaving Tangier*, although the story revolves around Azel's desperate yearning to reach the Spanish soil,

Ben Jelloun delineates myriad female characters' transnational engagement, inhabiting two cultural poles. Kenza, for instance, marries Miguel to obtain Spanish citizenship. Although she remains true to Moroccanness by preparing delicious Moroccan tagines, celebrating Eid, and reminiscing about Morocco, she "for the first time in her life … [has] a glass of wine" (131) with her Spanish husband. In addition to Kenza's apparent cultural hybridity, Siham leaves Morocco for desperate economic reasons. She immigrated to work for a "Saudi family living in Marbella that needed a practical nurse to take care of a handicapped woman" (57). While in Marbella, she takes off the veil, engages in extramarital affairs, and celebrates religious festivals like a devout Muslim. Soumaya works in a brothel owned by a man from Nador "to earn a little money" (77). Nonetheless, in the last chapter entitled "Returning," the third-person narrator recounts how the characters "without a single regret, they've left everything behind and have already forgotten why they ever left home" (211). They, finally, undertake a reversed journey back to their origins, where scars and wounds of the West engrave both their body and soul. "Lost and found again" (213), they find peace in returning home with newly acquired global ideals that defy local oppression, marginalization, and patriarchy.

Additionally, in *The Happy Marriage*, Ben Jelloun delineates a Moroccan couple who inhabit a third cultural sphere. Despite their irreconcilable differences, Amina and her nameless husband, whom she calls *Foulane*, share a simultaneous attraction towards both Moroccanness and Europeanness. Their house is adorned with diverse Moroccan pieces, such as handmade blankets, antique watches, and Moroccan tagines. Instantaneously, they live in a modern home, eat with a fork and knife, and even enjoy a glass of wine during meals. The amalgamation of these two cultural signs—traditional Moroccan and modern European—hybridizes the cultural space occupied by the couple. Nevertheless, Amina experiences a strong psychological attachment to her Berber history while also enjoying partying, drinking, and traveling throughout Europe. Amina embodies cultural heterogeneity; the ability to be both Moroccan and quasi-European at the same time, integrating transnational cultural harmoniously. At an early age, saved from the misery of the native village she names "Bled el Fna, the village of nothingness" (193), Boualem, her uncle, entrusts her to a French couple, motivated by financial gain. She encounters myriad cultural values and quickly becomes accustomed to them. Transitioning from eating with her fingers, Amina uses a fork and a knife, attends a private school, learns to speak French, and, eventually, travels to France. On the one hand, while in France, she becomes a model, forms new friendships, and acquires "a lot of boyfriends," but safeguards her hymen for her future husband (200). On the other hand, after marrying, the couple remains deeply connected to their roots. When they visit Morocco, they forget their problems and live happily. Furthermore, Amina "spent hours talking to the women of the village, who'd told her about all their problems … promising those women she'd return and help" (35). While in Europe, Amina "[spends] a year promoting a troupe of Berber musicians in France, Belgium, and Switzerland" (158) and uses the money "to brighten up the village, build a school, and above all improve the inhabitants' living conditions" (158). In contrast to such an inseparable bond with Moroccanness, the wife embraces the secular, liberal thrills of France, where she "enjoys a liberal life" as well as "drank quite heavily and always said that she'd been out with the girls" (69). Amina's in-betweenness grants her unimaginable agency. Throughout the novel, Amina contemplates her origins. She asks: "I didn't even know who I was anymore! Was I Lahbib Wakrine's daughter, or did I belong to Mr. and Mrs. Lefranc? Was I Arab or Berber? French or Belgian" (198). This suggests that Amina is of Arab-Berber origins and was later raised by a French family, highlighting her hybrid identity. Through the newly acquired global identity, she "found the reassurance she'd been looking for" (35).

