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Veni, Pati, Scripsi: The Maghrebi Diaspora in Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs* and Salah Methnani-Mario Fortunato's *Immigrato*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Comparative Literature

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Abstract

The empire knows how to write back even after it shrinks, but the formerly colonized who move to the metropolis write differently. Two Maghrebi diasporic novelists – Driss Chraïbi, a Moroccan living in France and Salah Methnani, a Tunisian who found shelter in Italy --, scan the territories of their adoptive countries, produce maps of tortured inner experience, and amalgamate the autobiographic with the fictional. They write in the respective languages of their adoptive countries: Chraïbi, at the very beginning of the Maghrebi diasporic literature in France, published *Les Boucs* in 1955 and Methnani (in collaboration with Mario Fortunato), published the first Maghrebi immigrant novel in Italian, *Immigrato* in 1990. In revealing the creativity and productive capacities of the Maghrebi diaspora, *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* are ground-breaking novels of the diasporic experiences of Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians living in France and Italy. The analyses of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* and of their critical reception constitute the bulk of this dissertation. Drawing on Ato Quayson’s concept of the “diasporic imaginary” and Linda Hutcheon’s theory of “irony” and “parody,” the dissertation focuses on the constant intertwining of gravitas and levitas in the two novels. It claims that through the deployment of these literary devices, *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* uniquely stress the grave, dramatic, and at times tragic dimensions of the Maghrebi condition in the diaspora. To this end, the subtle presence of the ironic and the parodic, along with instances of levity, challenges prevalent readings of Maghrebi diasporic literature as homogeneous. Shifting the critical attention from text and author to the reader, this study’s final chapter contends that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* invite the reader to play an active role in the production of meaning.

Keywords: Driss Chraïbi, *Les Boucs*, Salah Methnani, Mario Fortunato, *Immigrato*, Migration, Maghreb, Diasporic Imaginary, Levity.

Summary for Lay Audience

The twentieth century has witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon of migration of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian populations to Europe in the aftermath of national independences, and Maghrebi diasporic communities are now scattered all over the world. In this dissertation, I look at the first two literary texts from the Maghrebi diaspora that centre on the experience of migration from the Maghreb to France and Italy in the twentieth century.

The literary analysis of *Les Boucs* (1955) written by Moroccan-born Driss Chraïbi, and *Immigrato* (1990) written by Tunisian-born Salah Methnani in collaboration with Italian-born Mario Fortunato demonstrates that although these texts shed light on the tragic dimension of the Maghrebi condition in the diaspora, at times tragedy is interrupted by lighter episodes.

Critical voices of the Maghrebi diaspora as well as scholars of French, Francophone and Italian literature, and Ato Quayson's work on diaspora, along with Linda Hutcheon's concepts of irony and parody contribute to the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Les Boucs offers one of the first contributions to a Maghrebi diasporic imaginary in the French context, and the text is singularly loaded with irony. *Immigrato* is a pioneering text of the Maghrebi diaspora in Italian and can also be read as a parody. This study's final chapter contains a reflection on the mechanisms of literary evaluation with a focus on the potential offered by a comparative study of texts written by members of migrant and diasporic communities. I also argue that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* invite the reader to play an active role in the production of meaning.

Dedication

*“And We will surely test you
with something of fear
and hunger
and a loss of wealth
and lives and fruits,
but give good tidings
to the patient”*

Qur’ān 2:155

To my brother Hafid (1980-2018) and my father Saïd (1936-2013)

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Introduction

0.1 *Les Boucs and Immigrato*

Set against the background of Algerian immigration to France in the 1950s, *Les Boucs* is the second novel written by Moroccan-born author Driss Chraïbi (1926-2007). Written between October 1954 and June 1955, *Les Boucs* was published during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and one year before the dissolution of the French protectorate over Morocco and Tunisia. Through the exploration of the labourers' living and working conditions in the greater Paris area, Chraïbi seeks to challenge derogatory stereotyping of North Africans in both the Maghreb and France. Driss Chraïbi is best known for his first book *Le passé simple (The Simple Past)*, a vitriolic attack on Moroccan traditional society, however, as evidenced by the novel's dominant reception, in writing about Maghrebi migrants, it is against the West that Driss Chraïbi revolts in *Les Boucs*. Yalann Waldik, the central character of *Les Boucs*, is not represented as a young intellectual on a visit to France, as one may find in the African literature of the time, but he is portrayed as an Algerian migrant who is not only fascinated by the French civilization but also deeply scandalized by the outrageous living conditions of Maghrebis in the French capital city. Yalann's despair and suffering are not triggered while he is still in Algeria, yet he starts drifting towards madness when he embarks on a journey to France. He is confronted with the terrible circumstances that plague a group of twenty-two impoverished North African labourers; and as a writer, he feels the moral obligation to save them. It is Yalann's failed attempt to rescue the twenty-two Algerians and their "décrystallisation humaine" that Chraïbi displays in *Les Boucs*. Adding to the tragic situation, the romantic relationship between Yalann and Simone is strained by their son's sickness and her affair with Mac O'Mac, a French intellectual. The novel ends with the insertion of Isabelle into the storyline; she has survived World War II and in offering a form of hope to Yalann her presence dissolves the nightmarish atmosphere of the text. The final scene shows the conversation between ten-year-old Yalaan and a priest in Algeria who convinces the young boy to leave the homeland and depart for France.

Salah Methnani was born in Tunisia in 1963 and graduated in 1987 from Tunis university. Having a strong interest in the works of Moroccan-born Mohamed Choukri, he published a translation in Italian of *Madman of the Roses* in 1989.¹ Published one year later

¹ Methnani, Salah. *Il folle delle rose*. Rome: Theoria, 1989.

and written in collaboration with Mario Fortunato *Immigrato* recounts in the first person the itinerary of twenty-seven-year-old Salah, the main protagonist, who embarks as a graduate student in foreign languages (English and Russian) on a journey through Italy from South to North. Describing the journey in a journal kept throughout the trip, *Immigrato* is divided into chapters which bear as titles the names of town and cities: Tunis, Mazara del Vallo, Palermo, Naples, Rome, Florence, Padua, Turin, Milan, and Kairouan. *Immigrato* explores Salah's descent into degradation and his discovery of the underworld in which immigrants are caught in drug trafficking, sexual exploitation and interethnic hostility. In the first chapter Salah remembers his childhood in Tunisia and recounts the birth of his desire to leave Tunis after completing his studies and start a new life in Italy. In the final chapter, Salah travels back to the homeland where he visits his father before returning, legally this time, to Italy. Thus, *Immigrato* offers one of the first literary responses to issues related to migration from the perspective of a Maghrebi migrant arriving in 1990s Italy, and it can be argued that, by reading *Immigrato* as a diasporic text, further levels of understanding can emerge.

Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's critical work on irony and parody, and theoretical formulations about the "diasporic imaginary," this dissertation analyzes *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* to demonstrate that the element of levity, enabled through irony and parody, creates new possibilities of interpretation with regard to the economic, historical, political, and socio-cultural landscape of the Maghrebi diaspora. The study of levity also expands and complicates the parameters of literary evaluation to which these novels have been subjected, which have focused predominantly on the context, the authors, and the gravity of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. To develop this analysis, I take into consideration the socio-political circumstances that shape the novels and to which they respond, and locate *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* in relation to the broader literary production of the Maghrebi diaspora in France and Italy.

0.2 Historical Context

The 20th century has witnessed an unprecedented migration of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian populations to Europe in the aftermath of their national independences. In the context of decolonization, Maghrebi migrants have reached Europe and North African communities have been established in the major European cities. According to Eric Sellin and Hédi Abdel-Jaouad,

what is known today to literary scholars as the Maghreb (adj., Maghrebian) and, to historians as the Maghrib (adj., Maghribi), [is] an area including Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. “Maghreb,” which also serves as the Arabic word for Morocco, comes from the word maghrib (root gharb, west), meaning the place where the sun sets, or the western region; as distinguished from the Mashreq, or Eastern part of the Arab world. The so-called Greater Maghreb includes Mauretania and Libya, but the linguistic bonding through French has tended to cause people to group the first three countries, despite great differences in their internal and social structures. (1)

Furthermore, Katharina Natter explains that Libya and Mauretania cannot be included in the “core Maghreb” (4) because they do not have the same migratory profile as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. In any case, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia share the experience of a relatively extended period of colonization: 44 years for Morocco, 75 for Tunisia and 132 for Algeria. In comparison, the Fascist regime ruled over Tunisia for a relatively short period of time during the second world war between November 1942 and May 1943 (Choate 12).

By reason of historical ties, France and Italy appear as two significant destination countries for the Maghrebi diaspora (Natter 5). Literary critics have recently paid renewed attention to the memory and representation of colonialism, its downfall in North Africa, and the subsequent Maghrebi migration perceiving in the literary form an alternative critical perspective to that of ‘official’ political discourse.

0.3 Literary Context

In order to appreciate more fully the relationship between gravity and levity in the context of Maghrebi diasporic literature in French and Italian, how it has been presented in literary texts, and what effects such representations may have had on the way Maghrebi diasporic literature is assembled within the French and Italian social and cultural landscapes, it is important to present both a conceptual history of the limited and limiting phenomenon of “migrant literature” as utilized in France and Italy, as well as the evolution of literary productions that depict such a phenomenon. Indeed, there have been numerous efforts made in the overall visibility of first diasporic Maghrebi authors in various literary genres, as evidenced by the popularity of novelists such as Azouz Begag and Amara Lakhous; Abdelwahab Meddeb and Majid El Houssi in poetry; Nabile Farès and Moussa Lebkitri in theatre, to name only a few. And yet there remains a sharp contrast between the variety of

literary productions in the Maghrebi diaspora on one hand, and its cataloguing as a marginal and exotic migrant literature on the other.

While Maghrebis in the broadest sense of subaltern populations have existed as a recurring trope in literary undertakings over the years in Europe, one field that remains largely under problematized concerns the relationship between aesthetic representations of the Maghrebi diaspora and their critical theorizations within the evolving landscape of French and Italian cultures. Whereas the term subaltern refers generally to an individual's subordination in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture, the fluctuating definition of the subaltern concept (from Antonio Gramsci to Subaltern Studies scholars such as Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) needs to be understood here as the voices silenced by the official and dominant discourses in the French, Italian and Maghrebi context.

Moreover, the literary texts produced by the Maghrebi populations — and in the more specific context of this dissertation, Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian diasporas — in French and Italian societies hint at a troubled relationship. For example, Rachid Djaidani was accused by Éditions du Seuil of not being the real author of his first dark-humoured novel, *Boumkoeur* (1999), which details a harsh *banlieue* housing project. In response to such accusations, Djaidani decided to record a making-of documentary while writing his second novel, *Mon nerf* (2004), to avoid any further suspicions (Reeck 2012, 127). Faïza Guène's *Kiffe Kiffe demain* (2004), which revolves around a plot where Doria, a 15-year-old Muslim girl, lives in a housing project outside Paris, has been translated into more than twenty languages (Hargreaves 2013, 224). In spite of the relative commercial success in France and abroad of her five following novels, she admits that she is still “expected to talk about the banlieues” (Snaije).

That Maghrebi diasporic literary productions in French and Italian thrive more vibrantly outside France and Italy appears as a problematic contradiction. Yet, while literature produced over the last decades by the unprecedented waves of Maghrebi migrants and the Beurs² has been accompanied by an evolution in terms of themes and literary creation, most texts have been dismissed as mere “*témoignage*” with limited literary value. Therefore, such isolation requires a complementary scrutiny of readership and a focus on the mechanisms of literary evaluation.

² For an analysis of the genealogy of the term “Beur” refer to Sylvie Durmelat's “Petite histoire du mot beur ou comment prendre la parole quand on vous la prête” (1998).

Whereas the writers have been grouped under the ethnic banner and ghetto of “littérature Beur” and “letteratura della migrazione,” it is the debate on the notion of identity that has largely drawn the attention of the scholarship on migrant literature in France and Italy. After all, the Beur artistic ecosystem relies largely on the victimization and mythification of the emblematic hybrid Beur and ostracized “banlieusard” character. Though it would be convenient to conclude that it is by making use of autobiographical elements in their writings that Maghrebi diasporans are driven to denounce the severity of their living conditions, to do so would be a serious oversimplification of the complex relationship between the Maghrebi diaspora’s preference for certain generic forms and the possibilities of creative resistance that arise in these texts. One such way to facilitate an inquiry into the limits of present understanding is to look at points where writers of the Maghrebi diaspora, in their struggle for control of the means of representation, use levity as resistance tactics to “write back.”

0.3.1 Maghrebis and France

Jacques Chevrier recognizes that the Beurs have played a major role in contemporary Francophone literature. By introducing immigration as a major theme in their literary production, Beur writers have contributed to the debate on the movement of North African populations from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to France:

The heroic age of Negritude, exalting the values of black civilizations under the leadership of the dissident poet Leopold Senghor, has been replaced by another time, the time of ‘migritude,’ a neologism which means that the Africa told by the writers of that generation no longer has much to do with the concerns of their elders.

However, it was not until the late 1970s that the theme of immigration became one of the major topoi of contemporary literature, with a clear delay compared to the “beur” literature, born out of Maghrebi immigration. (97)³

In addition, Bernard Magnier provides a portrait of the early African diaspora authors who live and write in Paris. In *Beurs noirs à Black Babel*, Magnier singles out the main features of the texts: the characters differ from those of the previous generation. The “new heroes” engage in solo trips and while their ancestors used to reflect upon temporary forms of exile, the narratives now include a more ambiguous relationship with what is being considered the

³ Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

home and the host country. Among other common denominators, Magnier pinpoints the urban settings of the emerging literary production in which Paris is often the central location. Eroticism, humour and music permeate the literary fictions written by this new generation of writers who also initiate new editorial practices (105). However, not a single North African or Beur writer is included in this early study.

Jean Déjeux examines the literary and general cultural phenomenon initiated by Francophone migrant authors from the Maghreb. Between the end of World War II and the 1983's *Marche des Beurs*, which coincides with the publication of the first novel *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, by Mehdi Charef, nine novels⁴ written by seven authors deal "partially" with migration (1985, 97-98). Déjeux claims that during the same time span seven Maghrebi authors have entirely devoted their texts⁵ to the theme of migration (95). And it is worth mentioning the case of Tahar Ben Jelloun, Driss Chraïbi, Hamoud Atmani and Chérif Loueslati for their first-hand experience of migration to France, due to the fact they were residing in France either before or at the time of the publication of the aforementioned texts.

The 1983 *Marche pour l'égalité et contre la racisme* which was termed *La marche des Beurs* by the French media (Le Breton 251), is considered to be the founding act of the Beur movement. It is actually a symbolic date as the movement already began to manifest itself, albeit in a more discreet way, towards the end of the 1970s. It is generally accepted that Beur literature has established itself in 1983 and that it has been particularly concerned with the transmission of the so-called Beur culture, and that it has functioned as a new medium through which the life experiences of the Maghrebi diaspora have been voiced.

Notwithstanding the publication of *La Béotie* by Jean-Luc Yacine in 1977, and *L'Amour quand même* by Hocine Touabti in 1981, *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed*, published the same year as *La Marche*, has been welcomed by critics and acclaimed as the first Beur novel. It tells the story of Madjid, the son of Algerian migrants, and his friends who

⁴ These nine novels are Mouloud Feraoun's *La Terre et le sang* (1953), *Les Chemins qui montent* (1957) and *Le Fils du pauvre* (1950); Malek Haddad's *La Dernière impression* (1958); Mohammed Arabdiou's *La Pièce d'argent* (1962); Kateb Yacine's *Le Polygone étoilé* (1966); Ali Ghalem's *Une Femme pour mon fils* (1979); Nabile Farès' *La Mort de Salah Baye* (1980); Hocine Mahdi's *Mourir en France* (1983).

⁵ These seven texts are Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs* (1955) and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *La Réclusion solitaire* (1976) for Morocco; Rachid Boudjedra's *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée* (1975), Chabane Ouhaïoune's *Les Conquérants au parc rouge* (1980) and Hamoud Atmani's *De la place Charles Martel à l'impasse des Marronniers* (1982) for Algeria; Slaheddine Bhiri's *L'Espoir était pour demain* (1982), and Chérif Loueslati's *L'Entonnoir* (1983) for Tunisia.

live in the Parisian housing projects. The novel was later adapted into a film directed by Mehdi Charef himself, who was awarded the Prix Jean Vigo in 1985.

Moreover, according to Alec Hargreaves' survey, 28 books have been written by Beur authors between 1977 and 1989; 62 have been published during the following decade and 86 between 2000 and 2007 (2008, 211). And while the literary quality of these texts has been largely questioned, the rise in the number of publications has been accompanied by a rich debate on Beur literature and the value of ethnic minority writing in France.

Sylvie Durmelat's contribution to the debate on Beur literature insists on the role and the consequences of labelling Beur texts as mere sociological testimonials: "By focusing on the relationship to the "real," critics tend to give a reductive image of these texts and erase some of the choices, yet strategic, of their authors, including that of fiction" (1995, 105). And just as attempts had been made by some authors of North African heritage to detach themselves publicly from the Beur author label (Desplanques 149), in their majority second-generation writers have also rejected the idea that their texts should be included in the subgenre of migrant, francophone, Maghrebi or *banlieue* literature (Quarta 126-127). Various labels have been applied to these literary texts, the most recent ones being: "littérature de banlieue," "littérature des cités" and "littérature urbaine" (126). The use of adjectives such as "minor," "peripheral" and "marginal" has contributed to the further segregation of the second-generation Maghrebi literary production: "In fact, the novels were soon labelled as paraliterature or minor literature for their content and language, which was not considered very accurate to many. Notions such as peripheral literature or marginal literature became recurrent, thus accentuating the idea of segregation of which young people of Maghreb origin were already victims" (104). And we can find among other labels, a list of hyphenated qualifying adjectives which put the stress on the origin of the authors such as "littérature franco-maghrébine" or "littérature arabo-française" (122).

It is all the more delicate to establish once and for all when the shift from "littérature beur" to "littérature de banlieue" exactly took place. And while it is generally accepted that the *cité*⁶ is central in the "littérature de banlieue," I would like to part ways with Serena Cello with regards to her attempt to determine the exact date of birth of *banlieue* literature: "The

⁶ In "Writing Back from the banlieues" Alec Hargreaves writes: "In the context of the *banlieues*, the word *cité* typically denotes a neighbourhood dominated by a large expanse of HLM (social housing), often in the form of tower blocks" (n7).

real change in the literary milieu took place in 1999, with the publication of Rachid Djaidani's novel *Boumkoeur*: this is the moment when *beur* [sic] literature gives way to *banlieue* literature. This text had the merit of bringing the "cité" into the novel: for the first time it becomes the real protagonist" (206). If the *banlieue* plays a large part in Djaidani's novel, it needs to be mentioned that the *banlieue* did not wait until 1999 to acquire a prominent role given that earlier texts written by Beur authors already include a reflection on the *banlieue* and the *cité* as can be found in Charef's ground-breaking novel, *Le Thé au harem*, published in 1983.

Due to its significance in the debate on Beur and *banlieue* literature, the publication of *Qui fait la France?* should be singled out. It is a collection of twelve short stories preceded by a manifesto signed by ten writers among which "sons and daughters of North African immigrants are by far the most numerous" (Reeck 2011, 148). However, that same year none of the authors involved in the *Qui fait la France?* project was invited to add their name to the list of authors who signed the "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" manifesto published in *Le Monde*⁷. Even if Moroccan-born Tahar Ben Jelloun and Algerian-born Boualem Sansal are among the signatories of the manifesto written in favour of equality between all the French language literatures, not a single Beur or *banlieue* author can be found among the forty-four writers (Hargreaves 2014, 149).

Another interesting contribution to the discussion on Beur and *banlieue* literature is Mireille Le Breton's work on Mohamed Razane's *Dit violent* where she associates the birth of the *Qui fait la France?* collective with the death of the Beur literature and at once declares that *banlieue* literature does not exist (264). Therefore, it appears that in spite of the differing interpretations of the literary texts produced by second and third-generation Franco-Maghrebi authors, scholars converge in supporting the idea that the use of the term Beur has been perceived as a reductive literary category. With this in mind, it could be contended that the attempt to label and categorize these writers is an indication of the way in which migrant and diasporic literatures have been brought into French public debate.

0.3.2 Maghrebis and Italy

As an expected result of the unprecedented flows of migration which took place during the 1970s and 1980s, a literature produced by migrants can also be found in Italy. In a large

⁷ "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français," *Le Monde*, 16 Mars, 2007.

measure, the independence of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia was followed by a significant cross-Mediterranean migration to France, yet Maghrebi communities can also be found in Italy. In this context, the literature produced by Maghrebi immigrants in Italy is of interest because of their involvement in the pioneering movement of the “literature of migration.” The rise in the 1990s of the *letteratura della migrazione* sheds a strong light on the challenges encountered by the migrant populations in Italy. Many critics have argued that the emergence of such literature can be read partly as a response to two events: the killing of Jerry Maslo, a South African political refugee and agricultural worker, in Villa Literno near Napoli in August 1989, and the enactment of the Martelli Law in 1990 whose importance “lies in the fact that it is the first complete corpus of laws dealing with the presence within Italy of people originating from countries outside the European community” (Parati 298).

Over the past three decades, the attempts to define this literary corpus have proven highly problematic. For instance, in “Italian Postcolonial Literature” Caterina Romeo offers an overview of the different labels used to categorize the writers as

“italophone,” “migrant,” “postmigrant,” “multicultural,” “migration,” “diaspora,” “second-generation,” and “postcolonial,” as well as a variety of expressions referring to countries and continents of origin (Alessandro Portelli used the term “Afroitalian,” and other terms were subsequently used such as “African Italian,” “of African descent,” “Italian Somali,” “Albanian Italian,” and so on)” (2).

In the early 90s, Remo Cacciatori and Carla Ghezzi published a series of seminal articles where they trace the origins of the texts produced by migrants. Cacciatori claims that the presence in Italy of “immigrati extracomunitari” (non-EU national immigrants) coming from China and Somalia can be traced back to the 1920s or 1960s (163), and Ghezzi mentions that two autobiographies have been published in 1990 by young African and Maghrebi migrants (284). These two writers are Pap Khouma from Senegal with *Io venditore di elefanti, una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano*, written in collaboration with Oreste Pivetta; and Salah Methnani from Tunisia with *Immigrato*, written in collaboration with Mario Fortunato. If a sociological rather than a literary value has been attributed to the texts of what Armando Gnisci calls the “first phase” (2003, 93), Caterina Romeo writes that *Immigrato* was delegitimized by being confined “within the nonliterary space of autobiographical writing” (2012, 225).

Yet, another Maghrebi voice could be heard in Italian before the publication of Methnani's travelogue. Moroccan-born author Tahar Ben Jelloun was awarded the Goncourt prize in 1987 for *La Nuit sacrée* which centres around a Moroccan girl raised as a boy. It was translated into Italian as *Notte Fatale* the following year, but his earlier literary works have also played a significant role in circulating Maghrebi narratives outside France. *La Plus Haute des solitudes. Misère affective et sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains* originally published in 1977 was translated into Italian by Vittorio Cosentino in 1988 under the title *L'Estrema solitudine. La réclusion solitaire* originally published in French in 1976 was translated in 1990 by Egi Volterrani under the title *Le Pareti della solitudine* and a year later the Einaudi company published Ben Jelloun and Egi Volterrani's analysis of Southern Italy titled *Dove lo stato non c'è*.⁸

The texts produced by the first-generation Maghrebi writers in Italy share a focus on the everyday life's vicissitudes of Algerian, Moroccan or Tunisian migrants spread all over the Italian peninsula. The attention to the Maghrebi populations' quality of life can be found in *Chiamatemi Ali* by Moroccan-born Mohamed Bouchane, which was published in 1990; *Pantanella. Canto lungo la strada* (1992), written by Tunisian writer and film director Mohsen Melliti who also wrote *I bambini delle rose* (1995); Nassera Chohra, whose parents moved from the Algerian desert to Southern France Marseille, published her autobiographical novel in Italian under the title *Volevo diventare bianca* (1993).

