

Chapter 2

Negotiating Borderlands: Mohammed Kacimi and the Poetics of Relation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how painter-poet Mohammed Kacimi (1942–2003) embraces an aesthetic of relation, focusing on his depictions of Sub-Saharan Africa and the interplay of poetry and painting in his work. It explores his representation of a multifaceted Africa, rich in metaphor and imagery, and how his artistic practice articulates connections between the Global South and North. Framed within postcolonial theory, the analysis highlights the convergence of poetic and visual expression in Kacimi’s oeuvre, read through Édouard Glissant’s notion of Relation. It argues that for both Kacimi and Glissant, border crossing is a foundational act that affirms cultural diversity, fosters dialogue, and advocates inclusive models of cultural negotiation.

INTRODUCTION

The borderland is not simply a line dividing two territories; it is a space of encounter, exchange, and transformation where identities and cultures blend and reshape themselves. Mohammed Kacimi

This study examines how the painter and poet Mohammed Kacimi (1942–2003) embraces an aesthetic of relation, with particular attention to his representations of Sub-Saharan Africa and the interrelation between poetry and painting in his work. It explores Kacimi’s depiction of a multifaceted Africa—rich in imagery

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and metaphor—and considers how this visual and poetic engagement articulates the profound connections between the Global South and North. The analysis investigates the convergence of poetic and visual expression in Kacimi’s oeuvre, where his poetic voice serves as an entry point to his visual compositions.

Additionally, the study interrogates the transnational dimension of Kacimi’s poetics, through which he expresses personal and collective experiences of struggle, pain, and humanity within a broader, universal framework. Framed within a postcolonial theoretical context, this research offers a critical reading of Kacimi’s significant contribution to the Moroccan artistic landscape. From a conceptual standpoint, Kacimi’s body of work—both literary and pictorial—is examined through Édouard Glissant’s notion of Relation. I argue that, for both Kacimi and Glissant, border crossing constitutes a foundational gesture: one that affirms cultural diversity, fosters dialogical exchange, and advocates for an inclusive model of cultural negotiation.

Mohammed Kacimi stands out as one of the rare Moroccan artists who skillfully merges visual and literary expression. Unlike many of his contemporaries who privilege one medium over the other, Kacimi actively engages both painting and writing, not merely as parallel practices, but as interwoven modes of artistic inquiry. His essays and poetic texts are not ancillary to his pictorial work; rather, they form a dynamic counterpart, enriching and expanding the interpretive possibilities of his art. In Kacimi’s oeuvre, painting and writing are brought into a fertile and ongoing dialogue, each informing and deepening the other. This dialogic relationship generates a multilayered space where image and word converge, revealing his broader commitment to hybridity, intellectual openness, and the poetics of relation.

Kacimi’s work powerfully underscores the intrinsic link between artistic creation and resistance to inhumanity. His paintings and writings are not merely aesthetic expressions but acts of ethical engagement that confront violence, exclusion, and oppression. By evoking suffering and resilience through abstract forms and poetic fragments, Kacimi situates art as a site of witness and moral responsibility. His oeuvre serves as a visual and textual protest against silence and erasure, aligning artistic practice with the defense of human dignity and the affirmation of shared humanity.

Parole nomade: L’expérience d’un peintre (1999), composed of poems and meditative reflections on the artist’s own creative journey, is structured around what Glissant (1997) terms an “aesthetic of Relation.” This relational framework unfolds within a plural, open, and dialogical space where the boundaries between disciplines, cultures, and identities are constantly negotiated and reimagined. In this space, the author-painter engages in an ongoing attempt to weave together the intimate, often invisible threads that bind the act of visual creation to the act of writing. Kacimi’s work resists compartmentalization, privileging instead a fluid movement between image and word, body and text, self and other — a movement that affirms interconnectivity as both an artistic and ethical imperative.

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