Moreover, in *A Place in the Old Village*, the couple experiences cultural hybridity differently. Whereas the husband and his wife lost their children to European influence, they propagate true Moroccanness. This cultural juxtaposition does not lead to conflict, contradiction, or separation between the two; however, it brings the family closer. The heterogeneity of their cultural identity stems from realizing that their children are "sons of foreign soil, ingrates without roots, without religion" (77). Also, they keep their multicultural family together via celebrating New Year's Eve like good Christians, along with fasting during Ramadan like keen Muslims. The mother willingly gives up her children to the West, unlike her husband. Her relationship with the children is full of love, peace, tolerance, and co-existence. The wife is an "intelligent, courageous, and thrifty" (19) woman, denoting global Moroccanness. The amalgamation of the unamalgamated, the combination of two unlikely lifestyles, and the rapprochement of secularism and Islam hybridize the couple's experience. Ben Jelloun delimits two Muslim enthusiasts, at the heart of the global North, who get along with whatever the diaspora has to offer them and concurrently remain dedicated to Moroccan traditions and Islamic legacy.

The formation of Moroccan female global identity is a multifaceted process of negotiation, association, affiliation, adaptation, and allegiance. In *The Happy Marriage*, *A Place in the Old Village*, and *Leaving Tangier*, Ben Jelloun showcases the prominent presence of Moroccan cultural signs at the heart of transnational domestic spaces. As a result, it links expats psychologically, mentally, and emotionally to Morocco. European private and public spheres are plural, reconciled, and heterogeneous, presenting a third cultural space where Moroccan cultural symbols defy the purity of Europeanness. To illustrate, *Khomisa*, straw mats, prayer mats, *djellabas*, blankets with specialized Moroccan symbols, tableaux with pictures taken from old medinas of different Moroccan cities, clay tagines and cups, talismans, herbs, and the *Qur'an* hybridize the Western cultural private as well as public space. A clear example is the quasi-homely web formed by expats. Coffee shops and restaurants replicate the Moroccan atmosphere, in which the smell of the famous Moroccan mint tea vibrates through Arabic shows broadcasting the latest news of Morocco on television. Walking through Spanish or French streets, Moroccan migrants experience a nostalgic *déjà-vu*.

Subsequently, traveling "to and around Morocco" (Wagner 55) is indispensable to sustaining Moroccanness. Ben Jelloun describes the characters' constant trips to Morocco and the existence of Moroccan cultural signs in the metropole as an illustration of cultural interrelations, affiliations, and connections. As a result, the aforementioned illustrations signify the predominant presence of Moroccanness within transnational, Western, and secular cultural contexts. Moroccan diaspora *oeuvre* offers a distinguished portrayal of Moroccan cultural symbols across national and transnational borders. It subverts the Western cultural hegemony to highlight its hybridity and plurality and thus sculpts a Moroccan female global identity that destabilizes cultural binaries and perpetuates spiritual postsecularity.

Postsecular Feminism: The Religious Making of Moroccan Female Global Identity

One of the numerous challenges that Muslim immigrants face is maintaining their Islamic identity. Indeed, given the different issues surrounding Islam in the Global North, Moroccan female expatriates find difficulty in vocalizing their Islamic background. However, after 9/11th, Muslims take pride in their Islamic background freely within secular spaces (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007; Habermas 2004; Mavelli and Petito 2014; Calhoun 2011; Abeysekara 2008). The terrorist attacks of September 11th uncovered an often-overlooked reality vis-à-vis the dominant presence of Islam in the West. They significantly acknowledged its long-awaited return to the public space to "become hypervisible" (Göle 6), because it "abandons the mask of privacy"

(Crockett 4) in Western society, culture, politics, literature, and criticism. It breaks free from previous misconceptions to attain "progress and emancipation in its many forms" (Possamai 825). Nevertheless, the current scholarship either essentializes Moroccan expats as hardcore Muslims or completely assimilates them within the secular West. They collectively neglect the fluidity of Moroccan female global religious identity. As a result, the subsequent paragraphs examine the postsecular feminist dimension of Moroccan female religious identity, focusing on the theme of spiritual conversion from the sacred to the secular or vice versa and religious conciliation between the sacred and the secular.

The postsecular phase marks "a major historical transition" (De Vriese and Vanheeswijck 86) that reconciles the sacred and the secular in "the wake of the dissatisfactions and disenchantments of secularism" (Ratti 114). While postsecularism deconstructs conventional binary opposition between "modernity and religion" (De Vriese and Vanheeswijck 90), postsecular feminism theorizes the postmodern interest in religion from a feminist viewpoint. It intersects gender, faith, and identity, exploring the transnational experiences of Muslim women. It, hence, advocates "an intercession between the secular and the religious" to "examine the context within which these claims and counterclaims arise" (Cumpsty 112; Nandini 2). Besides, postsecular feminism joins two main feminist perspectives: the Islamic and the secular, stimulating "de-essentialisation … of both Islam and feminism" (Sirri 2). Moreover, it breaks free from the European "trend of secular feminism," recognizing "religious [and] spiritual motivations behind women's (political) agency" (Smiet 8; Poutiainen 1090). Also, it recommends a feminist twist to postsecular thinking that postsecular scholars have collectively overlooked.