While Gnisci's distinction between a "fase esotica" [exotic phase] and a "fase carsica" [karstic phase] (2003, 93) may appear judicious for a better understanding of the early stages of migrant literature in Italy, it is worth mentioning that a shift in the treatment of migration issues can also be observed in the literary texts produced later in the 2000s. The autobiographical texts of the "fase esotica" are followed by fictions which offer a different approach to issues related to the movement and displacement of Maghrebi and migrant populations as can be found in Moroccan-born Mohammed Lamsuni's *Clandestino* (2002), and Algerian-born writers Abdelmalek Smarri's *Fiamme in paradiso* (2000), Amara Lakhous' *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (2005) and *Divorzio*

⁸ During the 1990s several African writers also published their first texts in Italian: *La promessa di Hamadi* (1991) by Saidou Moussa Ba born in Senegal; *Aulò. Una storia Eritrea* (1994) by Ribka Sibhatu born in Eritrea; *Lontano da Mogadiscio* (1994) by Shirin Razanali Fazel born in Somalia; *Racordai. Vengo da un'isola di Capo Verde* (1996) by Maria de Lourdes Jesus from Cape Verde.

all'islamica a viale Marconi (2010), Tahar Lamri's *I sessanta nomi dell'amore* (2006) and Amor Dekhis' *I lupi della notte* (2008).

0.4 Theoretical Context

0.4.1 Diaspora

In his pioneering article, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," William Safran suggests that the concept of diaspora should be applied to members of expatriate minority communities which share several characteristics. Safran's defining characteristics are that

(1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "centre" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign regions; (2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; (3) they believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host country and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; (4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; (5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and (6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (83-84)

And I would point out that texts produced by French-speaking and Italian-speaking North African writers offer singular combinations of these attributes. The exploration of the combinations which can be found in *Les Boucs* (1955) and *Immigrato* (1990) will help identify some of the particularities of the Maghrebi diasporic literature.

It is on the attempts to "insert" (85) the Maghrebi diaspora into the French economic and political systems that Chraïbi's text reflect upon, and one might add that it is the mitigated success to include the Maghrebi diaspora into the Italian economic and political spheres that Methnani decries in *Immigrato*. Of particular interest are Safran's comments on the relative closure of the French political system and the impossibility of assimilation for Maghrebis as long as Frenchness is "equated with European and Christian (or Judeo-

Christian) origins and customs” (86). Indeed, the challenges of assimilation and integration into the French and Italian contexts are key elements in the works of Chraïbi and Methnani who offer a wide range of approaches not only to issues of adjustment but also to the encounter between the host nation and the Islamic culture that permeates the texts produced by the Maghrebi diaspora. In this regard, a close reading of diasporic texts would confirm the subtlety of the encounter between *francité* or *italianità* and “secularized” or “diluted” Islamic culture (86), while challenging the traditional stereotypes according to which France is the land of human rights, and Italians are “brava gente.” As for the assertion that “it is highly improbable that the Maghrebis in France, though often made a scapegoat for unemployment and crimes of violence, would be forcibly expelled” (96), the texts written by Maghrebi diaspora authors are united in condemning the turning of the Maghrebi subject into a scapegoated target, and if mass expulsion of Maghrebi populations from France back to the Maghreb does not constitute a central focus of Chraïbi’s texts, on the contrary, *Immigrato* features characters deeply distressed by the fear of being issued a “foglio di via” [deportation order] (Fortunato and Methnani 27, 43) and the deportation it entails.

Maghrebi diasporic literature can provide elements of response to Safran’s question: “does the weakening of religious practice among the Maghrebis in France compromise their myth of an ultimate return to their country of origin or, on the contrary, does it cause them to emphasize their “Arabness” (*arabité*) and therefore to maintain a homeland myth?” (96). If a weakening of religious practice can likely be found in the Maghrebi diasporic texts under scrutiny here, this general tendency needs to be mitigated as instances of religious fervour can be identified too, whether it is the celebration of the Eid festival that marks the end of Ramadan for the Algerian workers in *Les Boucs* (175), or the five daily prayers in the Turinese hostel room performed by Salah’s Moroccan friend Saïd in *Immigrato* (104) to name a few. And not only do Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts differ in their approaches to religious practices but they also differ in their approaches to both a myth of and a return to the homeland.

For Kim D. Butler, the study of the relationship with the homeland is only one of the five dimensions⁹ that any diasporan research should focus on. While it is agreed that the homeland plays a key role in the building of a diasporan identity, Chraïbi and Methnani’s

⁹ These dimensions are: “1) Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; 2) Relationship with the homeland; 3) Relationship with hostlands; 4) Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora; 5) Comparative studies of different diasporas” (195).

novels appear to support the claim according to which “it is the issue of return, and the related sense of connection to the homeland, that is intrinsic to the diasporan experience, rather than a specific orientation toward physical return” (205). In fact, *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* offer a broad spectrum of relations between the hostland and the homeland.

Furthermore, Vijay Mishra’s research on the Indian diaspora might prove useful for the examination of the displaced Maghrebi population. In his contribution to the theorization of the Indian diasporic imaginary Mishra differentiates between the “old” and the “new” Indian diaspora (422). He argues that “there is a radical break between the older diasporas of classic capitalism and the mid- to late twentieth-century diasporas of advanced capital to the metropolitan centres of the Empire, the New World and the former settler colonies” (421). It is possible to draw parallels between Mishra’s notion of an old and a new diaspora and the dispersal of Maghrebi populations given that Chraïbi and Methnani capture the Maghrebi diaspora through different generational groups and various economic cycles. Another point of convergence with Mishra’s “diasporic space” is that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* are also replete with occurrences of “hybrid, cross-cultural and interdiasporic relationships” (434). Moreover, Mishra’s assertion that “diasporic communities are always hyphenated” calls for an exploration of hyphenation in the context of Maghrebi diasporas.

Additionally, his distinction between the “old Indian diasporas of exclusivism” and the “new diaspora of late capital (the diaspora of the border)” (422) offers an interesting counterpoint to Abdelmalek Sayad’s breakdown of the Algerian emigration and immigration timeline (1977, 61). In this regard, Lacroix and Lemoux have questioned the relevance of Sayad’s classification of the twenty-first century Algerian migration to France into three ages¹⁰ suggesting that an examination of the current Algerian migrants’ trajectories shows “A dialectic dynamic, between encampment on the transmediterranean space which still largely structures the Algerian transnational social landscape, and a desire for openness towards the horizons of a globalized space” (9-10). The complexity of the fraught relationship between the homeland and the hostland in the context of Algerian migration to France is further outlined: “The new generations of emigrants are therefore engaging in existing migratory dynamics, not by replacing them, but by embracing their roughness in the manner of a new

¹⁰ The first one which lasted until 1945-1950, a second one which spans from 1950 and the Algerian war of Independence in 1962, and a third age from 1962 to the publication of Sayad’s seminal text in 1977.

sedimentary layer” (9). It is therefore opportune to question how Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts portray the migrant trajectories.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah explores the politics of identity, with a focus on the Asian diasporic experience and proposes the concept of “diaspora space” as “the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes ... where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed” (205). In view of this, the application of the notion of “diaspora space” to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* carries the potential to reveal how Chraïbi and Methnani agree and differ in their approaches towards the processes through which the Maghrebi diaspora is constituted. While both texts elaborate on the economic, political and cultural processes of the “diaspora space” of the Maghrebis, one could argue that *Les Boucs* delves deeper than *Immigrato* into issues of a psychic nature. Yet, as Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts interrogate the “economic, cultural and political effects of crossing/transgressing different ‘borders’” (238), the “diasporic space” allows for a reading of the texts as sites that seek to negotiate the positionality of the Maghrebi diasporan subject. Brah interrogates the construction of the term ‘the Asian’ in post-war Britain and rejects binary constructions of race by raising issues of caste, religion, ethnicity, and age; and offers a critique of “fixed sets of positionalities” (13) and “politics constituted around the assertion of the ‘primacy’ of one axis of differentiation over all the others as *the* motor force of history” (14), and underscores “the need to explore the interconnections between different axes of differentiation” (14). In arguing that “At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey” (179), Brah formulates a series of questions that appear to be particularly relevant for the study of Chraïbi and Methnani’s text:

“If the circumstances of leaving are important, so, too, are those of arrival and settling down. How and in what ways do these journeys conclude, and intersect in specific places, specific spaces, and specific historical conjunctures? How and in what ways is a group inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality, or other axes of differentiation in the country to which it migrates?” (179).

Accordingly, *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* display diverse points of departure and arrival, as well as different historical periods, and as Chraïbi centres mainly on the dialectic relationship between France and Algeria, Methnani’s text is replete with references to the journeys completed by a myriad of newcomers and established migrants originating outside Italy and

the Maghreb. Consequently, as the texts insist on the traumatic insertion of the Maghrebi diaspora into French and Italian hermetic societies, Chraïbi focuses primarily on Algerian migrant labourers in the Parisian periphery while Methnani denounces the fate that awaits displaced populations coming from the broader global South. Thus, the Tunisian author manages to provide a moderate degree of insights into the condition of displacement under which Maghrebi as well as non-Maghrebi diasporas live. Furthermore, Brah indicates that “The manner in which a group comes to be ‘situated’ in and through a wide variety of discourses, economic processes, state policies and institutional practices is critical to its future. This ‘situatedness’ is central to how different groups come to be relationally positioned in a given context” (179); accordingly *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* can be read as creative and insightful responses to this imposed condition and as attempts to examine the situatedness of the Maghrebi diaspora.

Avtar Brah also emphasizes “relationality across multiple modalities of power-class, gender, ‘race’ and racism, ethnicity, nationalism, generation and sexuality” (237), and argues that “we focus on processes of economic exploitation and inequities ... these cannot be addressed purely as ‘economic’ or ‘class’ issues without reference to other modalities of differentiation” (243). And if most of the critics have focused on the way *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* discuss matters relating to high levels of Maghrebi unemployment, racial discrimination, and processes of exploitation, they have been rather silent on the way gender relations have been restructured by the experience of migration. The exploration of the ways in which multiple modalities of differentiation intersect in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* indicates that Chraïbi and Methnani have serious interest in the restructuring of gender relations in the diaspora. Except when Yalann makes a few mentions of his mother residing in Algeria, the Maghrebi woman is almost entirely absent from *Les Boucs*. The Maghrebi diaspora that Chraïbi depicts is exclusively male, and gender-relations between Algerian men and French women are charged with suspicion and hostility. Yet, one of the distinctive features of Chraïbi’s text is that it stages two interracial relationships, first between Yalann and Simone whose parenthood is clouded by the sickness of their son Fabrice, and later between Yalann and Isabelle. Contrastingly, at various stages of his journey, Salah meets a considerable number of migrants and Maghrebi diasporans who struggle with poverty and high unemployment. One of the peculiarities of *Immigrato* is that it includes numerous depictions of men and women of the Maghrebi diaspora, and that it displays a wider variety of sex and gendered norms and practices than *Les Boucs*. In *Immigrato*, Maghrebi men engage in

practices until then unknown to most of them such as street peddling, drug trafficking, and prostitution, and the diaspora constitutes a site of sexual experimentations, and homoeroticism. Although Maghrebi women appear to have gained financial independence in the diaspora and achieved empowerment, all the ones that Salah meets have entered the paid labour force exclusively through sex work. In Methnani's text gender relations are impacted and altered by the experience of migration. While Salah's short-lived interracial romance with Giovanna can be read as facilitating a sense of temporary assimilation into Italian society, in its overwhelming majority, the host population greets with open hostility most of the Maghrebis regardless of their gender. Thus, as it provides an exploration of the reconfiguration of masculinity and femininity in the Maghrebi diaspora, *Immigrato* also delivers insights into the forms of inequality and exclusion that Maghrebi diasporans face in Italy.

0.4.2 Maghrebi Diasporic Imaginary and Levity

In the introduction to *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani argue that

As an analytical category transnational communities are understood to transcend diasporas because such communities may not be derived primarily or indeed exclusively from the forms of co-ethnic and cultural identification that are constitutive of diasporas, but rather from elective modes of identification involving class, sexuality, and even professional interest.” (4)

In line with this argument, Chraïbi and Methnani's substantial focus on matters relating to co-ethnic identification allows for a reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* as diasporic rather than transnational texts.

In support of his claim that the “sense of exile, mobility and circulation” is “central to the condition of diaspora” (139), Ato Quayson illustrates the concept of diasporic imaginary by drawing primarily from texts that have “reflected changes to social formations since World War II and the independence of many nations from the yoke of colonialism” (140). In his view, the elaboration of a theory of the diasporic imaginary needs to be articulated around questioning of “the assumption of the nation-state as the privileged horizon for literary history,” the impact of “voluntary and enforced movements of populations ... on the imagination,” and the production of a “model for interpreting literary texts in full view of

their grounding in the recursive mobilities of the past and present time” (140). While the “figure of the stranger or that of the one who arrives from a point outside of demarcated social or communal boundaries” (141) is firmly anchored in the postcolonial tradition, “for the diasporic imaginary, on the other hand, the condition of strangerhood or estrangement is a necessary and inescapable dimension” (142). Quayson also goes on to argue that

as a thematic, strangerhood must properly be thought of as occupying a continuum between affiliation/attachment and disaffiliation/estrangement, with different points on that continuum helping to configure a text as either postcolonial or diasporic ... the condition of strangerhood is by no means the only defining characteristic of the diasporic imaginary. (142)

Yet, arguing that postcolonial literature is predominantly characterized by a “dynamic relationship between the implicit or explicit assertion of the epochality of a particular space (nation, community, society) as providing the dominant horizon for identity and identification,” Quayson adds that, “the oscillatory structure of strangerhood and its problematic relation to spatial epochality is one area that allows diasporic writing both to overlap and to be sharply distinguished from postcolonialism” (142). In line with this approach, the coupling of Yalann and Salah’s swinging between affiliation/attachment and disaffiliation/estrangement with 1950s France/Algeria and 1990s Italy/Tunisia’s spatial epochality advance the idea of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*’s diasporic configuration.

Quayson’s assertion that “the diasporic imaginary is encapsulated in a set of complex relationships between form, content, and affective economies” and that the elements of place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting are “central to the diasporic imaginary in literature” (148) is of particular interest for our discussion on the Maghrebi diasporic imaginary. In examining the diasporic imaginary, Quayson stresses the role played by the dialectical relation between the homeland and the place of sojourn, the close connection between displacement and nostalgia for a lost time and space, and he adds that “[g]enealogical accounting involves questions of ancestry, ethnicity, tradition, and culture and provides a distinguishing past to the person or community” (151). Quayson finds the “stories of the “how-we-got-here” variety” to be one of the defining characteristics of genealogical accounting, along with the production of a “nexus of affiliations,” the expression of a “quest motif,” and the introduction of “a form of ethical imperative that is incorporated into the recognition of the past” (151-152). While each of these features can be observed in *Les Boucs*

and *Immigrato*, they are approached by Chraïbi and Methnani through different perspectives and provide insight into the Maghrebi communities in France and Italy. In Quayson's view, it is the author's interest in "moments of epochality" and adherence to the "trope of the epochal, nation-state inflected or not," and the "nation-and-narration orientation," that helps understand "the differences between postcolonial and diasporic literature" (153). While Quayson considers that genealogical accounting is "constitutive" (148) of the diasporic imaginary, it is the configuration of elements of place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting that renders possible the positioning of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* on a spectrum that includes a range of texts that can be "asserted to be strongly diasporic, while others may be only noted as expressing the diasporic imaginary in an attenuated form" (148). Quayson reaches the conclusion that "taking account of the contributions of diasporas to world history is fundamental," and that literary elaborations on "integrity and discontinuity, attachment and disaffiliation may provide us handy windows for understanding the variegated world in which we live and how to live in it" (154). As such, the variations on the diasporic imaginary developed in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* can be recognized as valid contributions to the comprehension of the Maghrebi diaspora and the world beyond its boundaries.

Along with Quayson's elaboration on the diasporic imaginary, the theoretical frameworks at work in this dissertation are Linda Hutcheon's concepts of irony and parody. In *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* the representation of the migration experience through the issue of space plays a prominent role. Neighbourhoods, bars, hostels, and street corner are marked by tensions and terror. Yet, the depiction of such spaces in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* yields critical knowledge about the immigrant experience. And if the critical reception has underscored the seriousness of Chraïbi and Methnani's text, the severity with which these spaces are depicted does not necessarily mean that they cannot function as sites of resistance. In this regard, the deployment of aesthetic and stylistic elements such as irony and parody opens up a range of possibilities while it enables a heightened reading experience that has been largely overlooked by the critics. In *Irony's Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony*, Hutcheon writes:

With irony, there are ... dynamic and plural relations among the text or utterance (and its context), the so-called ironist, the interpreter, and the circumstances surrounding the discursive situation; it is these that mess up neat theories of irony that see the task of the interpreter simply as one of decoding or reconstructing some "real" meaning

(usually named as the “ironic” one) ... a meaning that is hidden, but deemed accessible, behind the stated one. (11)

In my analysis, I argue that in employing Linda Hutcheon’s concepts of irony and parody in relation to the juxtaposition of texts, contexts, and interpreters hidden and unsaid levels of meanings can be uncovered. Given the prominent role of socio-cultural circumstances in shaping the context, and their repercussions on the meaning and interpretation of the texts, the examination of the socio-cultural circumstances under which the literary enterprises of Chraïbi and Methnani were conducted, and to whom *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* were initially addressed, is particularly relevant.

Linda Hutcheon also offers a review of the functions of irony “from the most benign ... to the more contentious zones where irony is generally accepted as a strategy of provocation and polemic” (44). She adds, “As a response to the extensive literature ... that sees irony as a straightforward semantic inversion ... and thus as a static rhetorical tool to be used, ... irony is, instead, a communicative process” (56). Therefore, the examination of the different functions of irony in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* holds the potential of revealing the dynamism of the communicative strategies deployed by Chraïbi and Methnani. In Hutcheon’s view “irony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude” (35) and it is opportune to underline the role of irony in actively engaging the audience into deciphering the presence of ironic meanings in the texts.

Whereas the elements that determine irony are “its critical edge; its semantic complexity; the ‘discursive communities’ that ... make irony possible; the role of intention and attribution of irony; its contextual framing and markers”(4), parody is defined as “a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity ... an appreciation or even an understanding of parody obviously depends upon an acquaintance with the parodied text (2000, xii).” In line with this argument, the identification of parodic signals and the access to the parodied source depend solely on the interpreter. The correlation between parody and irony is made manifest when Hutcheon further adds that,

Parody, then, in its ironic ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well

as destructive. The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual "bouncing" ... between complicity and distance. (32)

This dissertation argues that the elements of irony and parody provide alternative ways of understanding the Maghrebi diaspora and the adjustment of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian immigrants to the social, political, economic and cultural framework of the French and Italian host society, and it challenges the dominant discourse that frames Maghrebi literature and cultures as homogeneous, marginal and inferior.

0.4.3 The Reception

The exploration of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s critical reception raises the question of literary evaluation. In contrast to the first and second chapter that focus on individual texts, the third chapter engages with the debate over the literary value of Maghrebi diasporic texts. Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins* (2001) is of particular relevance in unfolding the process by which value was, and still is, attributed to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*: "Exoticism describes a political as much as an aesthetic practice. But this politics is often concealed, hidden beneath layers of mystification" (14). Following this line of thought, the examination of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s literary evaluation aims to expose the specific regulatory practices in operation in the French and Italian context.

Thomas Beebee's notion of generic instability provides an opportunity to interrogate the critics and reviewers' insistence on classificatory processes that centre on genre as a predominant evaluative criterion. According to Beebee, genre is so intensely ideological that "the generic classification of a text determines its meaning(s) and exposes its ideology" (19). And the examination of generic designations in relation to Chraïbi and Methnani's texts attempts to show how generic oscillations and combinations can transform the meaning and value of the works under scrutiny in this thesis.

In this regard, I address the following research questions: How do levity and gravity relate to the migrant and diasporic experience in the two pioneering texts of the Maghrebi diaspora in France and Italy? A secondary question supplements my leading research question: what do Chraïbi and Methnani attempt to undertake in their works? Thirdly, how are the notions of race, gender and class negotiated in the two texts under scrutiny? I address these questions in the three chapters of this thesis.

Chapter one engages in the investigation of Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs* regarding the interplay between gravity and levity, and the concept of irony as put forth by Linda Hutcheon. The critical reception of the novel is examined through the scrutiny of a number of reviews and critiques performed by scholars inside and outside France. Based on the critics' responses to *Les Boucs*, ironic inferences and potential levels of signification are explored. In my attempt to suggest that instances of levity can be found in Chraïbi's text, I explore the way in which he contributes to the elaboration of a Maghrebi diasporic imaginary. I am challenging the generic classification of *Les Boucs*, and Chraïbi's talks and interviews also assist in providing a different understanding of the various layers of implied and unsaid meanings in the text. My argument is that the reading of Chraïbi's text as a *Künstlerroman*, a specific genre that "traces the embryonic growth of the artist from the moment when he exhibits artistic talents and interests to the point when he actually creates" (Seret 3), allows for a better understanding of Yalann's psychological, social and artistic voyage, and that the comic effect produced by the presence of irony enables a more layered and subtle depiction of Yalann's sombre journey. I also suggest that *Les Boucs* functions as a window into the Maghrebi diaspora in France, and that the interplay between gravity and irony serves as a site which produces a reflection on the economic, historical, political, and socio-cultural landscape of the Maghrebi diaspora in France.

Chapter two deals with the examination of Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato's *Immigrato* concerning the relation between gravity and levity, and the concept of parody as proposed by Linda Hutcheon. The critical reception inside and outside Italy as well as the elements of parody employed in *Immigrato* are investigated. In addition to Methnani and Fortunato's talks and interviews, and with the suggestion that parodic echoes pervade the text I question the critics' classificatory operations and discuss unexplored levels of meaning. My contention is that the reading of *Immigrato* in relation to the tradition of the Grand Tour allows for a better understanding of Salah's initiation journey, especially through the comic effect achieved by the occasional presence of parodic allusions in Methnani and Fortunato's dark rendering of Salah's descent into the underworld of Italian society. I also argue that *Immigrato* serves as a gateway to the Maghrebi diaspora in Italy, and that the intertwining of gravity and parody constitutes a relevant site for a commentary on the diasporic condition of the Maghrebis living in Italy.

Chapter three is devoted to the consideration of the connections between comparison and literary evaluation with a focus on the potential offered by a comparative study of diasporic texts. Through the examination of the mechanisms at work in the literary evaluation of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, I aim to highlight the importance of the reader's role in the evaluation and interpretation of the texts of the Maghrebi diaspora. As I elaborate on a non-hierarchical comparative reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, I claim that cosmopolitan comparison and collage allow for the exploration of the uniqueness of the two texts. And in accordance with the recent shifts in the field of diaspora studies that call into question the methods of assessment of diasporic cultural production, I suggest that the response to the ongoing exoticising strategies of diasporic text lies in transhistorical and transgeographical readings. I also put forward the argument that the presence of irony and parody adds to the generic instability of diasporic texts and that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* call the reader into playing an active role in the construction of meaning.

