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WRITER

**MERIEM BOUDERBALA: SHARED EXOTICISM**

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**ORIGINAL FRENCH TEXT BY MERIEM BOUDERBALA. TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY DALIA HASHIM AND IMOGEN GEMIKONAKLI.**

Using Prose Poetry, Meriem Bouderbala illustrates her origins, art and inspiration.

My name is Meriem Bouderbala.

On my father's side:

My great grandmother, a Circassian, was kidnapped by Arab pirates and sold to the Bey of Tunis, who offered her to my great grandfather, general of his army.

My grandfather became a French national, left for Morocco and enjoyed the prizes of colonisation. He returned to Tunisia a rich man just before the Independence, to become a Tunisian citizen.

My father was born French and did his military service in the French army. As my grandfather had become a Tunisian national, my father studied in Paris, returned to Tunis, got married, and I was born.

On my mother's side:

My great grandfather was a Blackfoot who settled in Tunisia since the beginning of the protectorate. As an intellectual in the opposition, he fought for Tunisia's independence.

My grandfather, of Corsican origin, was a customs inspector at Gabes as were many Blackfoots. He and my grandmother hid Tunisian Jews to protect them from Nazi raids during the Second World War.

My mother met my father in Tunis, they married and then I was born.

I have used the contemporary medium to make an impossible transcription of my bearings, which were exclusively Arab.

The gaze, being a prisoner of historical, psychological and sociological frameworks, can only ever be blurred, endlessly reflecting the shimmering, uncertain surfaces of false transparency. My work is an abyss, a succession of ephemeral suspensions, harmonising the individual gaze with the gaze of the other: Me, seeing Westerners looking at the Maghreb, me being both one who looks and the one who is looked at. Art, for me, exists in this borrowed time between the gaze of one and the gaze of the other.

Transparency: art exists in an in-between state, inside the uncertain realm of transparent-like exchanges, the transparent-like gazes of one at another, the false transparency to oneself. This illusion and dream of transparency that modernity has shattered.

Only ashes arise, juxtaposed with violence, confused echoes of the atrocities of colonisation, the uprooting, the current violence within these countries confronted with the modern world, glittering fragments of a dreamed-up orient: these images that skew the quest for transparency and possibility of order.

Between exoticism and sharing, the impossible curtailment of the foreigner. Exoticism is the gaze of the other at a culture, one that is necessarily foreign; art is a shared dupery in the face of the unbearable.

I make of my core, of its altered and disturbed photographic appearance, an ephemeral scene of tragedy that has no origin, nor end.

The revolution closes in on itself and the realm of possibilities is shattered, we must go elsewhere.