Ben Jelloun is an eccentric novelist who utilizes the West as a non-conventional setting to craft stories of transnational connection, social liberation, cultural affiliation, and religious compromise. His female characters capture transnational pious connections that correlate the orthodox and non-orthodox, inhabiting a postsecular society, that welcomes religious variances "without fearing them," recognizes "a previously denied respect for 'religious citizens'," surpasses predicaments of "religious monopoly," and incorporates "a contentious mix of worldviews, cultural norms, epistemologies and moral systems" (Barbato 6; Modood 15; Rosati and Stoeckl 5; Byrd 1).

As an outcome of September 11th, "Muslim women across the globe are increasingly finding ways of empowering themselves through their faith" (Ahmed 3). To examine the Moroccan female global identity, this paper presents an international representation of Islam that integrates the spiritual and the secular, as evident in the sacred conversion of Ben Jelloun's female expatriates. The journey to the West, *per se*, is charged with uncertainty, curiosity, and yearning for change. Moving from a conservative, virtuous self towards a modern, liberal identity is, without doubt, inevitable within Western secular spaces. For instance, in *Leaving Tangier*, Kenza crosses the sea after marrying an old Spanish man, which is immoral, and his conversion to Islam is a fiasco. In addition, Kenza works as a dancer in a restaurant, gets involved in "an unhappy love affair" (197) with Nâzim, and uncages herself to let go of "everything that was weighing on [her], holding [her] back, tethering [her] to resignation and silence" (151). Kenza's transformation is both cultural and spiritual. She expresses increased openness towards reason, humanism, and liberalism. She breaks the shells of religious modesty and chastity to dance with unmatched "subtlety and grace" (130) for the hungry male gaze. But her final return to Tangier marks a personal spiritual shift and ultimate return to Islam.

Recently, "religion is undergoing a metamorphosis" (Jasiński 9), and so are Moroccan female expatriates. Definitely, Siham and Soumaya also go through an unusual spiritual mutation. Ben Jelloun sketches the characters' religious mutation as a mirror to their

geographical displacement. While in Spain, they neglect faith-based practices to live a life free from religious restraints. As they survive the diaspora, they "sometimes wind up doubting the existence of God" (63), and, at last, they both find the right path once they go back home. This is clear through Soumaya's alteration from one of Azel's adulterous faux pas to a compliant Muslim. Consider the following portrayal of Soumaya's final return to Morocco:

> Soumaya, the beauty, the woman who believed everything men told her, who gave herself to them freely, Soumaya, lost and found again, comes aboard, covered from head to toe. No one dares speak to her. She wears the white haik of the peasant women of the Rif, hiding her body, which the last few years have stripped of all charms. (213)

Azel's unforeseen passing engenders Soumaya's, Kenza's, and Siham's return to Islam and to their homeland. After selling her body to Spanish men, Soumaya repents her former sins, embracing Islam with open arms. Likewise, Kenza's homecoming designates a spiritual return to Islam and thus experiences a noticeable religious adjustment from liberalism to conservatism. Amina, similarly, in *The Happy Marriage*, endures a notable spiritual transformation. Throughout the narrative, we observe the wife's openness to secular thrills and Western whims after presenting undeniable religiosity back home, and ultimately denouncing the secular in favor of embracing Islam once more.

Transcultural spiritual encounters render the West as a transformative space of negotiation, exchange, and assortment for Islam. "The 'death of God' has come and gone" and therefore "the sacred is returning" (Tacey 15, 236). Religion is not at the margin of Western secular spaces anymore; however, it shifts into a postmodern, postcolonial, and transnational disguise. Since postsecular feminism is intra-secular and intra-religious, myriad forms of faith co-exist harmoniously, helping the creation of a Moroccan female global identity. Ben Jelloun creates a contemporary form of Islam that reconciles tradition with modernity, sacredness with secularism, and conservatism with liberalism in a markedly coherent way. In *The Happy Marriage*, the couple finds unprecedented balance between traditional faith and modern secular lifestyle. They fuse sacred and secular values, finding a middle ground between spiritual dedication and worldly desires.