Chapter One - Generic Frames, Mental Health and Religious Imagery: The Diaspora in Chraïbi's *Les Boucs*

Albert Memmi coined the label “Génération de 52” to designate North African writers who played a major role in the coming of age of Maghrebi literature in French. He maintains that, “For the first time, North Africa can be seen to take itself on. Accepted, assumed, or discussed, she ceases to be a simple décor or a geographic accident. These new authors are at grips with their country as with the essential of themselves”¹¹ (1965, 14). These were native North African writers who began publishing in the early 1950s, shortly before or at the time of the outbreak of the Algerian revolution (1954-62), and the independence of Morocco and Tunisia (1956). As an instrument of cultural and political subversion, this literature, written in the language of the colonizer, was used to express the new identity of emergent nations and ignited a literary revolution that preceded a political one (Marx-Scouras 534). Writers of the Generation of 52 include Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Mohamed Dib, and Yacine Kateb from Algeria; Albert Memmi from Tunisia; and Ahmed Sefrioui and Driss Chraïbi from Morocco.

Because of the large place it has given to descriptions of locale, daily activities, costumes and folklore, the early stage of modern Maghrebi francophone literature has been described as “ethnographic or documentary.”¹² This literature later evolved into a “literature of refusal and contestation,” in which the focus shifted from a disclosure of the suffering endured by the indigenous populations of the Maghreb under French rule, to a condemnation of “the abuses from both internal and external sources” (Monego 21). While these writers managed to catch the attention of the European reader by denouncing the injustices of the French ruling over the Maghreb, they also exposed the shortcomings of their native societies and were therefore accused of serving the interests of the colonial power. However, it is the ability to use two of the major tools of the colonial domination that came to be celebrated as unprecedented achievements: namely, the adoption of the French language for literary purposes and the consequent development of the novel as a literary genre in the Maghreb. As

¹¹ “[P]our la première fois, l’Afrique du Nord se voit enfin assumée. Acceptée, revendiquée ou discutée, elle cesse d’être un simple décor ou un accident géographique. Ces nouveaux auteurs sont aux prises avec leur pays comme avec l’essentiel d’eux-mêmes” (Memmi 1965, 14).

¹² In *Le Roman Maghrébin*, Khatibi indicates that “This type of novel corresponds politically to the period of the expansion of imperialism, and scientifically to the development of the social sciences, in particular ethnology as a study of the cultures of the colonized world and archaic societies” (28). Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

former students of the French colonial school system, these writers comprised an elite group who felt isolated from the majority of their fellow-countrymen, therefore questions of identity, ambivalence and hybridity pervade the early autobiographical texts. The first literary representations of African immigration to France¹³ were published during the colonial period in the form of novels that staged migrant labourers or autobiographies of intellectuals who were in France to visit the country or study (Albert 27).

Chraïbi's *Les Boucs*, then, can be considered a part of the African tradition of the Francophone novel that delivers a different perspective on the issues faced by a Maghrebi ethnic group. In that regard, Christiane Albert analyses the case of contemporary Francophone writers from the Caribbean, Africa and the Maghreb publishing during the colonial period and after the independence. She acknowledges that before the independence African writers developed above all the theme of integration by focusing on the experience of foreign students in the French higher education system. However, another series of novels published in the same period also deal with experiences of exile and migration. At that time, French industry needed a large labour force and it is in the Maghrebi Francophone literature that the discussions on exile, migration for economic reasons and of unknown duration take place. The material and psychological difficulties encountered by the labour migrants become apparent in these narratives, but it is their "economic exploitation" that is given particular prominence (Albert 33).

Born in El Jadida (formerly Mazagan) on 15 July 1926 to an upper-middle-class family, Driss Chraïbi entered a French school when he was ten and pursued secondary education at the Lycée Lyautey in Casablanca where he began to compose poetry. In 1945 he left Morocco for Paris to study chemistry, and obtained a diploma in chemical engineering in 1950. He also held a variety of jobs: journalist, photographer, labourer, teacher and travelled throughout Western Europe. For thirty years he worked as a writer and producer for the O.R.T.F, the French national radio and television broadcasting system (Chraïbi 2001, 84).

With respect to Chraïbi's irony, I investigate the extent to which his novel can be read from multiple perspectives by scholars from France and the Maghreb. By considering the opinion of scholars inside and outside of France on Chraïbi's novel, I examine the reception

¹³ Among the first literary representations of African migration to France, Christiane Albert mentions Bernard Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris* (1959), Gérard Aké Loba's *Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir* (1960), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), Ousmane Socé Diop's *Mirages de Paris* (1964), and Camara Laye's *Dramous* (1966).

of *Les Boucs* since its publication in the aftermath of World War II, and I explore the multiple levels of meaning that a reading of irony in *Les Boucs* uncovers. Therefore, my analysis pays particular attention to the comprehension of the texts with respect to ironic inferences. For this purpose, I focus on “the interaction of text, context, and interpreter” (Hutcheon 1995, 56). I also include the interviews in which Driss Chraïbi discusses his novel and unveils part of the implicit or unsaid meanings. The methodological and theoretical frame of my study draws on the juxtaposition of Linda Hutcheon’s work on irony, with a range of French and Maghrebi sources that include papers, articles, dissertations, essays and interviews that relate to my research.

Two tasks are undertaken in this section: first, the chapter offers a comparison of the multiple responses provided by the French and Maghrebi readers of *Les Boucs*, and it is the various readers’ understandings of irony in Chraïbi’s text that this approach aims to contrast. Second, by juxtaposing the critics’ reading with mine, this method opens the way to a varied set of interpretations or ironic inferences in Chraïbi’s text.

Abdelkébir Khatibi looks at acculturation in the novels produced by Maghrebi writers and argues that the Francophone Maghrebi authors favour autobiographical writings to evaluate the issue of alienation and uprootedness. In his view the Maghrebi novel of a colonized writer “amazes by its seriousness and its solemn tone.”¹⁴ The same is true of Chraïbi as *Les Boucs* stirs a debate about issues relating to the migrants’ condition of alienation, and their feeling of alienation as they resettle in the host country. The fact that an Algerian migrant occupies the central role in the novel, and that most of the story is narrated through his perspective is highly significant. Chraïbi’s *Les Boucs* does not align itself with what Khatibi calls “ethnographic novel,”¹⁵ which depicts Maghrebi subjects as objects of oppression in their native land as can be found in Sefrioui, Feraoun, Mammeri and the early novels of Mohammed Dib. Using a strategy that blends irony and a broad range of meanings, Chraïbi tells of the North African migrant’s position not only within the territory of France or the Maghreb, but also within the space of the Maghrebi diaspora. Therefore, one may argue that the literary texts of the Maghrebi Francophone literature in general, and *Les Boucs* in particular, provide the post-World War II Maghrebi migrant with the opportunity to tackle the issue of representation and self-definition.

¹⁴ “[É]tonne par son sérieux et par son ton solennel” (82).

¹⁵ “[R]oman ethnographique” (27).

Maghrebi and French scholars have unanimously used notions such as protest against and hatred towards Moroccan society in their analyses of *Le Passé simple*, but their use of the critical notion of violence and revolt has led to the placing of *Les Boucs* in what Jean Déjeux calls the “literature of refusal and protest.”¹⁶ In the same vein, Memmi argues, “Far from being surprised at the revolts of colonized peoples, we should be, on the contrary, surprised that they are not more frequent and more violent” (2003, 171). Memmi warns that “the colonized fights in the name of the very values of the colonizer, uses his techniques of thought and his methods of combat. It must be added that this is the only action that the colonizer understands” (173).

In *La littérature maghrébine de langue française*, Jacqueline Arnaud closely examines the case of the Francophone writers of the Maghreb and investigates the problem raised by their use of the French language. By presenting various writers’ personal attitudes toward the choice of French or Arabic as the medium of expression, Arnaud investigates how French language has been adapted to suit the writers’ needs, how it has been treated, and even deformed or reshaped. French language as a vehicle of literary expression has been perceived as a form of exile by those who have experienced the use of French as a demonstration of colonial domination. Hence, the adoption of French by Maghrebi writers has been regarded as an enriching experience with the potential to bring modernity and advancement, while being simultaneously perceived as an “ignominious mark of enslavement imposed by a superpower” (Monego 35).

The autobiographical dimension of *Les Boucs* has been the source of debate and Chraïbi himself has confirmed that the novel originates from his personal observations and lived experiences accumulated while living in France. It is then worth noting the ways in which Chraïbi presents the details of Yalaan Waldik’s odyssey that includes a variety of geographical and historical settings. If Chraïbi has been condemned for his lack of criticism towards the French protectorate over Morocco (Kadra-Hadjadji 331), *Les Boucs* shows a clear-cut distinction between Yalaan Waldik’s aspirations prior to departure and his reaction to the (mis)treatment of Maghrebi migrants after their arrival, thereby revealing the extent of racism in mid-twentieth century France. The heated political context¹⁷ in which the various

¹⁶ “[L]ittérature de refus et de contestation” (1973, 38).

¹⁷ *Les Boucs* follows Yalaan’s itinerary, which starts in 1937-1938 and ends during the Spring of 1954. It was not until 1954 that negotiations over the independence of Morocco and Tunisia were undertaken; and the Algerian war of independence started in November 1954.

scenes are set up is particularly enlightening.¹⁸ In *Les Boucs*, the chapter entitled “Imprimatur” looks at the scene of eighteen-year-old Yalaan’s arrival from Algeria during the winter 1945-1946: “He still had no doubts. He was eighteen years old, and only his glands were pubescent. All around him he heard mocking laughter, sounds of salivation and of sniffing. His throat began to choke from the odor of humid dirty underwear” (71).¹⁹ Two fellow-countrymen, the boss and the foreman, immediately plunder Yalaan’s belongings and money. And after receiving his unemployment card²⁰ from the hands of the French commissioner Dupont, Yalaan’s disillusion is mentioned explicitly: “Then he saw Waldik’s eyes. They had suddenly gone dead, as if anesthetized” (76).²¹

In the third part of the chapter “Imprimatur” a brief account of Yalaan’s return to Algeria is given, and how he spent those two “lost” months,” from September to November 1953, paying particular attention to his father’s deteriorating health:

he had seen his father, the beggar on the road. His father’s face. Which he always knew was wrinkled. But not quite to such a degree. There are wrinkles which are a kind of penalty. Others which explain nothing at all, simply wrinkles and nothing more. His father’s were from smallpox. Thin deep lines that cut into the face with such cruelty that he wondered when he had had smallpox. And what terrible kind of smallpox. (81)²²

In the same chapter, the reader is reminded of France’s power of attraction as a dream destination for Maghrebi youth. The sharp contrast Chraïbi creates is provocative, in the

¹⁸ In *Colonial Migrants and Racism. Algerians in France, 1900-62*, Neil MacMaster writes: “On the outbreak of the Algerian War in November 1954 migration to France had already existed for half a century. The history of this early phase of labour and military recruitment to serve the needs of the metropolitan economy and armed forces provides an insight into the genesis and growth of racism, the processes through which European society began to categorise non-European migrants as inherently inferior outsiders. This early colonial development, which was already under way in 1910-1920, established deep-rooted patterns of stereotyping, marginalisation and discrimination that have continued to leave a deep imprint on French society” (2).

¹⁹ “Il n’avait pas encore de doute. Il avait dix-huit ans et seules ses glandes étaient pubères. Tout autour de lui s’agitaient des ricanements, des bruits de salivation et des reniflements. Une odeur de caleçons sales surchauffés le prenait à la gorge” (103). All quotes are taken from the English translation of *Les Boucs* by Hugh A. Harter titled *The Butts*.

²⁰ According to Neil Macmaster: “During the Depression the normal pattern of circulation was arrested, fewer men departed from Algeria, while of those already in France, some returned while many – even the unemployed – sat tight waiting for conditions to improve” (178) ... “Six months’ residence in France gave Algerians the right to unemployment benefit, which was preferable to the terrible poverty facing men who returned home” (271).

²¹ “Puis il vit les yeux de Waldik, soudain morts, comme anesthésiés” (111).

²² “[I]l avait vu son père le mendiant des routes. Le visage de son père. Qu’il avait toujours su ride, certes. Mais non à ce point. Il y a des rides qui sont des sanctions. D’autres qui n’expriment rien du tout, des rides, de simples rides. Celles de son père étaient de la vérole” (118).

sense that both the French and the Maghrebi reading publics are prompted to observe the degree of disparity between the migrants' aspirations, the worrisome health conditions in the Maghreb and the dire living conditions in France between 1937 and 1954. In addition, the romance between Yalaan and Simone which starts in 1949 turns gradually into a sado-masochistic relationship. The disintegration of the sentimental attachment between the two, their separation and the appearance of Isabelle raise question marks over the life saving role of the French woman in her attempt to rescue the North African young man.

The text astutely displays Yalaan's irony about the political context of decolonization and the Algerian war by raising the question of France's (in)hospitality:

Oh, says the soul of the little Berber boy to me, my father, kiss my father's hand. You will find him sitting on a rock at the turn in the road. He has no land anymore, no arm anymore, no faith to keep him going. Tell him I sent him a money order yesterday for a thousand francs. Tell him I'm just fine and that France is the land of plenty. (64)²³

Yalaan's remarks indicate that the North African migrants are well aware of their families' predicament, and that a relationship is maintained with the homeland but also that migrants engage in the fabrication of narratives about France as a hospitable and prosperous nation. In other words, the readers are led to take into consideration Yalaan's use of irony in denouncing the migrant condition in post-World War II France. Yet, the text does not provide the reader with a detailed socio-political landscape. However, several scenes provide a description of the living conditions of the North Africans and in the second chapter of part one titled "Copyright," the French readership comes to grasp the unwelcoming atmosphere, fraught with hostility and racial bias towards the presence of labourers when Chraïbi writes:

They walked Indian file through the foggy morning. Waves of laughter welcomed them, instinctive, quickly smothered – and afterwards you could wonder how anyone could have laughed, as if laughter had an instinctive value. They had a heavy step, their arms just hung at their sides, and their faces were marked with fear. The people who stopped to watch them go by blinked their eyes in a moment of intense and sudden disbelief in which the conventional beginnings and ends of man were rapidly

²³ "Oh ! me dit l'âme du petit Berbère, mon père, baise la main de mon père, tu le trouveras assis sur une pierre au détour du chemin, il n'a plus de terre, plus de bras, plus de foi, pour continuer de subsister de lui-même, dis-lui que je lui ai envoyé hier un mandat de mille francs et que je me porte bien et que la France est un pays de cocagne" (95).

revised, and the classifications of sovereign and metaphysics alike were brought to naught, reshuffled like a house of cards shaken to the very foundation and following through systematically. Etymologies, the sense and use of words such as human dignity, pity, Christ, democracy, love... They opened their eyes: the failure of civilization, if not humanity itself, that they had seen file by dressed in rags – or at the very least, of rags stuffed with human nothingness. (19)²⁴

As one can notice from this excerpt, the text performs several functions simultaneously: first, the reader is notified of the antagonism between the North African labour-workers and an undefined group of watchers whose reaction is imbued with fear. Second, the text is narrated through the prism of an external narrator who reports the scene, yet pairs the fear and incredulity produced by the strangeness of the migrants' mechanical and soulless appearance with the instinctive and repressed laughter of the watchers. The narrator tells of the labourers' spiritless movement while directing the attention of the reader to yet another noteworthy matter: the text uses the scene of the encounter between the migrants and the incredulous French population to complicate the dominant discourse on French post-war hospitality. The narrator suggests ironically that, in spite of the bewilderment produced upon the apparition of the infrahuman migrants, the watchers' momentary self-questioning will only lead to a rebuilding of the same thought system, and consequently, it will leave very limited hope for a different approach towards the issue raised by the presence of the migrant labourers.

It is laughter which characterizes the very first reaction of those observing the walk of the fearful labourers. Therefore, by raising the question of the value of laughter, the narrator endeavours to direct the attention also on the host. For this reason, the narrator's focus on the host's attitude towards the migrants can be interpreted as an attempt to undermine the sense of superiority that the watchers have over the labourers. It is noteworthy to mention that the staging of the migrant labourers' walk also serves to anticipate further considerations on the inclusive and exclusive conduct of both hosts and guests. In this scene, deprived of verbal

²⁴ “Ils marchaient à la file indienne dans le matin brumeux. Des trilles de rires les accueillaient, instinctifs, vite étouffés – et l'on se demandait ensuite comment on avait pu rire, si même ce rire avait une valeur d'instinct. Ils avaient le pas pesant, les bras ballants et la face effarée. Ceux qui s'arrêtaient pour les voir passer fermaient brusquement les yeux, en une minute de doute intense et subit, où l'origine et la fin conventionnelles de l'homme étaient vélocement révisées, les classifications des règnes et les métaphysiques mises à bas et échafaudées de nouveau comme un château de cartes sur leurs mêmes fondements et suivant la même systématique ; l'étymologie, le sens et l'utilité des mots tels que dignité humaine, pitié, Christ, démocratie, amour... ils ouvraient les yeux : la faillite de la civilisation, sinon de l'humanité, qu'ils avaient vu défiler vêtue de fripes, -ou, à tout le moins, des fripes emplies de néant” (24-25).

exchange between the two populations, the examination of the function of laughter, a joyless one, can be understood as an attempt to examine the role of humour in relation to issues of (in)hospitality, segregation and racism.

In *Les Boucs*, several scenes allude to the poor health conditions of Fabrice, the son of Yalaan and Simone. While the scene of the walk is pervaded with sombreness, the child's meningitis and later hospital admission enhance the gravity of the narrative. At the end of the third chapter of *Imprimatur*, Simone confesses on cheating to Yalaan, and their verbal exchange is interestingly interspersed with the presence of laughter. At the end of her confession, Simone directs her thoughts towards the lugubrious conditions of her son's hospitalization. However, it is with laughter that Yalaan responds to the tears that accompany Simone's confession. The way Chraïbi ends this chapter with the intertwining of gravity and laughter may aim at achieving several goals: first, considering that moroseness pervades the preceding and following chapters, the reader is drawn into questioning the nature of Yalaan's laughter in such a gloomy scene. Second, the reader may realize that the presence of a dissonant and multifarious laughter can also be identified elsewhere throughout *Les Boucs*. This is to highlight the fact that the text tries to engage the reader in a reflection on the interlacing of tragic solemnity and laughter.

Yalaan has the hope of becoming a writer and Mac O'Mac, a supposedly famous liberal French novelist is introduced in the storyline in the third chapter of the part titled "Copyright." In fact, Yalaan wishes to publish his novel "*Les Boucs*" (*The Butts* in Harter's translation) that tells of the living conditions of the 300,000 North Africans living in France, and after Simone brings Mac O'Mac home the ensuing conversation sheds light on the distinctive features of the French novelist. This chapter does not only give details about the peculiarity of Yalaan's mental state, or Simone's ambiguous obsequiousness towards Mac O'Mac; it serves to signal the power dynamic between the Algerian writer and the French intellectual. The reader is informed that Simone has brought the manuscript of Yalaan's book to Mac but the latter fails to convince that he has actually read it; and their incongruous conversation underscores Mac's snobby attitude, disdain and nonchalance, which turns Yalaan into a guest in his own house. Yet, Yalaan's project to write a novel that centres on his fellow-countrymen attests to his attachment to the values of liberty, equality and fraternity treasured and promoted by the French intellectual spheres; however, Chraïbi's irony can be sensed in Yalaan's reaction to the pompous, patronizing and obscure language used by Mac

during their conversation: “I was trying to translate into Arabic, as the Butts would do. Even translated into the dialect of Algeria’s Kabyle, such an explanation of their miserable existence would have overwhelmed them. They might have seen Mac O’Mac as a simple crustacean, a crab dressed up in tweed” (26).²⁵ The text continues to oppose the false promises of the French civilizing mission and the deceptive nature of assimilation policy by looking at the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of the Western intellectual, as when Yalaan imitates Mac’s attempt to convince Simone of the dangers of remaining in a degenerating relationship with Yalaan:

If I understand things, the house in Villejuif belongs to you. When you met your lover, he was just out of prison, and he used up all your savings. He gave you promises in exchange. And a gritting of teeth, as bitter as the cat’s meowing. And great resolutions that, according to me, are capable of attaining the stars. But, my dear, our mission is to civilize, and I cannot allow an Arab to barbarize a representative of the French people. (49)²⁶

This paragraph constitutes a pivotal point in the narrative with respect to the role of the Western intellectual, and the duplicity of his stance regarding the relationship between France and the Arabs. As such, this scene exemplifies Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry. In “Of Mimicry and Man. The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” Bhabha explains that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. In this way the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; and in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (2004, 122). Accordingly, Yalaan’s imitation of Mac functions as an inversion in a role-play that questions the social hierarchy and destabilizes Mac’s assertion of Western supremacy over North African migrant populations and his implicit discarding of any sense of responsibility in the dismal state of affairs in which the Maghrebi labourers are being kept. The inversion of the roles leads to the questioning of Western intellectuals’ claims for the emancipation of oppressed populations. One can argue that the text ironically

²⁵ “J’essayais de traduire comme l’auraient fait les Boucs. Même traduit en kabyle ou en vérités simples, cet exposé de leurs misères les eût noyés. Et peut-être eussent-ils jugé Mac O’Mac un simple crabe vêtu de tweed” (35).

²⁶ “Si je comprends bien, le pavillon de Villejuif est à vous. Quand vous avez connu votre concubin, il sortait de prison – et il a mangé vos économies. Ce qu’il vous a donné en échange, ce sont des mots. Et des grincements de dents, aussi aigus que des miaulements de chat. Et de grandes résolutions capables, d’après lui, d’atteindre Beltégeuse. Mais, ma petite, c’est à nous de civiliser et je ne permettrai pas à un Arabe de barbariser une représentante du peuple français” (70-71).

sets out to mock Mac's power by putting in the mouth of the migrant apprentice intellectual the words of the Western intellectual, and by doing so the mockery performed by Yalaan challenges Mac's feeling of superiority. Bhabha adds, "What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (125). Therefore, Yalaan's imitation shows that he is able to employ a method of subversion against Mac O'Mac's narcissistic belief in a French civilizational superiority over Arab populations. Meanwhile, the excerpt also shows that the question of race in the relationship between Yalaan and Simone is the source of agitation and unrest, and their arguments generate scenes in which theatricality intersects with mental disorders. In that respect, Yalaan's mockery indicates that the interracial relationship remains under the scrutiny of the Western intellectual, and that it is part of the civilizing mission to protect the French woman from Yalaan's plan to dehumanize her. Through the switching of the roles and Yalaan's self-lowering to a few animalistic features, this scene touches on the destabilizing potential of mimicry but also on the subversive capacity of Yalaan's mockery.

After writing a social critique of Morocco in *Le Passé simple*, Chraïbi turns to the critique of the West with *Les Boucs*, and in an attempt to expose the hypocrisy and fallacies of Western liberal ideals, he devises a method which combines imitation and mockery with a dislocated language, and presents a non-linear narrative with numerous analepses and prolepses. This technique unsettles the gravity of the narrative and allows for the amusement of the readers when Chraïbi experiments with caricatures and, at the same time, examines a profusion of issues as relevant today as they were over half-a-century ago. Therefore, one may speculate that the plot of *Les Boucs* benefits from a parodic style of writing. That is, there are scenes where imitation, mimicry and mockery serve a satirical purpose and trigger comic pleasure. Although Chraïbi's rendering of the North Africans' plight is marked by severity, one may contend that *Les Boucs* is consistent with parody, and that it may expand it, for some readers, to the whole of the book. Freud writes: "Caricature, as is well known, brings about degradation by emphasizing in the general impression given by the exalted object a single trait which is comic in itself but was bound to be overlooked so long as it was only perceivable in the general picture. By isolating this, a comic effect can be attained which extends in our memory over the whole object" (201). The portraits of the main characters and any information about their physical descriptions are scattered throughout the text, and these fragmented portrayals point to Chraïbi's tendency to isolate the single traits for his characters.

The disjointed narrative allows the author to continuously alternate between Yalaan, Rauss, Simone, Mac O'Mac and the North Africans, referred to as "Les Boucs" [the Butts], whose features are at times distorted and exaggerated. As such, Chraïbi's decision to deliberately perform an overloading of certain characteristics indicates the novelist's attachment to caricature as a revealing tool with ridiculing and comic potential.

Read in French both in France and the Maghreb, Chraïbi's novel places Yalaan, Rauss and the Algerian labourers at the heart of the story, and mocks France's humanistic pretence, its institutions and deceitful intellectual elite. Yalaan's position as the narrator of the events in the first chapter and the subsequent third person narration indicates the "de-crystallization" of the main character, and in this instance, the failure of acculturation. More importantly, by coupling parody with gravity, Chraïbi is able to conduct an interesting assemblage: he pairs the attention to the gravity of the North Africans' circumstances with an openness to levity, and as such his criticism produces a comic effect. Both French and Maghrebi audiences are led to assess their attitude towards immigration, when they are also amused by a series of incongruous situations.

While Chraïbi's exaggerations and irony can be understood as a useful device for bringing about significant socio-political matters and the violence resulting from the encounter between two cultures, one may nevertheless pay attention to the novel's sarcastic undertones and gain perspective by reading beyond gravity. On the one hand, the author employs irony in order to expose the strong political, social, and cultural tensions between French natives and North African populations, while, on the other, irony attempts to question the widespread stereotypes that represent the Maghrebis in general, and the North African labourers in particular, as primitive and oppressed beings. Written before the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian Independences *Les Boucs* unveils the racial discrimination exercised against Maghrebis over the 1930s to 1950s period, and one could argue that Chraïbi invites the Francophone audiences to evaluate and denounce the dominant conducts towards immigrants.

1.1 The Critical Reception of *Les Boucs*

1.1.1 The Critical Reception of *Les Boucs* in France

André Rousseaux's reading of *Les Boucs* provides a series of considerations on the distinctiveness of Chraïbi's novel. He writes,

Here is a book which suffocates us too violently so as to allow one to venture into applying the artificial language, used too often in the formulation of literary judgments. There is a page where the author makes such a satire of these judgments, that the technicians of literature are side-lined. But it would also be detrimental to speak only of testimony – I do not say document, it would be iniquitous – when talking about a novel shaped by the singular power of creative writing. (2)²⁷

As a literary critic writing for *Le Figaro littéraire*, Rousseaux observes the characters in the novel and affirms, “The tragedy of the “Butts” is not only about the frustrated hopes they had when they embarked for France. It is about falling, between two worlds, in a void where the language they hear is no longer a bearer of human life” (2).²⁸ Hence, Rousseaux concentrates on the author of the novel and maintains that,

On the contrary, his whole book cries out that the intellectual problems of a westernized Oriental are drowned here in a poignant human tragedy. It is about a man who participates, with all his thinking and loving nature, in two worlds, that of Muslim Africa and that of the French genius. Then, he strives madly to dismiss as an intolerable nightmare the politico-social errors which would throw into a bloody enmity these worlds, which he believes to be fraternal. (2)²⁹

Scholars such as Rousseaux recognize the tragic dimension of Chraïbi’s *Les Boucs*. What’s more, Rousseaux takes an interest in Chraïbi’s authorial role and his transcontinental involvement. The audiences who have thus far learned about the fraught relationship between France and the Maghreb through an antagonistic lens are now encouraged to understand what Maghrebi migration to France looks like from the point of view of a Maghrebi intellectual who imagines a cordial Franco-Maghrebi relation. In fact, Chraïbi’s work has managed to single out the role of the French society in creating the conditions for the exclusion of

²⁷ “Voici un livre qui nous prend trop violemment à la gorge, pour qu’on se risque à lui appliquer le langage factice qui sert trop souvent à formuler les jugements littéraires. Il y a une page où l’auteur fait une telle satire de ces jugements-là, que les techniciens de la littérature sont mis hors-jeu. Mais ce serait un autre tort que de parler seulement de témoignage – je ne dis pas document, ce serait inique – au sujet d’un roman que met en œuvre une création littéraire d’une singulière puissance” (2).

²⁸ “Le drame des « Boucs, » ce n’est pas seulement d’être frustrés des espoirs qu’ils avaient quand ils se sont embarqués pour la France. C’est d’être tombés, entre deux mondes, dans un néant où le langage qu’ils entendent n’est plus générateur de vie humaine” (2).

²⁹ “Tout son livre au contraire nous crie que les problèmes intellectuels d’un Oriental occidentalisé sont ici noyés dans une poignante tragédie humaine. Il s’agit d’un homme qui, de toute sa nature pensante et aimante, participe à deux mondes, celui de l’Afrique musulmane et celui du génie français. Alors, il tend éperdument à écarter comme un cauchemar intolérable les erreurs politico-sociales qui jetteraient dans une inimitié sanglante ces mondes qu’il croit fraternels” (2).

migrant populations. Thus, when a French audience realizes that French people, despite their “genius,” still treat the North Africans as subhuman, parked in the shantytowns of the greater Paris, they will think of French people as inhospitable, barbaric, and inhumane. Rousseaux has advanced his argument without having mentioned the levels of humour in the text; instead, he has focused on the Westernized Oriental author’s rendering of the migrant tragic conditions.

What Chraïbi has done in the text is associated to the oppositional function of irony which “contests dominant habits of mind and expression” (Hutcheon 1995, 49). Meanwhile, one can see that Chraïbi presents elements of parody and caricature in his depiction of Maghrebi and French characters by insisting on certain physical and moral traits, as is the case with Yalaan Waldik and Mac O’Mac. It can also be argued that Chraïbi’s usage of irony, because it targets both the North African and French characters in the text, aims to establish an egalitarian tension while it also signals “certain judgemental attitudes” of the author (Hutcheon 36).

Also published in October 1955, Lucien Guissard’s article on *Les Boucs* pays attention to Chraïbi’s text, “Driss Chraïbi throws in our faces a prose burning like lava, conveying anger, resentment, invective. This prose has, at times, sounds of rumbling poems; it is dazzling like glowing embers, but in other places it is pompous, uncertain, clogged with dregs” (3).³⁰ The literary critic continues his review, including comments on Chraïbi’s narrative technique. He writes: “And I would not swear that Driss Chraïbi is quite experienced in the narrative technique(s) of a Faulkner or Dos Passos” (3).³¹ Guissard’s unfavourable assessment of *Les Boucs* seems thereby to reduce Chraïbi’s unsuccessful novel to a failed imitation of two major American writers of the early 20th century. He asserts, “It is necessary to have two attempts in order to discern the logic of the narrative: the author will forgive Europeans. He will forgive them, but he will understand at the same time that his book may discourage some readers he wants to reach and who need, in fact, this blow to the stomach” (3).³² It is interesting to note that Guissard simultaneously warns the (European)

³⁰ “Driss Chraïbi nous lance au visage une prose brûlante comme une lave, véhiculant la colère, le ressentiment, l’invective. Cette prose a par endroits des sonorités de poèmes grondants ; elle brille de trouvailles comme de braises vives, mais à d’autres endroits elle est ampoulée, incertaine, encombrée de scories” (3).

³¹ “Et je ne jurerais pas que Driss Chraïbi soit tout à fait expérimenté dans la technique romanesque d’un Faulkner ou d’un Dos Passos” (3).

³² “Il faut s’y reprendre à deux fois pour discerner la logique du récit : l’auteur pardonnera à des Européens. Il leur pardonnera mais il comprendra du même coup que son livre puisse rebuter certains lecteurs qu’il veut atteindre et qui ont besoin, en effet, de ce coup au ventre” (3).

reader of the sustained effort implied in trying to make sense of *Les Boucs* while he recognizes the imperative of such literary undertaking, and here too it is not on the aesthetic values of Chraïbi's text that the critic puts the focus, but on the urgency of the North Africans' situation.

The distinctive feature of Guissard's approach is that, perhaps in reason of his position as a journalist, literary critic, and priest, he also considers *Les Boucs* from a religious standpoint. Published in the daily newspaper *La Croix*, which echoes the Roman Catholic Church's positions, Lucien Guissard's review asserts that the Christian perspective that Chraïbi claims to have given to his novel "remains too vague for those who did not know it beforehand" (3).³³ In his concluding paragraph the critic writes, "With indignation Driss Chraïbi expresses the distress of a world that vegetates on our doorstep; he gets the voice of those who don't have a voice across once again ... And don't we all need to be troubled in our sleep?" (3).³⁴ The mentioning of the doorstep³⁵ is a useful reminder of the peripheral and liminal space inhabited by the migrants, and it highlights the importance given in the novel to the recurring trope of the door.³⁶

The critic also raises the issue of the migrants' inability to gain a voice and agency in the contact-zone of the nightmarish Parisian periphery, but does not further problematize the role of the writer in articulating this condition of voicelessness. Guissard's concluding remarks dwell upon the necessary awakening produced by the novel which can help the privileged French audience step out of a reproachable lethargic state of detachment and indifference towards Yalaan and his fellow countrymen.

In another article from *Le Figaro*, the French novelist Jean Prasteau believes that "*The Butts* is not a document. And not even a report. Yet the evocation of the misery, the living conditions, and the mentality of the seventeen [sic] dirty Arabs, its heroes, is the fruit of an experience" (15).³⁷ As to Chraïbi's depiction of the North Africans, Prasteau maintains that,

³³ "[R]este trop vague pour ceux qui ne la connaissent pas au préalable" (3).

³⁴ "Driss Chraïbi clame la détresse d'un monde qui végète sur notre seuil ; il fait entendre une fois de plus la voix de ceux qui n'ont pas de voix... Et n'avons-nous pas tous besoin d'être troublés dans notre sommeil ?" (3).

³⁵ According to Arnold van Gennep, "[t]he door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (1960, 20).

³⁶ The particular relevance of Guissard's mentioning of the doorstep is even more pronounced when put in relation with Bakhtin's reflection on the threshold: "On the threshold and on the square the only time possible is *crisis time*, in which a *moment* is equal to years, decades, even to a "billion years" (1984, 169-170).

³⁷ "Les Boucs, ce n'est pas un document. Et même pas un reportage. Pourtant l'évocation de la misère, des conditions de vie, de la mentalité des dix-sept bicots, ses héros, est le fruit d'une expérience" (15).

Three hundred thousand North Africans live in France. Many work; send money orders to the *douar*³⁸. But a large number is unemployed, starving. There are *medinas*³⁹ around Paris where misery is horrible. This disenchanted multitude biting off more than one can chew has found its novelist. It's Driss Chraïbi, a thirty year-old Moroccan. For them, with them, he has written a pathetic book of such quality that he has suffocated critics: *The Butts*. (15)⁴⁰

Here again, Prasteau's critique fails to mention Chraïbi's use of humor and irony, and as such, it tends to focalize mainly on the grave living conditions of the Maghrebi migrants. Prasteau seems to have been disoriented as to what Chraïbi is trying to deliver: Prasteau's example of Chraïbi's insistence on gravity is derived from an excerpt in the fifth chapter of the second part "Imprimatur," in which the narrator brings up Yalaan's winter stay with the Butts in 1953-1954. The episode of Yalaan's stay with the Butts which concludes the second chapter, revolves around the particularly harsh living conditions of the Maghrebi migrants, their isolation and hunger. It is worth mentioning that the description of the daily routine of the Maghrebi migrants in this episode also serves to expose the degrading conditions to which North African migrants have been subjected, and their peculiarly vulnerable position with regards to issues of time and space. As the above-mentioned chapter reports:

The days did not go by. There was no succession of days and nights. There were only simple temporal sequences like the snapping of a twig or the killing of a louse. Noise grew in intensity but had no meaning, led to nothing precise or determined. One group of Arabs arrived and another left. They had no place in time or space, no shadow and, it would almost seem, no material substance. *Projection in the past*, thought Waldik, *and then even this past was projected toward a misty antiquity, peopled with shadows and echoes*. (100)⁴¹

³⁸ An Arabian village consisting typically of a group of tents or huts that encircle an open space (Merriam-Webster) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/douar>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

³⁹ The non-European part of a northern African city (Merriam-Webster) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medina>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

⁴⁰ "Trois cent mille Nord-Africains vivent en France. Beaucoup travaillent, envoient des mandats au douar. Mais un grand nombre chôme, crève de faim. Il y a des médinas autour de Paris où la misère est horrible. Cette multitude désenchantée aux yeux plus gros que le ventre a trouvé son romancier. C'est Driss Chraïbi, un Marocain de trente ans. Pour eux, avec eux, il a écrit un ouvrage pathétique et d'une qualité telle qu'il a suffoqué les critiques : *Les Boucs*" (15).

⁴¹ "La journée ne s'écoulait pas. Il n'y avait pas même de successions de jours, de nuit. De simples séquences temporelles comme le fait de casser une ramille ou de tuer un pou. Le bruit prenait alors de l'intensité mais n'avait aucun sens, ne préluait à rien de précis ni de déterminé. Un groupe d'Arabes sortait, un autre rentrait, ils n'étaient situés ni dans le temps ni dans l'espace, ils n'avaient pas d'ombre et, semblait-il, pas même de

As such, the novel talks about the challenges faced by the North Africans who migrated to France after WWII and the resulting disorientation that has affected many of them. However, Chraïbi's rendering of Yalaan's tragic narrative is not deprived of instances of humour and irony, and this may prompt the French audience to consider their responsibility in the treatment of the Maghrebi population:

With bursts of laughter they recalled the time in their lives when they had had unemployment cards that they had to have punched on a certain day so they could collect an unemployment benefit. They were still amazed by it. Some of them had even received letters from their native village, to which they sent a part of their money, a village in a holiday mood: the Christians pay our sons not to do any work! They had a devil of a time keeping their family from coming up to join them, women, children, cousins, and friends. (102)⁴²

Returning to Prasteau's viewpoint on Chraïbi's "pathetic" novel, one may feel compelled to compare the French critics' reviews with Chraïbi's statement in his book. Firstly, the reader may be struck by the fact that Chraïbi is using irony as a rhetorical strategy while describing the suffering of the unemployed labourers. Secondly, it is obvious that, whether deliberately or not, the French critics have overlooked the self-irony in the preceding sentences. Thirdly, the reader realizes that laughter occupies a substantial position in the novel. Interestingly, the depiction of squalid living conditions during Yalaan's winter stay with the group of jobless Arabs still makes room for a bitter laughter. As Chraïbi writes, "The thin smoking flame of the lamp lowered and sputtered and danced, quivering like their voices and their verbal fevers that rose all of a sudden as they fidgeted on a space of the floor where spitting and blows and cursing and bodies hitting and drunken laughter all melted together" (102).⁴³ Chraïbi integrates in this passage a scene in which Rauss's jealousy is depicted in the act of laughing:

matière. *Des projections dans le passé*, pensait Waldik, *et alors même ce passé était projeté vers une antiquité brumeuse, peuplée d'ombres et d'échos*" (146-147).

⁴² "Ils évoquaient avec des hoquets de rire gras cette période sociale de leur vie où ils avaient une carte de chômage, la faisaient pointer à jour fixe, percevaient une allocation de chômage. Ils en étaient encore tout étonnés. Certains même recevaient des lettres de leur douar, où ils envoyaient une partie de leur allocation, un douar en liesse et en branle : les Chrétiens paient nos fils pour ne rien faire ! – et ils avaient un mal de chien à empêcher leurs correspondants de venir les rejoindre, femmes et enfants, proches et amis" (149).

⁴³ "La flamme grésillante et fumante de la lampe baissait, giclait, dansait – saccadée comme leurs voix, leurs fièvres verbales montées d'un coup, gigotantes en un palier où fusaient crachats jurons corps à corps et rires avinés" (148-149).

He came back over the same road late at night with his headlights out. It took half a dozen arms and several hours of effort to get the motor stopped. It seemed to go right on defying the man who had gotten it started and even, you might say, the man, long since turned to mineral, who had conceived it. It coughed and shook with fits of laughter (104).⁴⁴

Rousseaux and Prasteaux's standpoints may appear to be relatively moderate for a French audience, given that they write for *Le Figaro*, a conservative Parisian daily newspaper that became after World War II "the voice of the French upper middle class."⁴⁵ Their examination and assessment of Chraïbi's novel insist strongly upon the gravity of the North African migrant crisis. Rousseaux and Prasteaux direct their focus mainly towards the genre of the text, and do not read Chraïbi's work as a diasporic text. It can be added that the episode Prasteau refers to can be interpreted in various ways. Yet, the critic plays an important part in reinforcing the general tendency to omit or miss the irony in Chraïbi's novel.

While reading "the Christians pay our sons not to do any work!" (102),⁴⁶ it is the voice of those who have not migrated and still living in the Algerian villages that is being heard; and this ironic intrusion serves to complicate the discourse on migration by displaying the existence of another community which manifests itself through mockery. French society is here reduced to its Christian dimension as to suggest a monolithic and homogenous population. Distinctive of this homogeneity is the absurd treatment of the migrant population. And the opposition between the French society, on the one hand, and the immigrants, on the other, is reinforced by Chraïbi's deliberate use of exaggerations that result in a caricature which brings forth both self-criticism and a reversal of hierarchy.

Along the same line of thought, Prasteau's focus on the migrants' disillusionment does not take into consideration Chraïbi's recourse to humour and irony, nor does the laughter of Rauss's dilapidated vehicle draw Prasteau's attention. His examination of Chraïbi's novel does not allow him to read the self-protective function of irony that "can be interpreted as a kind of defence mechanism" (Hutcheon 47). However, most of the critics

⁴⁴ "Il revenait par le même chemin, tard dans la nuit, tous feux éteints – et il fallait une demi-douzaine de bras et plusieurs heures d'efforts pour arrêter le moteur – comme s'il continuait de défier celui qui l'avait mis en marche et, semblait-il, même l'homme (depuis longtemps minéral) qui l'avait conçu, toussant et secoué de grandes quintes de rire" (152).

⁴⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Le-Figaro>. Accessed 21 September 2020.

⁴⁶ "Les Chrétiens paient nos fils pour ne rien faire !" (149).

who have praised *Les Boucs*, such as Prasteau, have justified their assessment by celebrating Chraïbi's ability to give a voice to the North African migrants. The general argument put forward is that Chraïbi has been successful in depicting the appalling treatment of the 1950s Maghrebi diaspora living in the Parisian periphery. Nonetheless, the use of irony and its self-protective function have not captured the French critics' attention.

It is helpful to consider other France-based critics that present their critiques from the point of view of literary criticism. After Prasteau's article in *Le Figaro*, *Les Boucs* has also been reviewed in one of the major French newspapers. Robert Coiplet publishes an article in *Le Monde* and sets the tone for his review of Chraïbi's novel by writing: "I would have preferred a little more order in the ideas" (6).⁴⁷ Coiplet also maintains that, "*The Butts* claims to tell the misfortunes of North Africans who came to France. I say pretend, because that's not what the author did. He actually depicted a young lunatic intellectual, filled with hatred for society where he cannot find his place" (6).⁴⁸ Writing for the Paris-based national daily newspaper (Kuhn 66), Coiplet further adds, "I cannot be interested in the misfortune of the ill-adapted intellectual Yalaan Waldik. It was not the subject. The real subject is the misery of the Arabs who were attracted to France by a promising to work ... They are the goats and it was only about them that we had to talk in order to make a beautiful book" (6).⁴⁹ Therefore, in his critique, Coiplet's preference goes to the scenes of the altercation between the Arabs and the French entrepreneur, and the final Spring meal; in other words, Coiplet's inclination goes towards a reading of the text as a sociological document; he seeks to establish a hierarchy and argues that *Les Boucs* should have given precedence to the tragic plight of the deceived Arab migrants, rather than the figure of the young intellectual which he invalidates due to what he considers to be a series of inconsistencies and improbabilities.

Published in *Le Monde libertaire*, the then organ of the French Anarchist Federation (Graham 127), Maurice Joyeux's review underscores the severity of the text, "It is a violent work on the miserable life of North Africans in France"⁵⁰ and anticipates the success of

⁴⁷ "Je préférerais un peu plus d'ordre dans les idées" (6).

⁴⁸ "Les Boucs prétendent raconter les malheurs des Nord-Africains qui sont venus en France. Je dis prétendent, car ce n'est pas ce que l'auteur a fait. Il a peint en réalité un jeune intellectuel désaxé, gonflé de haine pour la société où il ne trouve pas sa place" (6).

⁴⁹ "Je ne peux pas m'intéresser au malheur de l'intellectuel inadapté Yalann Waldik. Ce n'était pas le sujet. Le vrai sujet est la misère des Arabes qu'on a attirés en France en leur promettant du travail [...] Ce sont eux les boucs et c'est d'eux seulement qu'il eût fallu parler pour faire un beau livre" (6).

⁵⁰ "C'est une œuvre violente sur la vie misérable des Nord-Africains en France" (81).

Chraïbi's novel: "The work is called to a certain resonance" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 81).⁵¹ Joyeux's comments also recognize and praise the singularity of *Les Boucs*:

It contrasts sharply with the current North African literature. Nowhere do we find the nationalist stench that spoils the North African issue like a rotten carcass spoils the shantytowns. Allah is absent from this work of revolt all turned towards man ... *The Butts* has moved beyond the stage of litanies in honour of Muhammad, Ben What's-his-name or the great party of the Morons. (81)⁵²

Pascal Pia's hostile criticism targets both the writer and the central character of the novel: in the scholar's words, Driss Chraïbi is "clumsy, inexperienced and... pretentious" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 83),⁵³ and Yalaan Waldik is a "talkative and conceited intellectual. He is not entitled to speak on behalf of the "Butts" since he has spent more time in prison than with them and his fate is different from theirs" (83).⁵⁴ Here, Pia attacks Chraïbi's method of representation by pointing at the supposedly inadequate choice of Yalaan as a central character, and the blatant ventriloquism which jointly precipitate the collapse of Chraïbi's literary enterprise.

Michel Zérafra, French author and critic provides a different critical view:

Chraïbi offers us much more than a report: the tragic fate of Muslims who came to live in France, he expresses it in a real novel, which has three major characters: Yalaan Waldik – the narrator - Simone, his mistress, and Rauss, the outlaw who steals, wheels and deals and kills, assuming the pariah status that our society has attributed to him. Thus, thanks to an indisputable novelist talent, Driss Chraïbi has been able to unite three social dramas, three psychological plans: the sentimental and carnal attachment of a French woman for a cursed Arab, the existence led by twenty "boucs" sleeping at the back of an old dump truck, and especially the situation of the narrator, who fulfils his vocation in the midst of his race brothers, in order to better express their distress. It is this fierce desire for mediation that makes "*Les Boucs*" a

⁵¹ "L'ouvrage est appelé à un retentissement certain" (81).

⁵² "Il tranche avec la littérature nord-africaine courante. Nulle part on n'y trouve le relent nationaliste qui pourrit le problème nord-africain comme une charogne pourrit les bidonvilles. Allah est absent de cette œuvre de révolte tout entière tournée vers l'homme... *Les Boucs* ont dépassé le stade des litanies en l'honneur de Mahomet, de Ben Machin ou du grand parti des Conos" (81).

⁵³ "[M]aladroit, inexpérimenté et... prétentieux" (83).

⁵⁴ "[I]ntellectuel bavard et vaniteux. Celui-ci n'est pas habilité à parler au nom des "Boucs" puisqu'il a passé plus de temps en prison qu'en leur compagnie et que son sort est différent du leur" (83).

tragic book. Yalaan Waldik's lurking insanity does not come from the horrendous scenes of misery in which he is involved or that he witnesses; it is born out of the loneliness experienced in himself. He is abandoned. His brothers too. Bleary-eyed, he contemplates the misunderstanding between Islam and the West; a misunderstanding that humiliating acts of charity only increase. (178-179)⁵⁵

Zéraffa's argument rests on the assumption that Chraïbi's novel attempts to clear the mutual lack of understanding between Islam and the West. Yet, his interpretation of the role given to the three characters leads him to read *Les Boucs* through the lens of the tragedy genre. While Zéraffa mentions that there are "three major characters," "three social dramas," "three psychological levels," he still does not recognize the role of irony in complicating the "misunderstanding between Islam and the West," and the impact it has on the reading of the "social dramas."