Nonetheless, from a postsecular feminist perspective, the global religious contact zone is not a space of conflict, antagonism, and contradictions; it is a place of religious plurality. spiritual partiality, and secular/sacred detente. In *A Place in the Old Village*, the couple's closeness to God contrasts with the children's secular ideology. They admit that they are "Muslim[s] before being Moroccan[s] [since the] touchstone for everything [in their lives] was Islam" (70), which plays an essential role in the couple's religious postsecularity. Despite the children's secularist evolvements and the parents' Islamic adherence, the family is united, exemplifying spiritual accordance. Accordingly, the family connotes divergent spiritual involvements and perspectives. However, they advocate exceptional cohabitation. For instance, Mourad's marriage to "Maria, a Spanish woman," does not disturb how he "finds religion soothing. He loves his rituals; they bring him a peaceful sense of well-being" (58). As a result, the couple indicates the marriage between the sacred and the secular *par excellence*.

Further, places of faith are omnipresent in Western public spaces. In addition to mere religious symbols like the veil or prayer mats, mosques and Islamic centers propagate a postsecular quintessence of faith. Namely, in *Leaving Tangier*, Sadeq fights the Spanish civic authorities "to build a mosque … a modest but convenient site for worship in the heart of the Muslim community" (66). Consequently, thanks to Sadeq, the sacred invades Western secular public spaces, inspiring religious integration, heterogeneity, and hybridity. Also, the reunion of the secular and the sacred is evident in *A Place in the Old Village*. For instance, Jamila shares

her mother's eccentric views, like carrying a talisman along with "a mobile phone, a bottle of perfume, some lipstick" in her bag (18). She also marries a Christian against her parents' consent. While addressing this matter, Jamila asks fundamental religious inquiries, as the following lines show:

> What kind of religion is it that lets men marry Christian or Jewish women but won't let its women do the same with men? Well? You think I'll be happier with some countrified jerk, one of those lousy peasants who'll lock me up while he goes out to get drunk with his pals? No thanks, Papa, wake up: I decide how to live my life. (59)

Jamila challenges traditional ideas vis-à-vis marrying people from other faiths. Her bold decision to live her life outside the confines of the conventional is a subversive venture. Therefore, the marriage *per se* is a spiritual contact zone where belief and non-belief co-exist and where the sacred and the secular meet.

Ben Jelloun offers a moderate, global, and unconventional representation of transnational Islam. Moroccan transnational women, as presented in the novels discussed above, go through constant religious change. They do not reject their original Islamic faith completely, nor do they embrace modern secularist ideals impulsively while abroad. Rather, they encompass an adaptable postsecular feminist religiosity, a postmodern Islam that borrows extensively from transnational, postmodern, and secular values, shielding its core principles, although humbly. The postsecular is, undeniably, "a sociological condition" (Mandieta 55), which grants Moroccan female expatriates the capacity to take pride in their Islamic heritage and simultaneously experiment with a modern lifestyle. Therefore, Moroccan female global identity combines the conservative and non-conservative, the conventional and non-conventional, and the religious and non-religious to attain empowerment within the Western secular milieu.

Conclusion: Towards a Moroccan Female Global Identity

Thanks to transnational social, cultural, and political relations, Ben Jelloun finds inspiration in myriad historical events such as September 11th, the 20th February movement, the new media, the global financial crisis, and the European Migration Crisis. This article presents Moroccanness and Islam as key aspects of Moroccan female global identity. An identity that is complex, rich, and multidimensional, a procedure of intersecting cultural hybridity, postsecular religiosity, and gender within transnational contexts. Borrowing themes from transnational studies and postsecular feminist studies, I inspect transnational mobility, the existence of Moroccan cultural signs in Western settings, spiritual transmutation from the sacred to the secular and vice versa, and the compromise of sacredness and secularism in Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier*, *The Happy Marriage*, and *A Place in the Old Village*. Therefore, the writer discloses the way Moroccan female expatriates undergo a solid connection to Morocco both physically and spiritually, navigating a third space of cultural hybridity and spiritual postsecularity.

Throughout human history, mobility aggravates cultural hybridity. Once Moroccan women cross the sea, they encounter foreign cultural practices, lifestyles, and social standards. The search for a consensus between what is left behind and what is newly found is evident throughout Ben Jelloun's tales. The reformulation of a Moroccan female global identity is a process of cultural and religious hybridity, heterogeneity, and fluidity. It does not disseminate utter dedication or blind assimilation, but it showcases cultural and religious preservation and simultaneous adaptation. Moroccan diaspora women, as a result, keep considerable cultural ties with their home country via constant voyages to Morocco, bringing substantial signs in the form

of souvenirs to decorate their houses in the diaspora. Additionally, Ben Jelloun finds a solution to conventional religious conflict, provoking a postsecular feminist approach to religiosity. Kenza, Soumaya, Siham, Amina, and Mohammed's wife undergo considerable religious alteration from being devout Muslims to reckless secularists and then back to embracing the Islamic faith. They regulate Islam to match Western secular standards, while keeping room for traditions to flourish in their lives. In this regard, religious metamorphosis and secular/sacred resolution are key features of Moroccan female global identity that interconnect Moroccanness, Islam, and postsecular feminism.

The Moroccan female global identity is culturally hybrid and spiritually postsecular, advancing incomparable agency thanks to its fluid identity that embodies multiculturalism and religious in-betweenness. Put simply, Moroccan female immigrants occupy a third space of cultural plurality, presenting a peculiar attachment to both the home country and the host country, and postsecular spirituality, embodying interfaith dialogue and religious partiality without dismissing the importance of Islam, since "the literatures of the Moroccan diaspora are in the first place defined by their 'Moroccanness'" (van der Poel 8). It celebrates cultural as well as religious plurality to condemn singularity and avows that authority can only be found in turning differences into similarities.

The Moroccan diaspora literary canon suggests that a complete return to one's roots does not necessarily perpetuate empowerment; rather, we need a critical awareness of our origins and follow current postmodern trends to achieve unattainable agency in the diaspora. Throughout this study, I underline the way cultural hybridity and postsecular feminist spirituality are central to constructing a Moroccan female global identity that embraces the past with a modern touch. The equilibrium between the past and the present, the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary, and the home country and the host country is noteworthy in formulating a balanced, harmonious, and heterogeneous Moroccan female global identity. It trespasses conventional gulfs to applaud, embrace, and appreciate transnational cultural and religious connectivity.

The newly emerging field of postsecular feminism proves to be pivotal in the context of Moroccan diaspora studies. It claims an uncharted critical space of religious concession in the diaspora, praising the fact that Islam "has not disappeared from the world" (Graham 223). In this regard, Moroccan diaspora studies must accentuate Islam's undeniable presence in expatriates' lives as well as its essential role in formulating a quintessential global identity. Having said that, this article calls for a serious academic reassessment of culture and Islam in the lives of Moroccan female characters, presenting them as signs of enablement instead of negativity, coercion, and subjugation.

Thanks to transnational tangible and intangible networks, the world today is borderless, encompassing political negotiation, social influence, and cultural concession among diverse communities. Put simply, cultural rootedness transmutes into heterogeneous transnational associations. Likewise, religious exclusion turns into transcultural spiritual negotiation. As a result, global nets impose a transformative reflection, reconsideration, and demonstration of both culture and religion to fit within the rapidly shifting postmodern world. Hence, in a world where the movement of people, ideas, cultures, and faiths contests solid categories, Moroccan diaspora women disseminate a new form of transnational cultural as well as religious empowerment. Their culturally hybrid and postsecular feminist identity does not communicate paradox; rather, it implies harmony and agency – one that embraces tradition without ignoring progress, and reclaims traditional religiousness without overlooking modernity. Exploring Moroccan female global identity is not merely an academic venture, but also a compulsory step to celebrate intercultural synchronization, unworldly resilience, and the relevance of both Moroccanness and Islam in the lives of Moroccan female expatriates. I shall admit that the

Moroccan female global identity integrates, first, Moroccanness and Westernization harmoniously, and second, presents a postsecular feminist spirituality that brings together the sacred and the secular.

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