In other words, Zéraffa dismisses the idea according to which the text can be read as anything else than through its tragic property, rejecting therefore the role of irony in unsettling the boundaries of such genre. However, the presence of major and minor characters both on the French and on the North African side leads the reader to find that the text offers a mixture of diverging and converging viewpoints and worldviews. Thus, the assertion that Yalaan's "fierce desire for mediation" is the sole responsible for the tragic dimension of the novel, calls for some nuance. In fact, Zéraffa's reading of Yalaan's position reinforces the marginality of the migrant intellectual and disregards the revolutionary potential of Yalaan's in-betweenness.

The French critic further develops his argument by commenting on Chraïbi's intentions and contrasting the pros and cons of the authorial choices; he writes, "Driss Chraïbi is a visionary ... The author does not describe: his scenes are carried away in the tumult of a consciousness. He did not want to show, but impose, fascinate. Also, his book

⁵⁵ "Chraïbi nous offre beaucoup plus qu'un reportage: le tragique destin des musulmans venus vivre en France, il l'exprime en un vrai roman, qui comporte trois personnages majeurs: Yalann Waldik – le narrateur – Simone, sa maîtresse, et Raus, le hors-la-loi qui vole, trafique et tue, assumant la condition de paria que notre société lui a faite. Ainsi, grâce à un indiscutable talent de romancier, Driss Chraïbi a su unir trois drames sociaux, trois plans psychologiques: l'attachement sentimental et charnel d'une Française pour un Arabe maudit, l'existence que mènent vingt « boucs » couchant dans la benne d'un vieux camion, et surtout la situation du narrateur, qui accomplit sa vocation au milieu de ses frères de race, pour pouvoir mieux dire leur détresse. C'est cette farouche volonté de médiation qui fait des Boucs un livre tragique. La démence qui guette Yalann Waldik ne vient pas des affreuses scènes de misère dont il est l'acteur et le témoin; elle naît de la solitude éprouvée en lui. Il est délaissé. Ses frères le sont aussi. D'un œil hagard, il contemple le malentendu dressé entre l'Islam et l'Occident ; malentendu que des actes humiliants de charité ne font qu'accroître" (178-179).

does gain in emotional and poetic efficiency what it loses in the area of the objective account” (179).⁵⁶ Zérafra elaborates a long list of weaknesses aimed at identifying the novel’s deficiencies and tracing the author’s shortcomings:

The criticism we will make against Chraïbi is his self-assertion with too much insistence as a writer. Not everyone can be Faulkner. His book contains too much artifice of style; too often the narrator wants to show that he can think. Chraïbi has not sufficiently overcome the contradiction that exists between the culture he possesses and the misery he evokes. Finally, the book ends on a hardly acceptable Christian tone: Yalaan Waldik is saved from despair by a young woman who has suffered a condition, a fate as hard as his. This «compensation» is barely convincing; the salvation of an individual is not that of a social mass. It was necessary to choose either the misery of the «boucs» or else the cruel destiny of a North African writer. (179).⁵⁷

To address Zérafra’s viewpoint, first, one can refer to a letter written in January 1999 to Michel Legras in which Driss Chraïbi writes: “I only started reading Faulkner in 1956, after the publication of *Les Boucs*. Until then, I was relishing on French and Arab writers” (qtd in Legras, 88).⁵⁸ One can also refer to Chraïbi’s memoirs entitled *Le Monde à côté* in which he gives further details about the period that preceded the publication of *Les Boucs*. He writes: “Faulkner was for me a revelation, a marvel ... The influence of William Faulkner was such that I had great difficulty in getting back my language and my identity. It was him who shook me somehow ... But it was not in *Les Boucs* that he manifested himself; it was in *L’Âne*, published a year later” (75).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “Driss Chraïbi est un visionnaire... L’auteur ne décrit pas : ses scènes sont emportées dans le tumulte d’une conscience. Il n’a pas voulu montrer, mais imposer, fasciner. Aussi son livre gagne-t-il en efficacité affective et poétique ce qu’il perd dans l’ordre du témoignage objectif” (179).

⁵⁷ “Le reproche que nous ferons à Chraïbi, c’est de s’affirmer avec trop d’acharnement comme écrivain. N’est pas faulknérien qui veut. Son livre comporte trop d’artifices de style ; le narrateur veut trop souvent montrer qu’il sait penser. Chraïbi n’a pas suffisamment dépassé la contradiction qui existe entre la culture qu’il possède et la misère qu’il évoque. Enfin le livre se termine sur un ton chrétien difficilement acceptable : Yalann Waldik est sauvé du désespoir par une jeune femme qui a subi une condition, un destin aussi dur que les siens. Cette «compensation» n’est guère convaincante ; le salut d’un individu n’est pas celui d’une masse sociale. Il fallait choisir : ou bien la misère des «boucs», ou bien la destinée cruelle d’un écrivain nord-africain” (179).

⁵⁸ “Je n’ai commencé à lire Faulkner qu’en 1956, après la publication des Boucs. Jusqu’alors, je me repaissais d’auteurs français et arabes” (qtd. in Legras 88).

⁵⁹ “Faulkner fut pour moi une révélation, un éblouissement ... L’influence de William Faulkner était telle que j’eus grand-peine à retrouver mon langage et mon identité. C’est lui qui me secoua en quelque sorte ... Mais ce ne fût pas dans *Les Boucs* qu’il se manifesta ; ce fut dans *L’Âne*, publié un an plus tard” (75).

It is interesting to note that Z eraffa’s concern with Chra ibi’s exaggeration stems from *Les Boucs*’ narrator. In the second chapter of the second part entitled *Imprimatur*, the narrative is no longer told in the first person. Therefore, one can speculate that Z eraffa does not approve of this important change in focus. Chra ibi writes the first part of the novel in the first-person singular, then the second and third parts in the third person singular. Thus, the reader can observe the entanglement of the narrator’s metamorphosis with the intricacies of a non-linear narrative. Chra ibi writes,

He seemed dehumanized speaking in third person, with such lucidity that he wondered if that dehumanization were not more of a splitting of personality that had taken place several weeks earlier, that early morning, for example, when Simone had driven him out of that room on whose threshold he was now standing. (70)⁶⁰

It is essential, then, to stress the importance of the figure of the narrator in Chra ibi’s particular method of storytelling which relies upon the juxtaposition of Yalaan’s metamorphosis reflected in the change in perspective that can be observed in the non-linear narrative. Chra ibi’s technique of narration in *Les Boucs* is characterized by a transgression of the general conventions of representation, at which critics such as Z eraffa have taken offence.

Z eraffa directs the attention of the readers to the Christian element Chra ibi’s work exhibits in its final pages, but the critic is sceptical about the validity of Yalaan’s salvation. Z eraffa’s contention that Chra ibi ascribes a Christian tone to the end of his novel, I would argue, omits the recurring presence of Christian motifs throughout the narrative. Besides, Z eraffa does not make mention of Chra ibi’s effort to use irony along with other literary tropes in the rendering of Yalaan’s salvation. Had the critic paid closer attention of the irony in Chra ibi’s novel he could have been led to discover underlying meanings of Yalaan’s salvation and alternative interpretations.

Z eraffa expresses a clear dissatisfaction with Chra ibi’s artificial shifting of the narratorial voice, yet the critic does not take into consideration the functions of irony to point to “the complexities of historical and social reality” (Hutcheon 28) in the post-World War II context. Some might wonder why Z eraffa expresses appreciation for the visionary inspiration

⁶⁰ “Comme s’il se f ut d epersonnalis e, parlant   la troisi eme personne, avec une telle lucidit e qu’il se demanda si cette d epersonnalisation n’ tait pas plut ot un d edoublement qui se f ut produit des semaines auparavant, ce lointain matin, par exemple, o  Simone l’avait chass e de cette chambre sur le seuil de laquelle il se tenait   pr esent” (101-102).

of the author and simultaneously rules out Chraïbi's overuse of literary artifice. This suggests that the critic is either unaware or unconcerned with Chraïbi's use of irony as a tool for critical distance and transgression. While the tragic dimension of the novel underscored by Zérafra cannot be undervalued, Zérafra's stress on Yalaan's unconvincing final salvation leads the audience towards a reading of the novel through a Christian lens. Hence, I would argue that a focus on the failed deliverance of the North African migrants, and by extension a focus on the Christian imagery in *Les Boucs* that takes into consideration the complicating function of irony, provides the basis for a plurality of interpretations.

As the following extract makes clear, Jean Cathelin's interest is also drawn to the generic classification of the novel and Chraïbi's successful writing of "a kind of epic, a myth expressing with great intellectual elaboration his own participation as a Moroccan in the tragedy of the Algerians in Paris" (81).⁶¹ The nuance in Cathelin's remark recognizes the proximity of *Les Boucs* with the epic mode of representation for "It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community" (Lukacs 66). According to the French critic, the literary representation of the migrant experience brings the novel closer to a myth which, in the words of Mircea Eliade "is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a "true history," because it always deals with *realities*" (Eliade 6).⁶² And whether it is because of Chraïbi's interest in the migrants' "fabled time of the beginnings" (Eliade 5) or in the presence of elements of a spiritual and sacred dimension in *Les Boucs*, Cathelin underscores the considerable thoughtfulness with which the author addresses the adverse and tragic conditions that the Algerian migrants live under. Among the various interpretations with regards to the choice of Algerian migrants (rather than, for example, Moroccan, Tunisian, Polish, Portuguese or Spanish ones) in Chraïbi's denunciation of the post-World War II French attitude to migrants,

⁶¹ "[U]ne sorte d'épopée, un mythe exprimant avec beaucoup de mise en forme intellectuelle sa propre participation de Marocain à la tragédie des Algériens de Paris" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 81).

⁶² In his chapter on the structure of myths, Eliade attempts a definition of myth: "Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only of that which really happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent times of the "beginnings." Hence myths disclose their creative activity and reveal the sacredness (or simply the "supernaturalness") of their works. In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the "supernatural") into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really establishes the World and makes it what it is today. Furthermore, it is as a result of the intervention of Supernatural Beings that man himself is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being" (5-6).

Cathelin alludes here to the author's first-hand experience of migration, which Chraïbi will confirm in later interviews.

Chraïbi's talent has also been recognized by Michel Chrestien, who deplores, however, that *Les Boucs* does not restrict itself to a testimony: "The gift of this young Moroccan writer, his vision at times fulgurant, his uncommon visual, tactile, auditory memory, his deep and skin-deep humanity, but not only literary, would have done wonders in a pure and simple testimony" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 82).⁶³ Under the pseudonym Michel Chrestien in reference to Balzac's famous character, literary critic Jacques Silberfeld's attention is drawn by Chraïbi's visionary power and his multisensory memory, which, Chrestien believes, could have produced a better work, had Chraïbi opted for an eye-witness report. Known also for his work as a translator of Vladimir Nabokov and Hannah Arendt, Michel Chrestien disagrees with Chraïbi's preference for: "a tragic theme, a burning issue and embellish[ing] it, by adding to it the story of a writer from Saint-Germain-des-Près worthy of the worst entertainers ...The result? This book meant to make all of us blush makes us shrug our shoulders" (82).⁶⁴ The critic insists on the inadequacy of Chraïbi's inclusion of Yalaan's tribulations into the tragic narrative of the North African migrants and emphasises the unsuitability of his presence in the novel. Here, again, the critic believes that Chraïbi should have structured his novel differently and insists that the direct consequence of the presence of a writer in the plot is that *Les Boucs* completely misses its target. According to Chrestien rather than producing a biological manifestation of emotion which would be putting the French reader at "the centre of attention" (Crozier 90), the French audience reacts to Yalaan's incongruous presence with a shoulder-shrugging⁶⁵ that can be interpreted as "a signal of hesitation or uncertainty" (Jokinen and Allwood 55).

Chrestien's labelling of Yalaan as an *amuseur* is of particular interest in the discussion over the seriousness expected in dealing with the North Africans' misery. Rather

⁶³ "Le don de ce jeune écrivain marocain, sa vision par endroits fulgurante, sa mémoire visuelle, tactile, auditive peu commune, son humanité profonde et à fleur de peau mais non pas uniquement littéraire, auraient fait merveille dans le témoignage pur et simple" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 82).

⁶⁴ "[U]n thème tragique, un thème brûlant pour l'enjoliver, pour lui rajouter une histoire d'écrivain de Saint-Germain-des-Près digne des pires amuseurs... Le résultat ? Ce livre destiné à nous faire rougir tous tant que nous sommes faits hausser les épaules" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 82).

⁶⁵ In *Telling Lies. Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage*, Paul Ekman writes: "The shrug and the finger are two examples of actions that are called *emblems*, to distinguish them from all of the other gestures that people show. Emblems have a very precise meaning, known to everyone within a cultural group. Everyone knows that the finger means "fuck you" or "up yours" and that the shrug means "I don't know," "I'm helpless," or "What does it matter?" Most other gestures don't have such a precise definition, and their meaning is vague" (101-102).

than taking consideration of the possibilities offered by the *amuseur* in its ability to call into question the severity of the situation, Chrestien does examine the *amuseur*'s ability to call into question the authoritative discourse. Consequently, any appreciation of the nuances introduced by the presence of an entertainer is excluded, along with the idea that Yalaan's position is a substantial element in Chraïbi's elaboration of a counter-discourse. Turning to the quality of Chraïbi's prose, Chrestien writes,

The most French feature of this son of Islam, who also claims it a little painstakingly, is without doubt that he writes like a French high school graduate. With the same excessive use of adjectives and abstract words ("No critical perception could possibly have distinguished one of them from the other," *The Butts*, p. 20), with the same lack of clarity and feeling for the language. (85)⁶⁶

Beyond the dubious paternalistic tone of these remarks, Chrestien's observations on certain grammatical elements of the text orient the reader towards Chraïbi's peculiar use of the French language. Instead of questioning the author's intention or the effect produced on the reader, the critic interprets Chraïbi's propensity towards abstraction and specific parts of speech such as adjectives as indicative of stylistic incompetence. Rather than considering alternative ways of reading Chraïbi's stylistic preferences, Chrestien insists on the writer's pronounced absence of clarity in articulating his vision, and the substantial immaturity of his language skills. Chrestien adds, "Chraïbi has that Arab quirk of never leaving a detail in peace. Of never losing sight of it. No, it is necessary to spell it out once and for all, and to underline it and to frame it, the Turkish delight school, you know" (qtd. in Legras 85).⁶⁷ Chrestien is repelled by what he considers to be Chraïbi's exaggerated insistence on particular details that turns the writer into a maniac and the critic sustains that the writer's undue attention to details is a distinctive Arab feature before ironizing on Chraïbi's alleged affiliation with a pseudo-literary school. Chrestien does not put forward any alternative reading or interpretation of what he reads as exaggerations. The potential role of exaggeration in widening the discourse on migration is excluded from his analysis as much as the relation between exaggeration and irony.

⁶⁶ "Le côté le plus français de ce fils d'Islam, et qui se veut un peu laborieusement tel, c'est assurément qu'il écrit comme un bachelier français. Avec le même abus d'adjectifs et de mots abstraits ("Pas un sens critique ne les eût distingués l'un de l'autre," *Les Boucs*, p. 28), avec le même manque de clarté et de sens de la langue" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 85).

⁶⁷ "Chraïbi a ce travers arabe de ne jamais laisser un détail en paix. De ne jamais le perdre de vue. Non, il faut mettre sur ce seul i dix point au moins, et souligner et encadrer, l'école du lokhoum, quoi" (qtd. in Legras 85).

André Réatif's review also appears to provide insightful comments on Chraïbi's work:

For some time now, French opinion has been more shaken by the condition of the North African emigrants. We have described it right here a few years ago. It is not bad, however, that our good conscience is awakened again by calls coming from North Africans, even if they are violent, unjust, unacceptable in their form and repulsive. I am referring to this piece of molten lava that is the book of Driss Chraïbi called *The Butts*. The butts, that is, the dirty Arabs, the new pariahs of a so-called Christian civilization. The previous novel of this Moroccan was a cry of revolt, without shame nor measure, against his family and his father, against Islam too. This time he lashes out at French society, Christians and civilization. (258)⁶⁸

It is interesting to note that Réatif's disapproval of Chraïbi's work is based on the form chosen by the Moroccan author to convey his message. The molten lava metaphor used by the critic allows the reader to reconsider the explosive origins of the novel, the eruption of the immigration issue on French soil, and the outbursts of the North African voice. In spite of the earlier interpretations provided by other literary critics who identified the novel's ability to broaden the debate opened up by the arrival of the North African migrants, just as lava can form new land masses, Réatif reduces Chraïbi's work to a mere condemnation of religion: Islam in Morocco with *Le Passé simple*, and Christianity in France with *Les Boucs*. He further adds:

His broken, jerky and gripped style, unconcerned about logic and grammar, jostles words, accumulates sensations, the immediate vision of objects, wants to translate the harshness of the revolt that is at the heart of his hero. The latter, a lead astray intellectual, sadistic out of degeneration, drunk with hunger and poorly digested culture, strangles a cat that he loves, takes a woman as he would kill her, spits out his hatred page after page. Blasphemy mingles with irony, murder with insult. Everything is blameworthy in our society which pens up men like beasts, pushes them back to the

⁶⁸ "L'opinion française est davantage saisie depuis quelque temps de la condition faite aux émigrants nord-africains. Nous l'avons décrite ici même il y a quelques années. Il n'est pas mauvais cependant que notre bonne conscience soit réveillée à nouveau par des appels venant de nord-africains, fussent-ils violents, injustes, inacceptables dans la forme et rebutants. Je fais allusion à ce morceau de lave en fusion qu'est le livre de Driss Chraïbi qui s'appelle *Les Boucs*. Les boucs, c'est-à-dire les bicots, les nouveaux parias d'une civilisation dite chrétienne. Le précédent roman de ce marocain était un cri de révolte, sans pudeur ni mesure, contre sa famille et son père, contre l'Islam aussi. Il s'en prend cette fois à la société française, aux chrétiens et à la civilisation" (258).

depths of caves or shacks, compels them to beg, to steal, to kill. His violence is too literary, too constant to be true and to convince us. But still, the condition of those it wants to avenge is unacceptable and puts shame on our nation's face. (258)⁶⁹

However, Rétif does not remain insensitive to the particularities of Chraïbi's style and the instantaneity with which the novel depicts Yalaan Waldik's protest. Interestingly, Rétif's remarks are concerned with the hero and pay brief attention to his psychological profile but do not seem to take into consideration the various steps of Yalaan's transformation throughout the novel. Worthy of mention is also the critic's reference to Chraïbi's irony and its close association with blasphemous language in the condemnation of the way in which French society treats North African immigrants. In his final comments, Rétif rejects Chraïbi's polemical critique of civilization, and touches upon the verisimilitude of the novel and acknowledges his own incredulity by questioning the likelihood of the violence depicted in the text.

Reiterating the arguments put forward by Rétif, and far from being enthused by Chraïbi's narcissism, Jean Déjeux further adds that, "the author has missed out on the real problem and he does not offer anything constructive. He wanted to depict "the slow decrystallization of Africans in France," but he did like Kateb with his "Nedjma," he has told us too much about himself!" (1957, 87).⁷⁰

As seen, most of the critics operating in France at the time of the publication of *Les Boucs* have recognized Chraïbi's talent while simultaneously questioning the prominence of Yalaan's ordeal and challenging the author's narrative technique. If on the one hand, Chraïbi has been praised for his effort in giving a voice to the marginalized North African immigrants of the Parisian periphery, on the other, it is the style chosen to undertake such a project that the critics have unanimously rejected.

⁶⁹ "Son style, haché, heurté, haletant, insoucieux de logique et de de grammaire, bouscule les mots, accumule les sensations, la vision immédiate des objets, veut traduire l'âpreté de la révolte qui est au cœur de son héros. Celui-ci, intellectuel dévoyé, sadique par déchéance, ivre de faim et de culture mal digérée, étrangle un chat qu'il aime, prend une femme comme il la tuerait, vomit sa haine à longueur de pages. Le blasphème se mêle à l'ironie, le meurtre à l'insulte. Tout est condamnable dans notre société qui parque les hommes comme des bêtes, les repousse au fond de grottes ou de gourbis, les contraint à mendier, à voler, à tuer. Sa violence est trop littéraire, trop soutenue pour être vraie et pour nous convaincre. N'empêche que la condition de ceux qu'elle veut venger est inadmissible et met la honte sur notre visage de nation" (258).

⁷⁰ "[L]'auteur est passé à côté du véritable problème et il n'apporte rien de constructif. Il voulait dépeindre « la lente décrystallisation des Africains en France, » mais il a fait comme Kateb avec sa "Nedjma," il nous a trop parlé de lui !" (87).

1.1.2 The Critical Reception of *Les Boucs* in the Maghreb

Written a year after the start of the Algerian war, Maurice Monnoyer's review was published in the weekly journal *L'Effort algérien*, an organ of the French Catholic Church in Algeria.⁷¹ Monnoyer argues that *Les Boucs* is "of an uncommon violence, harsh, carelessly written, in turn hallucinatory, vertiginous and poignant" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 85).⁷² The comment on the writer's supposed negligence is illustrative of the critic's interest in Chraïbi's writing technique and it is worth mentioning that the expression "composé à la diable"⁷³ could also be interpreted as "with violence and exaggeration." Consequently, Monnoyer's approach of *Les Boucs* can lead the reader to interrogate what Chraïbi has allegedly overlooked and to question the role of violence and exaggeration in the novel.

One can contend that Monnoyer does not remain indifferent to the charged imagery of Chraïbi's disturbed vision. Yet, one of the most salient points in Monnoyer's critique has to do with his high degree of scepticism: "The relationship (of the Boucs) with the French – the Christians, as the author says – is tough. Is it possible that on the part of the Metropolitans there may be so little friendship? I don't want to believe it" (84).⁷⁴ After articulating his aesthetic considerations, Monnoyer places his emphasis on the verisimilitude of Chraïbi's depiction of the French reception of North African migrants and it is to the issue of authenticity and accuracy of representation that the critic turns. By expressing his concern for the credibility of the novel Monnoyer claims for himself the ability to verify the validity of Chraïbi's literary work, and he goes so far as to formulate a prediction concerning the future of *Les Boucs*: "I have every reason to believe that Driss Chraïbi's goal will not be achieved. We will read his book, we will devour it, but we will not discover what is underlying, that is to say the deep desire for a better understanding between North Africans and Metropolitans" (qtd. in Roche 77).⁷⁵ Thus, Monnoyer anticipates the failure of Chraïbi's enterprise and

⁷¹ About the position of *L'Effort Algérien* towards the French presence in Algeria, Anne Roche writes: "Mais *L'Effort algérien*, même s'il est favorable à la présence française, ne peut néanmoins se confondre avec la position des "ultras," d'autant plus que la direction de Monnoyer prend fin en 1956, soit bien avant la radicalisation de type O.A.S. (68-69).

⁷² "[D]'une violence peu commune, âpre, composé à la diable, tour à tour hallucinant, vertigineux et poignant" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 85).

⁷³ For more information on the different meanings of the term "Diable" refer to Émile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, <https://www.littre.org/definition/diable>. Accessed 29 November 2020.

⁷⁴ "Les rapports (des Boucs) avec les Français – les Chrétiens, comme dit l'auteur – sont durs. Est-il possible que de la part de Métropolitains il y ait si peu d'amitié ? Je ne veux pas le croire" (qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 84).

⁷⁵ "J'ai tout lieu de penser que l'objectif de Driss Chraïbi ne sera pas atteint. On lira son livre, on le dévorera, mais on n'y découvrira pas ce qui est sous-jacent, c'est-à-dire le désir profond d'une meilleure compréhension entre Nord-Africains et Métropolitains" (qtd. in Roche 77).

irrespective of the reader's tenacity, Monnoyer claims that Chraïbi's flop is in large part due to the absence of any opening towards a deeper and mutually beneficial relationship between French native and immigrant populations.

The question of an underlying meaning is of particular interest, in that it raises the problem of double meaning in the text. As such, if Monnoyer is to be trusted, then the French reader can only find incomprehension and mutual exclusion between the majority and the minority groups or individuals in the novel, in the manner of two monolithic masses. In turn, one is entitled to wonder whether or not this warning is a result of the critic's (in)ability to identify in the text itself the presence of such a desire for a better understanding between the dominant and dominated groups.

In her 1957 review of Chraïbi's work, Jeanne Ballet writes "In *The Butts*, hermeticism is intensified" (58).⁷⁶ Published one year after the end of the French protectorate of Tunisia in the Tunis-based journal⁷⁷ *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*,⁷⁸ Ballet's article⁷⁹ reproaches Chraïbi the opacity that characterizes his novel. As a matter of fact, Ballet issues a warning to the Moroccan writer: "The author ought to be careful: if too much clarity is often synonymous with indigence, the obscurity intended and maintained by artificial means is not always a proof of depth. Either way, it risks repelling the reader and preventing the message from being conveyed" (58).⁸⁰ Ballet's concern over Chraïbi's apparent obscurity is justified by the priority that the critic gives to the understanding of straightforward ideas by the reader. Therefore, the focus is put here on the reader's reaction regarding the novel's apparent obscurity and sensed hermeticism which parasite the reading of the novel. Ballet raises the issue of the novel as a representation of the fragmentary decomposition of the African migrants and insists that the complexity of the narrative perturbs the identification of a unique line of thought:

Thus, "*The Butts*" wants to depict «the slow decrystallization of the Africans in France». Indeed, it depicts it in dazzling terms which stand out. Fury, disappointment,

⁷⁶ "Dans "Les boucs," l'hermétisme s'accroît" (58).

⁷⁷ According to Kmar Kchir-Bendana, the Institut des belles-lettres arabes (IBLA) was founded in Tunis in 1926 by the Society of Missionaries of Africa (the White Fathers), and its journal was founded in 1937.

⁷⁸ For further information regarding IBLA, see Kittler 301-303.

⁷⁹ IBLA designates both the institution and its journal.

⁸⁰ "Que l'auteur prenne garde : si trop de clarté est souvent synonyme d'indigence, l'obscurité voulue et entretenue par des moyens artificiels n'est pas toujours une preuve de profondeur. En tout état de cause, elle risque de rebuter le lecteur et de ne plus laisser passer le message" (58).

fatigue, hunger, and desperate fatalism do join together in these obscure pages where one seeks in vain a solid common thread that allows the binding of fragmented sensations, the giving of a substance to a general idea. (58)⁸¹

The term “décristallisation” is in reference to Stendhal’s concept of “crystallisation,”⁸² and the critic recognizes some success in Chraïbi’s departure from, and reversal of this process.⁸³ However, Ballet warns the reader that a search for a single thread in *Les Boucs* is destined to failure, given Chraïbi’s peculiar examination of the concepts of “transformation, order, and union” (Mathias 142) in understanding and representing reality. It is also Chraïbi’s representational system that is at the centre of Ballet’s criticism, and seemingly, the author’s partial depiction of the migrants’ grim living conditions does not meet its purpose : “It’s a polemical book, but it does not give any clear idea of the so painful and hardly resolvable issue of Algerian unemployment and the maladjustment of unskilled workers upon their arrival in France. Most likely, it is intended to alert public opinion, but as it is conceived, it does not inform objectively” (58).⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that for Ballet, Chraïbi’s novel should have worked towards providing a true measure of the migrants’ low standard of living. Presumably, Ballet laments what she considers to be Chraïbi’s inexact representation of reality and omits to question the possible reasons for such a deviation from traditional methods or realistic representation. As if the novel had to fit itself into a rigid set of boundaries and rules, Ballet’s remarks contest the representational veracity of Chraïbi’s text, and call attention to the author’s bias rather than examining the alternative meaning that Chraïbi’s purported partiality may offer. In her concluding remarks, Ballet writes:

⁸¹ “Donc, “Les boucs” veulent peindre « la lente décristallisation des Africains en France ». Et de fait, ils la peignent en termes fulgurants qui font image. La fureur, la déception, la fatigue, la faim, le fatalisme désespéré se mêlent en ces pages obscures où l’on cherche en vain un fil conducteur solide qui permette de lier des bribes de sensations, de donner corps à une idée générale” (58).

⁸² On crystallisation Stendhal writes “What I am calling crystallisation is the working of the mind, as it draws from all around it new discoveries of the loved object’s perfection” (6).

⁸³ On crystallisation Manon Mathias writes in “Crystallography in Sand, Stendhal, Pictet, and Baudelaire”: “The establishment of crystallography as a scientific discipline dealing with the arrangement and bonding of atoms in crystalline solids is attributed to René-Just Häuy (1743–1822) in the early nineteenth century. From this point onwards, the process of crystallization is widely referred to in dictionaries and scientific essays in France. The chemical process of crystal formation involves three key concepts. First, transformation is a central aspect in the production of crystals as there is a change in state from fluid to solid, from the irregular to the regular. Scientific treatises, such as Häuy’s *Traité de minéralogie* (1801), highlight this point, frequently referring to ‘métamorphose’ ... and ‘transformation’ ... Second, the notion of union or attraction is important in the bonding and interlocking of atoms which occurs when crystals develop ... Finally, there is a strong link between crystals and order or regularity” (141).

⁸⁴ “C’est un livre de choc, mais qui ne donne aucune idée juste de la question si douloureuse et si difficile à résoudre du chômage algérien et de l’inadaptation des ouvriers sans spécialité à leur arrivée en France. Sans doute, vise-t-il à alerter l’opinion publique, mais tel qu’il est conçu, il ne l’informe pas objectivement” (58).

It has to be said frankly to the author, that if he is reaching out to a snob audience, he is on the right track, but if he wants to be heard by the general public, he must attempt to make himself accessible through a better composition, more rigor in putting forward his arguments, and by enhancing his style, which is excellent when it is clear, with a cadence which belongs only to the good authors and rather than prose would remind of plays written in verse. (59)⁸⁵

These remarks relate to Chraïbi's intended readers and the author's failure to reach a large audience. Ballet challenges the elitist insistence on using a composition which cannot be assimilated by a more modest readership. Once again, the hermeticism of the novel is targeted, especially the stylistic features that bar access to a better appreciation of the writer's line of reasoning. Therefore, when looking for a remedy to the author's complexity, Ballet suggests a more explicit exposure of Chraïbi's vision, an exposition in which there would be no interference that obscures the readers' understanding. It should also be noted that Ballet acknowledges the poetic dimension of Chraïbi's writing and brings the attention to the characteristic features of the writer's prose, and the role of pace and rhythm in Chraïbi's use of the French language.

Interviewed by Victor Malka on Chraïbi's work, the Moroccan writer Ahmed Séfrioui says, "It is very hard for a writer to judge another one. I believe, however, that Chraïbi's technique is not yet fully developed" (10).⁸⁶ In this interview published one year after the Moroccan independence in the *Démocratie* journal, an organ of the Democratic Independence Party (*Parti Démocratique et de l'Indépendance*) Séfrioui develops his thought:

Let me explain, in any narrative technique, so as not to leave the reader weary, the author must have recourse to different tones. It is necessary to look after halftones because the work that is in the image of the world, of reality, must not be entirely white nor entirely black. However, I believe, and no one will contradict me on this

⁸⁵ "Il faut avoir la franchise de le dire à l'auteur, s'il cherche l'audience des snobs, il est dans la bonne voie, mais s'il veut se faire entendre du grand public, qu'il fasse alors l'effort de se rendre accessible par une meilleure composition par plus de rigueur dans l'exposé de ses thèses, et par la mise en valeur de son style, lequel est excellent lorsqu'il est clair, avec une cadence qui n'appartient qu'aux bons auteurs et ferait penser à des pièces en vers plutôt qu'à de la prose" (59).

⁸⁶ "Il est très difficile pour un écrivain d'en juger un autre. Je pense toutefois que la technique de Chraïbi n'est pas tout à fait au point" (10).

point, that Chraïbi wallows too much in the dark. In the pictures he paints, the harmony of colours is not respected. (10)⁸⁷

Séfrioui dwells upon the monotony of Chraïbi's work and laments his inability to employ a well-balanced variety of tones. And if on the one hand, Chraïbi's work is characterized by the uniformity of its tone, on the other, for Séfrioui the issue stems from the overuse of darkness and the pleasure Chraïbi derives from it. Séfrioui also goes on to explain that,

Thus, in his book, "Les Boucs" too, Chraïbi has intended to recount the lives of North Africans in Paris but he has done so with no regard for truth. Reality is slapped. Chraïbi hardly takes it into consideration and I would ask you to believe that this is serious. My master François Bonjean often said: "As long as we do not see the best of a soul, we do not see anything. In "Les Boucs" Chraïbi has only seen the dark side of the problem..." (10)⁸⁸

The Moroccan author brings up Chraïbi's violent representation of reality and his disregard for the truth. Séfrioui also underscores the gravity of Chraïbi's deviation from a realistic and objective representation of the North African migrants' trials and tribulations. The insistence on the dark side of the migrant experience prevents Chraïbi from exploring and appreciating the brightness and lightness that Séfrioui implicitly associates with the migration process. It is therefore from Chraïbi's subjective rendering of the North African migrants' odyssey that Séfrioui's criticism emerges.

Thus, it may be concluded that, whether they were published in an Algerian, Tunisian or Moroccan journal, the critiques emanating from the Maghreb converged overall in rejecting the author for what has been interpreted as an inaccurate depiction of the North African migrant experiences in France.

⁸⁷ "Je m'explique : dans toute technique romanesque, pour ne pas lasser le lecteur, l'auteur doit avoir recours à différents tons. Il est nécessaire de ménager les demi-teintes parce que l'œuvre qui est à l'image du monde, de la réalité, ne doit être ni entièrement blanche ni entièrement noire. Or, et personne ne me contredira là-dessus, je crois que Chraïbi se complaît trop dans le noir. Dans les tableaux qu'il brosse, l'harmonie des couleurs n'est pas observée" (10).

⁸⁸ "C'est ainsi également que dans son livre "Les Boucs," Chraïbi s'est proposé de nous retracer la vie des Nord-Africains à Paris mais il l'a fait au mépris de toute vérité. La réalité est soufflée. Chraïbi ne la prend guère en considération et je vous prie de croire que cela est grave. Mon maître François Bonjean disait souvent : "Tant qu'on ne voit pas le meilleur d'une âme on ne voit rien. Dans "Les Boucs" Chraïbi n'a vu que le côté obscur du problème..." (10).

1.2 The Said and the Unsaid

This section explores multiple and ironic meanings produced by the juxtaposition of the text and its relevant contexts. In accordance with their recurrence in *Les Boucs*, the following pages look at the “ironic relation between the said and the unsaid” (Hutcheon 1995, 11) in Chraïbi’s text, by examining, first, the author’s representation of immigration and diaspora, then, the depiction of the migrant intellectual, and finally the use of religious imagery.

1.2.1 Diasporic Imaginary in *Les Boucs*

Ato Quayson’s views developed in “Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary” on the role of place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting are of particular interest for our discussion of the Maghrebi diasporic imaginary in *Les Boucs*.

In spite of the seven prison sentences that the main character serves in French jails, and the implied back and forth movement between his accommodation⁸⁹ in *Villejuif* (16) and his prison cell at *La Santé* (19), it is the dialectical relationship between France and Algeria that appears to occupy a central position in the narrative as illustrated by Yalaan’s migration at the age of 18 from Bône to Paris and the round-trip that he later performs when Mac O’Mac (92) sends him to Kabylia for two months (117). The scene in which Yalaan describes the neighbourhood where Simone’s house is located provides the reader with insight into the isolation felt by the narrator after being released from prison and returning to his partner’s home: “I loved him above all for his companionship. In this lost corner of Villejuif just south of Paris, there were thirty-two shacks around mine. Thirty-two families that never said a word to me. And my cat, his guts twisted from hunger and his skin raw, never once stole a thing from them. I squeezed his throat a little tighter” (14).⁹⁰ Hence, Yalaan indicates here his feeling of alienation, insisting not only on the peripherality of Villejuif located far from the Parisian metropolis, but also on his own position of marginality, and his sense of estrangement is even more accentuated by the fact that he is surrounded by a considerable number of voiceless neighbours. In his rendering of the local community’s inhospitality, Yalaan sets up an interesting contrast between the affection he has developed for his cat and the silence that characterizes the neighbourly relations, which is marked by ironic

⁸⁹ On the spatial segregation and housing of the Algerians in France, see MacMaster 193-195.

⁹⁰ “Je l’aimais surtout pour sa solidarité. Dans ce coin perdu de Villejuif, il y avait trente-deux pavillons tout autour du mien. Trente-deux familles qui ne m’adressaient jamais la parole. Et mon chat, les boyaux tordus de faim et le poil malade, pas une seule fois n’y était allé voler. Je serrai un peu plus fort son cou” (16-17).

exaggeration, and by doing this, the narrator creates “new levels of meaning” (Hutcheon 2000, 30).

Yalaan’s portrayal of Villejuif can also be interpreted from another point of view given the exaggeration articulated in this scene. While Yalaan has unflattering words for Villejuif, he insists on his profound state of seclusion as if he were besieged by a hostile population. Yalaan’s indication of a total absence of verbal communication with his neighbours is also worth noting when trying to establish the verisimilitude of the scene. In a similar vein, the reader is led to question the narrator’s degree of reliability: first, the portrait of the cat can be read as the portrait of the narrator himself, an echo and an imitation. Then, when the cat is ironically being praised for the undeniable integrity that he displays by keeping his distance from the neighbours, the reader may be surprised by the incongruity of the narrator’s strangling of his beloved pet. As such, the scene makes it possible to unveil new meanings by looking at the narrator’s incongruity.

The idea of confinement is further reinforced when considering Yalaan’s repeated incarcerations. Little is mentioned about the penal institution itself, but a conversation between Yalaan and Simone sheds light on the reasons for his last sentence: “After all, I spent six months in prison because of you, so don’t forget: that dumb peasant that called you an Arabo’s woman got his in a good beating. Don’t forget it. You know what that means for me: one more conviction and I’m deported” (44).⁹¹ As well as indicating the hostility with which Yalaan and Simone’s inter-racial relationship is met, this illustrates Yalaan’s increased sense of alienation and the growing anxiety associated with his fear of deportation. Yet, the reader is informed that the narrator has found the inspiration to put together a manuscript during his recent period of imprisonment:

I had the manuscript of *The Butts* under my arm. I had written it in prison, and I held it out for you as a gift and a promise that I made to you a long time ago. You insisted on leaving right away to take what I had written to Mac, whom you did not know. I only saw him this morning for the first time, and we talked amicably. More

⁹¹ “Pour toi en somme que j’ai tiré six mois de prison, rappelle-toi : cette espèce de cul-terreux qui t’a traitée de femme à crouillat, coups et blessures, rappelle-toi. Tu sais ce que cela signifie : une condamnation de plus et je suis expulsé” (63).

accurately, I used to write him when I had the price of a stamp, but he never answered me (44)⁹²

It is also the case that Yalaan's isolation is exacerbated by the total absence of a reciprocal correspondence with the French pundit, adding to the physical detention a further sense of intellectual estrangement. Thus, one may contend that the depiction of Villejuif and Yalaan's stay at the Santé prison contribute to the formulation of an unequivocal severity. However, Yalaan's remarks on the time spent in France appear to unsettle the idea of a definite gravity: "The only thing left of my drama was a pair of shoes. I looked at them. They were black, and they were laughing. Eight years in France, five of them in prison, three between two prison gates; a grandiose dream and death by gangrene. Imprisoned in a single woman, an Arabo's love" (60).⁹³ Of particular interest is the disruptive and destabilizing mention of laughter, which accompanies the personification of the shoes. The attribution of human qualities to an inanimate object introduces a new dimension in the story, especially since the shoes' laughter is loaded with mockery. Given that "personification operates in multiple registers – sensory and spiritual, visible and invisible, concrete and abstract – and it deals in facts, opinions, and beliefs" (Melion and Ramakers 1), the presence of a pair of laughing shoes complicates Yalaan's thinking on the time spent in France. The fact that the ability to laugh is attributed to a pair of shoes leads to the questioning of laughter's nature and function. Thus, the laughter functions here to turn Yalaan into an object of mockery, more specifically, told from the first-person perspective, the laughter indicates ironic self-deprecation. It should be noted, furthermore, that the enumeration, in a count-down manner, of Yalaan's misery and the laughter in the face of a broken dream reinforce the ridiculing of the narrator's enterprise.

The focus on the dialectical tension between Simone's house and the Parisian jail as principal locations in the narrative also allows for a variety of interpretations, such as the scene in which Yalaan, on the day of his release from prison, begs to be kept in jail:

That's when, for the first time, prison gates closed behind him – the gates of that prison he did not want to leave. He had done his time, but he was terror-stricken by

⁹² "J'avais sous le bras le manuscrit des BOUCS, je l'avais écrit en prison. Je te l'ai offert, un cadeau, une promesse que je t'avais faite il y a bien longtemps. Tu as tenu à partir tout de suite, présenter ce bouquin à Mac que tu ne connaissais pas, je l'ai vu ce matin pour la première fois, tout juste nous correspondions en termes amicaux – ou plutôt je lui écrivais quand j'avais un timbre, il ne me répondait jamais" (62).

⁹³ "Tout ce qu'il restait de mon drame, c'était une paire de souliers. Je les regardais. Ils étaient noirs et ils riaient. Huit ans en France, cinq en prison, trois entre deux portes de prison ; un rêve grandiose et mort de gangrène ; emprisonné en une seule femme, un amour de Bicot" (88).

the street and its noises and by all the problems he would have to solve again: food and drink and a roof over his head. He went back and begged the jailer to keep him in there. He said that he had killed and stolen and raped, but the guard grabbed him by the shoulders and shoved him into the street. The next door he went through was a priest's, at midnight, without knocking. To the priest he exemplified Islam's hypocrisy, but the Arab told him about his anxieties, which were sufficient to identify him with the anxieties of Christianity. He got a bowl of soup and a subway ticket. The next door was at the Algerian employment office. He went in with "Eureka" on his lips. "You're not disabled because of your job?" asked an Arab. "You don't have an incurable illness? You're not officially deported? Then we can't repatriate you. Out with you! Get out!" (91).⁹⁴

The seriousness of the scene lies in the agitated behaviour displayed by Yalaan who exhibits the signs of "gate fever, a syndrome marked by anxiety, irritability, and other symptoms that surface around the time of release" (Adams 336). Yet, one may contend that Yalaan's release in the third person also displays an ironic dimension. In fact, the scene brings together various elements that undermine its seriousness and one could argue that the harshness of the scene is mitigated by Yalaan's use of exaggeration and lies, but also by his forcible and grotesque expulsion by the prison warden. Additionally, the incongruity of his satirical encounter with the clergyman and the tragically comic overtone of his failed repatriation request converge in producing a humorous effect.

Yet, in line with Yalaan's dispiriting experience of migration a sense of nostalgia for a lost time and lost space accompanies the dispersal of North African labourers as described in the episode of Yalaan's work in the mines of Northern France:

There were a half-dozen Arabs with Waldik. They had no wives or any ties to the area: nothing more than a shack made of flimsy black boards and a stove they didn't know how to light, and cots that they avoided like the plague. They knew very well

⁹⁴ "[L]a porte de la prison se referma sur lui, la première – la porte de cette prison qu'il ne voulut pas franchir, sa peine purgée, plein d'appréhension devant la rue et ses stridences, pénétré de la terreur que de nouveau il allait avoir des nécessités à résoudre : le boire, le manger et le toit ; il se retourna, supplia le geôlier de le garder encore, lui révéla qu'il avait tué, volé, violé, et l'autre le saisit à bras-le-corps et le projeta dans la rue – celle d'un prêtre chez qui il pénétra à minuit, sans frapper, à qui il démontra l'hypocrisie de l'Islam, qu'il entretint de son inquiétude capable de s'identifier à celle du christianisme, et qui lui donna un bol de soupe et un ticket de métro – celle de l'office de son pays qu'il franchit en se répétant "Eurêka" : tu n'es pas invalide de travail ? lui dit un chaouch, tu n'es pas incurable ? tu n'es pas expulsé ? Alors, nous ne pouvons pas te rapatrier. Roh! fissa!" (133).

that sooner or later every night society forced them back among Arabs, stripped bare in front of one another like a group of castaways on a raft, with their terrible hunger for life – and that nostalgia for the soil of Africa that they did not talk about but which excited them all: black earth that broke into foam like a rising tide. (92-93)⁹⁵

The silent longing for the native soil carries a significant emotional weight, and resonates with Hutcheon's view that "It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power" (Hutcheon and Valdés, 20). Yet, through the use of a sea and water imagery, Chraïbi shows that in spite of the shared inaccessibility of a past time and space, the individual North African migrant drifts to a deeper sense of disconnection and succumbs to intense and life-threatening feelings of loss and yearning. However, one may still argue that Chraïbi's irony can also be found in the approach he adopts towards nostalgia, as in the episode of the radio when Yalaan hears the voice of a sheikh reciting the Quran:

But there was something more than words, and he had no need to comprehend. This Koranic incantation went beyond words or ideas or human values. He realized that he was crying. As he realized without looking around that all the other Arabs were crying. Making no noise and shedding no tears, their faces set and their eyes stony: as a tree in a back corner of a building would, or an aging lion in a zoo would cry. (96)⁹⁶

If the feelings of isolation are exacerbated by the on-air religious recitation, the depiction of the migrants' sense of remoteness is reinforced by the idea of an internalized and suppressed sadness. It is also possible to read the dehumanizing effects of the migration experience through Chraïbi's mention of the apathic and monolithic migrants' tearless cries. Yet, the presence of motionless floral and animalistic motives through direct comparisons serves to suggest a further distancing of the migrants from human condition.

⁹⁵ "Il y avait une demi-douzaine d'Arabes avec Waldik. Ils n'avaient pas de femmes, pas de liens avec le pays : rien qu'une cabane de planches noires et disjointes, avec un Godin qu'ils ne savaient pas allumer, et des lits de camp – et qu'ils fuyaient tacitement comme la peste. Car ils savaient que là, tôt ou tard, tous les soirs, la société les faisait se retrouver, entre Arabes, nus les uns pour les autres, comme un groupe de naufragés sur un radeau, avec leur faim atroce de la vie – et cette nostalgie de la terre africaine dont ils ne parlaient pas mais qui les animait tous : noire et déferlante comme un raz-de-marée" (135).

⁹⁶ "Mais il y avait autre chose que les mots et il n'avait pas besoin de comprendre. Cet incantatoire Koranique qui dépassait les mots, les idées et les valeurs humaines. Maintenant il savait qu'il pleurerait. Comme il savait sans qu'il eût besoin de se retourner que tous ces Arabes pleuraient. Sans bruit et sans larmes, la face figée et les yeux vitrifiés : comme pleurerait un arbre au fond d'une obscure cour d'immeuble ou un vieux lion dans un zoo" (140).

When aiming to identify instances of genealogical accounting in the novel, Yalaan's journey does not receive significant attention, rather it is succinctly mentioned during the conversation between ten-year-old Yalaan and the priest in Bône with the result that the young boy embarks for France. Interestingly, the novel indicates a sea journey performed by 18-year-old Yalaan and reported during the lengthy conversation with the commissioner at the processing centre:

Billboards with posters in our good old city of Algiers for the benefit of those poor dumb Arabs that announce in big red letters that workers are needed in France, that democracy abounds in France, that all you have to do is go down to such-and-such an agency and they'll even pay your trip . . . When I went to the agency, they wanted some money down, so I got across the sea in my own way: in a tar-barrel. The result was the same. Your boss and your colleagues all got their money down. The only difference was that they took everything except the last clothes on my back. (77)⁹⁷

Not only does Yalaan describe the economics of immigration in Algeria, but he also insists on the horrendous conditions of his sea crossing and delivers a critique of the Franco-Algerian migration industry characterized by rampant corruption. An ironic overtone can be read through the general deformation that Yalaan applies when he is referring to the city, the candidates to migration, and the country of destination. On the one hand, the deformation through inflation reinforces Yalaan's sense of vulnerability and degradation, on the other, it identifies specific targets and ridicules them through satire.

Furthermore, a clear quest motif permeates *Les Boucs*, and as a matter of fact, Yalaan's ambition to publish a book on the life of his co-ethnics in France is central to the narrative and gives Chraïbi the opportunity to question the notion of pain and suffering in such context:

my responsibility was not to redeem myself vis-à-vis the society I am living in because I have a claim to its sympathy, *but that I must redeem North Africans*. Suffer for them in my dignity as a man and in my flesh as a man. That is what I have been

⁹⁷ “Des panneaux publicitaires en la bonne vieille ville d’Alger, à l’intention de ces pauvres gourdes d’Arabes, et qui proclament en lettres rouges et immenses que la main-d’œuvre manque en France, que la démocratie abonde en France, qu’il n’y a qu’à s’inscrire dans telle agence qui supporterait même les frais de voyage... lorsque j’y suis allé, on m’a demandé des arrhes – et j’ai préféré franchir la mer par mes propres moyens : dans un fût qui avait contenu du goudron. Mais le résultat a été le même : votre patron et vos contremaîtres ont eu leurs arrhes, à cette différence près qu’ils m’ont arraché jusqu’à ma veste” (112-113).

doing for five years. Then translate that into a sort of testimony, not of my senses, but of my sufferings. (45-46)⁹⁸

Yalaan's arduous quest is marked by a collective dimension, and his painful literary enterprise takes the form of a redemptive mission in which Yalaan assumes the role of a saviour. The allusions to redemption serve to signal Yalaan's search for deliverance through the use of Christian terminology and imagery. Chraïbi's choice of a Christian symbolism when depicting Yalaan's odyssey can be interpreted in various ways, yet, the portrayal of Yalaan's mission through the use of a Christian jargon brings forth the narrator's ambivalence that leads the reader to question the notions of mimicry and mockery when dealing with prophethood.

The grave portrayal of Yalaan's messianic mission is elaborated through the evocation of the narrator's physical and moral sufferings, thereby adding to the seriousness of his pursuit, but the reading of Yalaan's quest is further complicated by his unconvincing preaching attempts:

To them, Waldik was a Christian. He tried – and Rauss seconded him – to explain to them why he wanted to expose their miseries in the form of a book: explained that a book was a kind of folded newspaper of some three hundred pages that would be completely devoted to telling their story. One of them shrugged his shoulders – a periodic twitch. They said nothing about their dignity as wounded pariahs. To express it or understand it would have seemed a weakness to them. At most, they cited the case of the guinea-pigs of the house in Nanterre and went right on treating him like a Christian (101).⁹⁹

Yalaan's failure in exhorting his companions in misfortune is of particular interest as it highlights first, his inability to gain the confidence of his compatriots, and then the growing distance that separates the aspirant prophet from the unemployed migrant labourers who

⁹⁸ “[J]e devais, non pas me racheter individuellement vis-à-vis de la société dans laquelle je vis pour que j’aie droit à sa sympathie, mais racheter les Nord-Africains. Pour eux souffrir dans ma dignité d’homme et dans ma chair d’homme. Voilà ce que j’ai fait pendant cinq ans. Puis traduire cela en une espèce de témoignage, non pas de mes sens, mais de mes souffrances” (65).

⁹⁹ “Waldik était pour eux un Chrétien. Il tenta – et Raus le soutint – de leur expliquer pourquoi il voulait étaler leurs misères à tous sous la forme d’un livre : leur expliquant ce qu’était un livre, une sorte de journal plié en trois cents pages qui leur serait entièrement consacré. Il y en eut un qui haussa les épaules – un tic périodique. Ils ne dirent pas leur dignité de parias blessés, l’expression ou le simple entendement en eût été une faillite, citèrent tout au plus le cas des cobayes de la maison de Nanterre, continuèrent de le traiter en Chrétien” (147-148).

refuse his proposal. While Yalaan puts in his best effort to persuade his comrades, in return they offer little response and, worse still, he remains an outsider. Rauss's support is ineffective and Yalaan's verbosity, through the over-detailed description of what a book is, contrasts sharply with the labourers' unwillingness to break the silence and touches on the absence of a diasporic cohesion among the North Africans. Additionally, the use of the term Christian calls into question the idea of proximity and distance in diasporic settings while putting forward the issue of stereotype. The heterogeneity of the North African diaspora is underscored here and, in the eyes of the North African migrants, Yalaan is and remains a Christian, orienting the reader to question the role of Yalaan, in the particular context of the North African diaspora, as an outsider.

The peculiarity of Yalaan's position opens up the discussion on the role of hybridity in the Maghrebi diaspora as Yalaan is perceived by his fellow countrymen not only as being different from the rest of the group but also as a foreigner who sides with the French population, in other words the portrait of Yalaan serves to illustrate the distance that separates him from the rest of the group. The labelling of Yalaan as Christian contributes to further his sense of alienation and can be read as a subtle mockery that targets a probable native informant whose incitement to revolt is met with scepticism: "One night he told them with sobs in his voice that he had come back to France only for them, that they should cry out, revolt, do anything other than squat there ... He rose to his feet and went about kissing each one's hand. That night too the same Arabo shrugged the same shoulders (103)."¹⁰⁰ It is also worth noting that in Yalaan's failed verbose attempts to convince his fellow countrymen to rise up, the North African outcasts are characterized by their silence and their bodily gestures. And in this scene the contrast is accentuated by the imbalance between the exaggerated theatricality of Yalaan's gesticulation and the repetitive, almost mechanical migrants' attitude of rejection expressed through shoulder gesture, as if they were reduced to being bodies, and body parts.

In addition, Yalaan's quest is also supported by abundant indications of a collective past which display an attempt to connect Yalaan and the Arab labourers to a common ancestry, as expressed by Rauss during a conversation with Yalaan:

¹⁰⁰ "Il leur dit un soir avec des sanglots qu'il n'était revenu en France que pour eux, qu'il fallait crier, se révolter, faire n'importe quoi plutôt que de croupir ainsi... Il se leva et leur baisa la main à tous. Ce soir-là le même Bicot haussa la même épaule" (151).

What I can't admit, what gets me confused, is this: when, how, and in what dark destiny of God could I ever have loved you? ... That day it was like getting a load off my back. Unloading my present, my past and my future, as well as our lay blood, a few civilizations' blood removed from what made Arab steeds and Arab conquerors gallop on in that time of hegira of sand, of thirst and of faith, and with every gallop, the credo: "Thou shalt live, not by the rhythm, but with the intensity of the galloping..." Yes, not very far distant: several centuries' wisps of straw in the maw of time, several wars that made merchants out of us, several stains on honour and dignity, but the race is still there with its nose forever Semitic, still living with the rhythm of the earth – just as our blood ever since then had traced it in our veins: "That man there," my blood said, "is one you will love. Without ever asking why. Completely, without an iota of intelligence or of hope. With the fanaticism of religion." I have doubts, my brother (34-35).¹⁰¹

This intervention in the first person shows that Rauss believes he shares a common ancestry with Yalaan, yet one may argue that Rauss' attitude towards his shared lineage is marked by a certain ambiguity. While on the one hand Rauss rejoices in the survival of the Arab race, on the other, the Arab victory over disappearance and extinction is accompanied by a set of moral obligations that Rauss brings up with scorching irony. The glorification of the collective past is accompanied by ironic remarks on the duty of unconditional love towards the members of the group. The attribution of a voice to the race's blood contributes to the incongruity of the scene in which the command to love one another takes the form of a quasi-divine precept, tinged with a hint of irony given the paradoxical nature of the order that leaves no space for intelligence, choice nor hope. In addition to the magnified glorification of a collective ancestry and the personification of blood through its ability to speak, the controversial nature of Rauss's intervention is that he ironically ends up expressing doubts

¹⁰¹ "Ce que je suis incapable d'admettre, ce qui fait mon désarroi, c'est : quand, comment et dans quel ténébreux destin de Dieu ai-je pu t'aimer ? ... Ce jour-là, ce fut comme si je m'étais déchargé. Vrac de mes présent, passé et futur, ainsi que notre sang séculaire – à peu de civilisations près le même sang que celui qui faisait galoper les destriers et les conquérants arabes en cette époque hégérienne de sable, de soif et de foi, avec à chaque galopée le credo : « Tu vivras avec, non pas le rythme, mais l'intensité de ce galop »... Oui, à peu de choses près : quelques siècles brins de paille dans le gouffre du temps, quelques guerres qui nous ont faits marchands, quelques souillures de l'honneur et de la dignité, mais la race est toujours là avec le nez à jamais sémitique et vivant toujours au rythme même de la terre – ainsi que notre sang l'a tracé en nos veines depuis cette époque-là : « Celui-là, m'a dit mon sang, tu l'aimeras. Sans jamais te demander pourquoi. Complètement, sans un iota d'intellect ou d'espoir. Avec le fanatisme d'une religion. » Je doute, frère" (47-48).

about the strict observance of ancestral moral obligations, thus offering a critique of both the blind obedience to antiquated principles and the belief in a radical form of brotherly love.

Yalaan too, in a conversation with Simone, shows interest in his distant genealogy: “But even if the whole creation of the Western World were to be consumed, I would say: “My forebears were Arabs, and I have lived as an Arab. I found them deeply committed, not to a belief or a destiny, but to their immemorial misery, and I will follow their path to the end: misery certainly must lead to something” (41).¹⁰² Yalaan’s contemplation stands sharply in contrast to Rauss’s glorification of the Arab past. The insistence is on the long-term desolation of Yalaan’s progenitors and on the narrator’s resigned acceptance of an inherited and unescapable wretched condition. Yet, Yalaan’s final remark deflects the severity of the unfavourable predestination by ironizing on the undetermined destination, in doing so he diminishes the seriousness of his condition.

With regard to the characters’ manifestations of nostalgia as “intimately tied to a sense of displacement” (Quayson 149), another observation is that the longing for an elsewhere different from the homeland is also expressed during Yalaan’s winter stay with the migrants:

One night Waldik woke up with a start. There was a sudden bustling about like the eve of a holiday. An Arabo put his fingers to his lips. Sh! Someone has found a guidebook, and everyone had a right to say something, under the chairmanship of the Corporal.

- “Rome,” said one.
- “Damascus,” said another.
- “New York,” chimed in a third. (102)¹⁰³

¹⁰² “Mais, lorsque bien même se sera consumée toute la création de l’Occident, je dirai : “mes aïeux étaient des Arabes et j’ai vécu comme un Arabe ; et je les ai trouvés ancrés, non pas dans une croyance ou une fatalité, mais dans leur misère immémoriale et je suivrai leur voie jusqu’au bout : la misère mène sans doute quelque part” (58-59).

¹⁰³ “Une nuit Waldik se réveilla en sursaut. C’était un remue-ménage soudain, comme à la veille d’une fête. Un Bicot posait le doigt sur les lèvres, chut ! l’on découvrait un planisphère, un indicateur Chaix, et tous avaient le droit à la parole, sous la présidence du Caporal.

- Rome, disait l’un.
- Damas, disait l’autre.
- New York, tranchait un troisième” (149-150).

Interestingly, the consultation around the world map is described in a condensed manner that singles out the three potential destinations while simultaneously highlighting Yalaan's remoteness and reiterating the Corporal's standing at the top of the established hierarchy. Regardless of their silence, Yalaan and the Corporal adhere to the project of boarding ship for New York:

They were all leaving the next day for New York. The train would leave at 6:02. There was a wait of about three hours in Le Havre for registering baggage, for customs and passport inspection. They waved those passports like excited dwarfs under the lamp light, passed them from hand to hand, and outdid one another in going over the nameless problems in getting a visa. (103)¹⁰⁴

The remarks on the laborious acquisition process of legal travel documents are accompanied by a grotesque depiction of the North African migrants turned into undersized creatures. Such process allows for a ridiculing of the would-be travellers' smallness in proportion with the enormousness of their undertaking. Added to this, the distorted representation of the cruise enthusiasts is conducted through the reduction of the characters' bodies solely to their hands, that is through the isolation of exaggerated body parts, contributing thereby to the creation of a particularly grotesque atmosphere. And out of the three potential destinations, New York is given preference over Rome and Damascus, yet the dream of embarking on the Queen Mary ship from Le Havre evaporates:

It was only due to his reflexes that Waldik was not reduced to a pulp. He jumped up and in two leaps was at the threshold. Inside, arms and legs tangled together, knives gleamed and glowed late into the night, and without a single cry or complaint the multiform and barbaric fighters struggled on, goaded by that idiot dream that they had just dreamed in common, the dream of a voyage that they had never made and of a freedom that they would never know. (103)¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ "Ils partaient tous le lendemain pour New York. Le train démarrait à 6 h. 02. Il y avait environ 3 heures d'attente au Havre pour l'enregistrement des bagages, la douane, l'examen des passeports. Ils les agitaient, ces passeports, gnomes surexcités dans la lumière de la lampe, se les passaient de main en main, surenchérissant sur les difficultés sans nombre qu'ils avaient eues pour l'obtention d'un visa" (150).

¹⁰⁵ "Waldik ne dut qu'à ses réflexes de ne pas être réduit en écrabouillis. Il sortit en deux bonds, s'arrêta sur le seuil – des bras et des jambes s'enchevêtraient, des couteaux brillaient et rougissaient, tard dans la nuit, sans un seul cri, une seule plainte, lutteurs multiformes et barbares, comme décuplés par ce rêve idiot qu'ils venaient de faire en commun : d'un voyage qu'ils n'avaient jamais fait ou d'une libération qu'ils ne vivraient jamais" (150-151).

The attention is drawn more than to the symbolism of the three destinations, than to the pejorative depiction of the oneiric vision itself. Among the inhospitable characteristics of the communal life, the menacing presence of cutting utensils as potential weapons shows the dangerousness of Yalaan's diasporic condition, and the frightening chaos in which undistinguishable migrants are reduced to an interweaving of disjointed body members. It is opportune to give attention to the narrator's emphasis on the voicelessness attached to the overly agitated and scaled-down characters who have undergone a dramatic transformation into lethargic, mute, uncivilized yet protean combatants. This metamorphosis is taking place in parallel with the transformation of the uplifting yearning to leave the caves of the Parisian periphery into a foolish and shared fantasy.

Through the mocking of the common dream it is the community's quixotic pursuit that is being targeted, and the inefficiency of the group effort to break out of subjection becomes the object of ridicule. While taking a critical look at the Arabs' "utopian yearnings and constructions" (Quayson 153), it becomes clear that Chraïbi's exploration of the diasporic imaginary in the context of the North African diaspora in France is characterized in *Les Boucs* by a general sense of resignation coupled with a readiness for further imminent departures. As the narrator says, "An Arabo is always ready to move on, resignedly" (46).¹⁰⁶ Yalaan's remark points to the immigrants' instability and reinforces the tragic dimension of their fragile condition. Yet, Yalaan's stance differs greatly from the rest of the group, and one may argue that his emotional torment stems from rejecting what he considers to be a form of blind acceptance that is widespread among his fellow countrymen. Expressed in the form of an inner monologue after the encounter with Mac O'Mac, Yalaan's anger is one of extreme exasperation upon returning to Algeria:

As far as I am concerned, fine! This self that is going to leave, that has nothing more to look forward to in France, I am going to provide him with something more that [sic] just a bunch of dates in exchange for the airplane ticket he is so ready to purchase for me. I'm ready to leave him my inheritance in France: even Simone and my son. And even the Butts! And my memories and my little moments of happiness. My experiences. A literary bastard! He could get a novel out of it, a mistress, a little shoeshine boy, whatever he wants – even if these notions continue to be like knots of suffering in my gullet. He has the style and the ease and the mixture of a businessman,

¹⁰⁶ "Un bicot est toujours prêt à partir, à se résigner" (66).

completely patented and with official recognition of public services. “God!” I said out loud, “deliver me from my past” (63).¹⁰⁷

Yalaan does not make any mention of his attachment to the homeland, instead he places the emphasis on the hostland, his shattered dreams and Mac O’Mac’s crookedness. The hostland has nothing more to offer, and the disillusioned first-person interior monologue includes a satirical take on the figure of the French intellectual. An ironic sense of bitter pride emerges from the alleged legacy that Yalaan wants to pass on, a patrimony that takes the form of an odd transaction in which his partner and his son are reified, thereby marking not only the failure of Yalaan’s literary pursuit but also insisting on the negation and dissolution of his family ties.

In addition, one of the recurring motifs consists in Yalaan’s recollection of his first and crucial encounter with the priest in Bône. These evocations are accompanied by regret and guilt about the deceitful chat between ten-year old Yalaan and the clergyman. Yet, Yalaan’s cry for help through divine imploration is less a proof that he cultivates a myth of return than an evidence of a sense of personal culpability over his failed quest. Beyond the flattering depiction of Mac O’Mac one cannot help but read the dithyrambic portrait of the French man of letters through a satirical lens that aims at the features of the pseudo-intellectual but also points by extension to those who validate his authority and take part in the intellectual fraud. The relationship between Yalaan the artist and Mac O’Mac plays a prominent role in the novel and consequently a reading of *Les Boucs* as *Künstlerroman* helps explore Chraïbi’s interest in the condition of the North African migrant as an artist in post-World War II France.

1.2.2 Yalaan the Migrant Artist

Chraïbi’s novel can be read as a variation of the *bildungsroman* as it deals in part with the maturation process of Yalaan Waldik as an artist. Despite the fact that *Les Boucs* does not satisfy all the criteria of the *Künstlerroman*,¹⁰⁸ a close consideration of “three prevalent and

¹⁰⁷ “A ce compte-là, très bien ! moi qui vais partir, moi qui n’ai plus rien à espérer en France, je suis prêt à lui donner bien autre chose que des dattes, en échange du billet d’avion qu’il veut bien me payer. Prêt à lui laisser mon héritage en France : même Simone et même mon fils. Et les Boucs donc ! et mes souvenirs et mes petites joies. Expériences. Bâtarde de littérature ! il pourra en faire un roman, une maîtresse, un petit cireur, n’importe quoi – même si toutes ces notions continuent d’être dans ma gorge des boules de souffrance. Puisqu’il a le style et l’aisance et le brassement de l’homme d’affaires, brevetés et reconnus d’utilité publique. - Dieu ! dis-je tout haut, délivrez-moi de mon passé” (93).

¹⁰⁸ For a definition of the *Künstlerroman*, see Roberta Seret’s “Introduction” to *Voyage Into Creativity*.

recurring themes, all in the form of metaphorical voyages: psychological voyage, social voyage, and artistic voyage” (Seret 9) may prove valuable.

While Yalaan’s childhood receives little attention, his early years are not completely ignored as is made clear by the mention of his crucial encounter with the priest in Bône at the age of ten. Yet, limited consideration is given to his adolescence, and there is no mention of a school experience prior to his journey to France. Interestingly, Yalaan’s formative years along with his experience at home or with friends are not given any consideration, which consequently assigns to the clergyman’s brief talk a predominant role in the young boy’s search for fulfilment. It is interesting to note the strikingly ironic contrast between the priest’s successful argumentation that manages to convince Yalaan by insisting on the intellectual advantages that would accompany the young boy’s departure for France, and Yalaan’s line of reasoning used to convince his father through the promise of further colossal and disproportionate financial gains under the condition that he sells his last goat to finance the boy’s journey to France. In other words, the paralleling of the two consultations brings the reader closer to the ambivalence at the root of Yalaan’s departure which calls into question the role that misunderstandings, hope and deception play in the young artist’s development.

Moreover, through the conversations with his father and with the priest, it appears that the psychological voyage of the Berber boy is devoid of any anticipation of a future artistic enterprise. The eight years that separate the encounter with the clergyman in Bône (1937-1938) and the arrival in France (winter 1945-1946)¹⁰⁹ are passed over in silence, and result in a void over the artist’s formative years, hence excluding the idea of an early inclination toward artistic undertakings on the part of the Maghrebi artist-protagonist.

If Yalaan’s psychological voyage makes little room for childhood recollections and focuses mainly on the development of the artist as a young adult, the positioning of the encounter with the priest at the end of the non-chronological sequence of events, can also be read as a sarcastic denouement in its relating the incongruous genesis of Yalaan’s odyssey. In turn, a reading of Yalaan’s psychological voyage through the prism of the last scene suggests the need for a second level of reading. In fact, the last scene reinforces the idea of a second level of reading beneath the surface of the text and in which the unsaid meanings of Yalaan’s

¹⁰⁹ For a chronological timeline of *Les Boucs*, see Legras 22-29.

psychological voyage are unveiled through a closer attention to the varied and multifarious aspects of irony.

Undoubtedly, the social voyage of Yalaan is a tormented identity quest in which the position of the artist vis-à-vis French society is a combination of both observation and participation. One may argue that the manuscript produced by Yalaan during his time in prison is the result of a meticulous observation of the French society. However, a close look at the text indicates that Yalaan gazes at a plurality of directions. For instance, the encounter between Yalaan and the commissioner at the immigration centre reveals the disillusion of the immigrant who comes to realize that France is not the hospitable destination he had hoped for:

It seemed he was opening his eyes for the first time since he had arrived in France. He contemplated him with care, like a bull he'd been told to slaughter: hybrid nose and moustache, the skin the colour of ashes and saffron, the glottis of a bird, the hollow torso, the twig-like legs and arms... and the look of distress, incommensurate and unhealthy, that he had never seen in a reptile ... Lying on the floor with the flat-iron for a pillow, Waldik had his eyes wide open ... Other Arabs had come in and gone out, thin and emaciated, so much alike that they all put on the same drab, faded mask, with one more punch in their unemployment card that they carefully put away in their wallet, folded over and tied shut, before they went out. Once through the door, it seemed he could almost hear them live: all their surliness, all the negation of their life bursting forth in a veritable rosary of insults. He stood there for quite a while, holding his rectangle of blue cardboard, changing it from one hand to the other, turning it over and upside down, weighing it and sniffing at it until finally he understood (74-76).¹¹⁰

By directing his gaze towards the commissioner and his fellow countrymen, it is Yalaan's central aim of understanding his new environment that is being underscored, and his position

¹¹⁰ "C'était comme si ses yeux venaient de s'ouvrir pour la première fois en France. Il le considéra soigneusement, comme un taureau qu'on lui demandait d'abattre: nez et moustache hybrides, peau couleur de cendre et de safran, glotte de volaille, torse creux, membre de bois... et cette détresse surtout, incommensurable et malsaine, qu'il n'avait même pas vue aux reptiles... Couché sur le seuil, avec le fer à repasser en guise d'oreiller, Waldik avait à présent les yeux bien ouverts ... Des arabes étaient entrés, sortis, maigres et faméliques, tous semblables comme s'ils avaient tous mis le même masque terne et floche, avec un trou de plus dans leur carte de chômage qu'ils rangeaient soigneusement dans leur portefeuille, plié en quatre et ficelé, avant de sortir. La porte franchie, il lui semblait les entendre vivre : toute leur hargne, toute la négation de leur vie éjectées en un chapelet d'insultes. Il resta longtemps, debout, immobile, avec son rectangle de carton bleu à la main, le faisant lentement passer d'une main à l'autre, le retournant et l'inversant, le soupesant et le reniflant, jusqu'à ce qu'il eût compris" (107-111).

of marginality. While a direct indication of any attempt to study and record his experience cannot be found, it should be pointed out that the peculiarity of Yalaan's portrayals of Mr Dupont and the Arabs lies in the presence of an incongruous animal imagery that adds to the unsettling grotesque dimension of the episode. From the perspective of the commissioner the episode of the unemployment card takes an incongruous turn:

Then he saw Waldik's eyes. They had suddenly gone dead, like someone anesthetized. Dupont had hardly taken his arm from his shoulder when Waldik jumped into the air and landed on the balls of his feet, crouching, a trapped animal, cornered and bruised, it seemed to him, but still with a little spark of life, the only thing he could defend and savagely hold on to, and worth a strength capable of cutting four men with four rifles into pieces – haggard, panting for breath, his muscles twitching and his teeth grinding together, he was shaking with rage at this mockery devised by a man placed (for he could not be a part of his activities) on the edges of society like a kind of residue: the mockery of the rectangle of cardboard that you had to have to be in proper standing in a society that rejected you and that you could just as well frame on the wall like the image of a saint. “I ate it,” said Waldik, syllable by syllable. “I ate my unemployment card. But it didn't give me any nourishment. I need a kilo of them a day, and I'll be here every God-created day to demand a kilo of unemployment cards. That's how many I'll need (76-77).¹¹¹

Yalaan's marginal position is reinforced by the lengthy bureaucratic procedures that give him little hope for a brighter future. Yet, Yalaan's willingness to integrate into post-World War 2 France collides with the dehumanizing effects of being confined to a subaltern position. The brutality of the encounter results in the degrading of the migrant into an animal or a waste. His participation in the French society is in jeopardy as he remains in the periphery and cannot make any progress towards a feeling of group membership. Furthermore, the

¹¹¹ “Puis il vit les yeux de Waldik, soudain morts, comme anesthésiés. Il avait à peine retiré son bras que Waldik fit un bond en l'air et retomba sur la pointe des pieds, accroupi – bête traquée, acculée, meurtrie, lui sembla-t-il, mais possédant encore une toute petite étincelle de vie, la seule chose qu'elle pût encore défendre et à quoi elle tint sauvagement et capable de hacher quatre hommes avec quatre fusils, - haggard, le souffle et les muscles tressautant, et les mâchoires malaxant, triturant avec rage ce dérisoire schéma de l'homme placé (parce qu'il ne pouvait pas prendre part à son activité) à la lisière de la société, comme un détrit : dérisoire rectangle de carton qu'il fallait posséder pour être *en règle* avec la société qui vous rejetait et que l'on pouvait encadrer comme une image sainte. – Je l'ai mangé, dit Waldik, détachant bien les syllabes. J'ai mangé ma carte de chômage. Mais ça ne m'a pas nourri. Il m'en faut un kilo par jour – et je serai ici tous les jours créés par Dieu et je vous réclamerai un kilo de cartes de chômage : c'est la quantité qu'il me faut” (111-112).

assignment of a sacred value to the unemployment card allows for the mockery of a piece of cardboard paper and by extension ridicules the absurdity of migration procedures. One can read unsaid meanings in Yalaan's views as, first, a denunciation of the hunger suffered by thousands of North African migrants confined to the suburbs of the capital; second, a condemnation of the holiness attributed to an excessive and inefficient bureaucracy. Either way, through the Rabelaisian appetite of the famished migrant Chraïbi satirically attacks all those involved in the implementation of absurd red tape, and it should be added that the blind followers of the French administrative machine are also targeted by Yalaan's irony who sharpens his satiric attack by deriding the pitiful powerlessness and inefficiency of the Communion wafer-like unemployment card.

Chraïbi insists strongly on the narrator's ability to scrutinize his new environment and during a conversation with Simone after being released from jail, Yalaan stresses the importance of the act of seeing, watching and observing:

When I met you four years ago, my first words were about the Arabos. Those 300,000 North Africans. And I, speaking and writing in French, trying to transmit their misery and their distress. If you count sixty kilos per Arab, you end up with some 20,000 tons of suffering. That day I saw your eyes, Simone. They were human. Neither beautiful nor enthusiastic. Not even a woman's eyes. Simply human, and I thought I saw in them, as Antony did in Cleopatra's, a whole flight of galleys. I said to myself: if only a single pair of European eyes would agree to *see* my 300,000 Arabos, their miseries would disappear (46).¹¹²

The urge to talk about migrants is unequivocal for Yalaan, and it becomes a source of inspiration for his manuscript. Interestingly, the emphasis is put on Yalaan's and Simone's eyes, which indicates that a hierarchy is established in the sense that Yalaan believes the condition of the North Africans could be improved if physically seen and not only distantly and abstractly acknowledged by Europeans. Yalaan's observations can be interpreted as a relative admission of failure given that in spite of the enormous population concerned, and

¹¹² “Je t'ai rencontrée, il y a quatre ans – et mes premières paroles furent pour les Bicots. Ces 300 000 Nord-Africains, moi parlant le français et sachant l'écrire, traduire leurs misères, leurs détresses. Je ne dis pas une cause, le mot est absurde. Mais, à raison de 60 kilos par Arabe, cela fait presque 20 000 tonnes de souffrance. Ce jour-là, Simone, j'ai vu tes yeux. Ils étaient humains. Ni beaux, ni enthousiasmés – pas même des yeux de femme. Simplement humains. Où je crus voir, comme Antoine dans ceux de Cléopâtre, toute une fuite de galères. Je me disais : si une seule paire d'yeux européens acceptait de *voir* mes 300 000 Bicots, aussitôt fuiraient leurs misères” (65-66).

the solemnity of his plea, he recognizes his own limitations and understands the value of being the object of the European's gaze. In other words, Yalaan is aware of the transformative potential associated with observation when performed by the French natives: the irony lies in the unbalanced relationship between the colossal 20 000 tons of suffering and the disproportionate potency of the Westerners' eyeballs.

Aside from being rejected by the members of the North African community, as an artist Yalaan fails to participate in the French society as indicated by his peculiar relationship with the French intellectual who sends him back to Algeria after breaking up with Simone and trying to commit suicide. On the verge of madness, and perceived as a Christian by his fellow countrymen, Yalaan is gradually viewed as a misfit who repeatedly clashes with the society and individuals he comes in contact with. Far from being accepted as a creative person, Yalaan is left to ponder on his own role within society. In his journey through art, Yalaan encounters various "messengers of love, death, and immorality" (Seret 11-12). Yet, the centre of Yalaan's attention during his stay in prison is the manuscript that relates the life of the North Africans in France:

Coming out of prison was life, Simone. The beginning of life. For me and for you. But to carry something inside yourself, deeply, intensely, for a very long time, like an ulcer – and to act always thinking of that ulcer, not man, not beast, from that poison to another, ashamed, belittled, beaten, but with the conviction that as long as you carry that something inside, nothing can happen to you, nothing can vilify you in your own eyes, just as Christ carried his cross, the conviction that words signify nothing, change nothing, neither systems nor hovels nor gifts of money or of nature; the conviction that I, the element in that checkered mosaic that Press Agencies call North Africans, that my responsibility was not to redeem myself vis-à-vis the society I am living in because I have a claim to its sympathy, *but that I must redeem North Africans*. Suffer for them in my dignity as a man and in my flesh as a man. That is what I have been doing for five years. Then translate that into a sort of testimony, not of my senses, but of my sufferings. After that was done, I had to adjust to myself and to the society in which I had to live. I had to unearth the individual who had been forgotten for five years. It was not complicated (45-46).¹¹³

¹¹³ "Sortant de prison, c'était la vie, Simone. Le commencement de la vie. Pour moi et pour toi. Mais porter quelque chose en soi, profondément, intensément, depuis très longtemps, comme un ulcère – et agir en fonction de cet ulcère, même pas homme, même pas bête, de prison en prison, honni, méprisé, battu, mais avec la

In this context, Yalaan's release from prison marks the beginning of a new life in which his artistic project carries what appears to be a paradoxical value. For the ex-convict, the rendering of the life conditions of the migrants in a book is comparable to a protective pathology with talismanic properties. Moreover, through the use of oxymoron, the narrator adds to the apparently contradictory nature of his activity by pointing at the worthlessness of words and their inability to effect change. The mention of the Cross sheds light on the prophetic dimension Yalaan assigns to his artistic mission. What appears from the comparison with Christ's mission is the collective nature of Yalaan's undertaking, however, the artistic production alone does not bring satisfaction to the writer in his selfless pursuit, rather, it is the achievement of a collective redemption that can lead the artist to his self-realization. That is, Yalaan's self-realization is inseparable from the need to redeem the members of his community, and the value of his artistic project can only be measured in relation with his fellow countrymen's liberation.

The vigour with which the maturation of Yalaan's artistic enterprise is expressed contrasts sharply with the bleak atmosphere of his final moments with the Arabs during the 1953-1954 winter season: "Then just as quickly there was silence except for the snoring of those who, like a Booz from the century of steel, were sleeping. Through it all, Waldik, transformed into a pair of eyes, watched and reflected: *they no doubt have never lived; reflected: lived fully with hopes and desires and inhibitions*" (102).¹¹⁴ Adding to the mere observation of his fellow countrymen it is his refusal to conform to their cultural norms and behaviours that reinforces Yalaan's feeling of marginality. His role is now reduced to an observational one through which he comes to realize the immigrants' inhumane condition. As such, Yalaan's relationship with Simone, his artistic enterprise and suicide attempt converge towards the idea of a gradual awareness of inadequacy. His failure to adjust to his new environment and make sense of its inconsistencies is further reinforced by the *mise en abîme*

conviction que tant que l'on porte ce quelque chose rien ne peut vous arriver, ni vous avilir à vos propres yeux, exactement comme le Christ a porté sa croix ; la conviction que les mots ne signifient rien, ne changent rien à rien, ni les systèmes, ni des baraques, ni des dons en espèces ou en nature ; la conviction que moi, élément de cette mosaïque bigarré que les Agences de presse nomment les Nord-Africains, je devais, non pas me racheter individuellement vis-à-vis de la société dans laquelle je vis pour que j'aie droit à sa sympathie, *mais racheter les Nord-Africains*. Pour eux souffrir dans ma dignité d'homme et dans ma chair d'homme. Voilà ce que j'ai fait pendant cinq ans. Puis traduire cela en une espèce de témoignage, non pas de mes sens, mais de mes souffrances. En suite de quoi, je devais composer avec moi-même, avec la vie sociale que je devais vivre. Déterrer mon individu oublié depuis cinq ans. C'était simple" (64-65).

¹¹⁴ "[P]uis chues d'un coup, saccadée comme les ronflements de ceux-là qui, Booz d'un siècle d'acier, dormaient – et Waldik, réduit à une paire d'yeux, regardait, pensant : *ils n'ont sans doute jamais vécu ; pensant : vécu en tout et pour tout des attentes, des désirs, des refoulements*" (149).

that serves to undermine the coherence of the narrative. The fact that Yalaan's text written in prison is ironically titled *Les Boucs* brings to light questions on the writing and the reading processes. Told in the first person and then in the third, the non-linear rendition of the Maghrebis' odyssey in France is further complicated by the worsening of Yalaan's mental health condition.

1.2.3 Migration and Mental Health

In reason of the dark tone with which Yalaan's psychological, social and artistic voyage is depicted, critics have overlooked the role of levity in *Les boucs*. Read through the lens of the Künstlerroman Yalaan's failed artistic enterprise and his unsuccessful integration offer a different level of signification; and if humorous episodes can be found in *Les Boucs*, the depiction of Yalaan's psychological voyage allows Chraïbi to bring together irony and elements that relate to mental health issues.

By way of tackling the intricacies of migration and mental health¹¹⁵ in Chraïbi's novel, Dinesh Bhugra and Susham Gupta's work of migration and mental health is of valuable interest as it provides an entry point to the examination of literary representations of mental disorders in *Les Boucs*. Among the various stages of migration, Chraïbi dwells upon Yalaan's post-migration to France, yet it is apparent that Yalaan deals with the difficulties and stress factors of migration at each stage: pre-migration, migration and post-migration. Through the representation of a variety of stress factors and stages of migration, Chraïbi leads the reader to a questioning of Yalaan's coping strategies. For Chraïbi the migration of the North African labourers is motivated by the pull factor of employment opportunities in France. In line with the push-pull theory of migration (Kumpikaite and Zickute) Yalaan follows the Relative deprivation theory of migration (Stark and Yitzhaki) according to which: "households send migrants to reduce their sense of relative deprivation compared to other nearby households. If households feel that they are poor compared to other households, this motivates them to send migrants elsewhere in order to increase their relative income" (Karpestam and Andersson 16).

¹¹⁵ In *Colonial Migrants and Racism. Algerians in France 1900-1963* Neil Macmaster writes: "The traumatic lives led by immigrants, their brutal confrontation with a harsh capitalist system, regulated by the clock and competitive individualism, and far removed from the supportive of Muslim village society, meant that Algerians suffered from high levels of disease, stress and mental illness" (93).

Textual evidence indicates that Yalaan's itinerary, much like his fellow countrymen's, adheres with the pull theory of migration¹¹⁶ which insists on the role played by "the factors associated with the area of destination" (Lee 50) and in particular the perceived "economic incentives" (Spring et al. 429) at the origin of the North African mass¹¹⁷ migration:¹¹⁸

Billboards with posters in our good old city of Algiers for the benefit of those poor dumb Arabs that announce in big red letters that workers are needed in France, that democracy abounds in France, that all you have to do is go down to such-and-such an agency and they'll even pay your trip (77).¹¹⁹

The addition of a political motivation for relocation to the economic one serves to recall that the French political system is perceived by the North African migrants as a factor of attraction. Yet, one can read irony in Yalaan's depiction of the misleading advertisement for migration that takes the form of a propaganda campaign. The unrealistic expectations of the immigrants are another important target for Yalaan's irony who mocks both his fellow countrymen's unrealistic belief and naivety while also undermining France's presumptuous self-worth. Interestingly, by focusing attention on the description of Yalaan's behaviour during his verbal exchange with the commissioner one can catch the young immigrant soliloquizing and this peculiar interruption in the conversation through self-talk signals of a distinctive state of confusion. Yalaan mentions the increased employment opportunities and the favourable political climate as the two main incentives for migration, but its accompanying stressors and the type of response from the individual and the group remain largely unaccounted for.

Given the role of employment prospects as a major drive in the migration decision-making process, unemployment¹²⁰ is a risk factor "which may cause further mental health problems after migration" (Bhugra and Gupta 98). If France presents itself as an attractive

¹¹⁶ In "The Determinants of International Migration. Conceptualising Policy, Origin and Destination Effects," Hein de Hass writes a critique of the "obsolete and theoretically uninformed push-pull and gravity models" (28).

¹¹⁷ For mass migration as "an example of collective behaviour," see Petersen 263.

¹¹⁸ For a competing explanation for mass migrations, see Greenhill 21.

¹¹⁹ "Des panneaux publicitaires en la bonne vieille ville d'Alger, à l'intention de ces pauvres gourdes d'Arabes, et qui proclament en lettres rouges et immenses que la main-d'œuvre manque en France, que la démocratie abonde en France, qu'il n'y a qu'à s'inscrire dans telle agence qui supporterait même les frais de voyage" (112).

¹²⁰ On the unemployment of immigrant Sayad writes: "Unemployment, for its part, can, despite everything, supply a semblance of justification because of its accidental and temporary character, as the search for work is, in this case, regarded by everyone as an act that rehabilitates the immigrant and restores him to his function as immigrant. This, however, is true only on condition that the period of unemployment does not last so long as to destroy all hope of ever going back to work or, which amounts to the same thing, becomes a structural given" (2004, 180).

labour market for the North African migrants, *Les Boucs* insists upon the negative effects of unemployment on Yalaan's mental health: "Don't ever come back," he yelled. "There is no work. No lodging. No help. No fraternity. There are only copper tags and forms to fill out and unemployment cards and promises. Nothing else. And me, I'm just an old goatskin full of fat and beer stuck to the flank of the bureaucracy (78)."¹²¹ When Yalaan receives his unemployment card from the commissioner, the realization of the scarcity of employment opportunities in France generates stress and anxiety in him, thereby suggesting that the disheartening news received upon his unwelcoming arrival in France play a substantial role in Yalaan's deteriorating mental health:

He had not even been angry. He now knew everything that he could expect from this life: a few crumbs. He tore up the money that Dupont had put in his hand when he left... He tore the money in two, four, in eight, in sixteen, in thirty-two pieces. Then he strewed the bits into the stream of rainwater running down the gutter. He knew that his future life would be like that too, leftovers, drifting. (78)¹²²

What emerges from the examination of Yalaan's individual post-migration factors is the prominence of the migrants' unfavourable economic condition in the host country. The adjustment to the French society is hampered by the antagonistic attitude of the French towards the immigrants. Perceptions of racial discrimination at the job-hunting level are included in Chraïbi's depiction of the North Africans' deprived environment: "Now and then the Corporal would open the door so they could hear for themselves. The contractor said the notice was already two days old, that he had hired some diggers, and that even if he had not done so, he wouldn't hire any damned Arabs (23)."¹²³ The effects of social exclusion through unemployment on Yalaan's fellow countrymen are noticeable when considering the character of the Corporal, one of the eldest migrants, "still a dirty Arabo after being in France since

¹²¹ "Ne reviens plus jamais, hurla-t-il. Il n'y a pas de travail, pas de gîte, pas d'aide, pas de fraternité. Que des plaques de cuivre, des interrogatoires d'identité, des cartes de chômage et des promesses. Rien d'autre. Et moi, je ne suis rien d'autre qu'une outre de graisse et de bière pendue au flanc de l'administration" (114).

¹²² "Et il n'eut même pas de colère. Car il savait maintenant que c'était tout ce qu'il pouvait attendre de cette vie : des miettes. Il déchira le billet de banque que Dupont lui avait mis dans la main en partant ... Il le déchira en deux, puis en quatre, puis en huit, en seize, en trente-deux, éparpilla les morceaux dans le ruisseau de la pluie récente, qui courait le long du trottoir. Et il savait que sa vie future serait ainsi, par bribes, à la dérive" (114-115).

¹²³ "De temps à autre, le Caporal entrouvrait la porte, les prenait tous à témoin – il dit que l'annonce date de deux jours, il dit qu'il a déjà engagé des terrassiers et que, même s'il ne l'avait pas fait, il ne voudrait pas de Bicots" (31).

1920, always or almost always, unemployed” (21).¹²⁴ Additionally, the vigour of the Corporal’s altercation with the contractor clearly indicates further distress and disturbance:

the Corporal went up to him. He got mad too, despite the warning that he should never get excited. Christians like calm, order, logic. A passive Arab with his glands atrophied and his soul shrivelled up could be of no interest to the man whatsoever ... But the Corporal’s head and bony hands began to jerk convulsively. He was screaming at the contractor. His eyes were yellow from worry, and his breath had the stink of hunger. He demanded to know if the man was the contractor himself, the person who had put up the notice about the jobs, but at the same time he tried to mollify him in case he was only an employee or a brother of the boss. Well, if that was it, no problem about it. He could finish up the arrangements in place of the head man. He and his Butts were willing to sign up with any old Christian, as long as he put a shovel, large or small, in their hands. And he went on to say that he was not hollering from anger, that he was begging him in what only sounded like anger, that he knew that the Christian (European, and what’s more a contractor, a man who not only had a job himself and a purpose in life, but who could give life as well as the means to live it to other people) would surely understand. (22-23)¹²⁵

The verbal exchange between the Corporal and the contractor takes a particular turn as it directs the focus to the difficulties of intercultural communication. One can argue that it is the fear of miscommunication that triggers the agitation of the Maghrebi migrant, yet the body gestures reinforce the hostile dimension of the encounter. The verbosity of the corporal, and the grotesque theatricality of his restless body call into question the binary logic that opposes, without a fail, the French and the North Africans. The power relation is unsettled by the desperate plea of the corporal whose poor physical health is put forward along with a

¹²⁴ “un Bicot mélancolique gratifié de ce grade parce qu’il séjournait en France depuis 1920 (toujours chômeur ou presque toujours)”(27).

¹²⁵ “[L]e caporal s’avança, se mit aussitôt en colère – et on lui avait dit qu’il ne fallait pas s’agiter, que le Chrétien aimait le calme, l’ordre, la logique, et qu’un *passif* d’Arabe fait de glandes atrophiées et d’âmes desséchées ne l’intéressait nullement ... mais sa tête et ses mains osseuses étaient prises d’un convulsif mouvement de bielle, tandis qu’il hurlait face à l’entrepreneur, avec ses yeux jaunis par la détresse et son haleine fétide d’affamé, lui demandant s’il était l’entrepreneur en personne, celui qui avait fait afficher l’annonce et qui demandait des terrassiers, mais à grands cris l’apaisant au cas où il n’en serait que le larbin ou le frère, que ça ne faisait rien, qu’il n’y voyait pas d’inconvénient quant à lui, il pourrait bel et bien conclure l’engagement au lieu et place du sus-dit, comme lui et ses Boucs étaient prêts à le faire avec n’importe quel autre Chrétien pourvu qu’il leur mît une truelle ou une pelle à la main – et il se disait que ce n’était nullement la colère mais une supplication qui s’exprimait sous forme de colère et que l’autre, Chrétien (Européen et, qui plus était, entrepreneur, c’est-à-dire un homme ayant non seulement un emploi et un sens de sa vie, mais procurant la vie ou le moyen de vivre à bien d’autres gens), comprendrait fort bien” (29-30).

logorrhoeic outrage which allows simultaneously for a feigned respect for and mockery of the imposed hierarchy. As a result of the escalating cycle of violent rejection, one of the responses to employment discrimination is the migrants' resorting to a lethal violence: "One by one, the Butts melted into the piles of rubble they were sitting on. And a breeze sprang up, smothering the sounds of the argument that was going on inside. It was late that night when two policemen on their nightly round went into the shack and found the body of the contractor with twenty-two knife wounds in it" (24).¹²⁶

When reading the text one can find indication of the push theory of migration in the last scene that retells the priest's persuasive force in convincing Yalaan to reach France: "He persuaded his father to sell his last goat by telling him that with the price of this single goat he could buy him a thousand, in ten years' time. And he left for France (123)."¹²⁷ Yalaan's participation in the labour migration to France stems from his low and disadvantaged socio-economic position in Algeria, and while the pre-migration planning process is unaccounted for, Yalaan's steadfastness and optimism should not distract from the fact that the priest sings the praises of migration to a ten-year-old child. In other words, the silence over the eight years between the initial encounter with the priest and the arrival in France puts a question mark on the pre-migration risk factors¹²⁸ associated with the waiting period prior to his voluntary migration to France. *Les Boucs* does not dwell on the pre-migration stage, rather it focuses on the process of migration and the post-migration period. Given that each stage has

¹²⁶ "Un à un, les Boucs se confondirent avec les tas sur lesquels ils étaient assis – et une bise se leva, noya l'altercation dans la baraque de bois. Ce ne fut que tard dans la nuit que deux agents, au cours de leur ronde, pénétrèrent dans le chantier à la recherche de vagabonds – et découvrirent le corps de l'entrepreneur troué de vingt-deux coups de couteau" (32).

¹²⁷ "Il persuada son père de vendre son dernier bouc, lui expliquant qu'avec le prix de ce bouc, il en pourrait acheter mille, dans dix ans. Et il s'embarqua vers la France" (181-182).

¹²⁸ On risk factors during pre-migration stage Moussaoui and Agoub indicate "During this stage, risk factors can be divided into two categories: factors depending on personal characteristics of migrants and those linked to environmental factors... Subjects with a history of mental disorders and alcohol and substance abuse are among the most vulnerable... Region of origin may be considered as a risk factor for some mental disorders, especially when the migrants come from remote and poor environments, such as the Rif region in Morocco. Migrants moving from a low-income country to a developed country are exposed to more psychological distress. Pre-migration traumatic events (violence, sexual abuse during childhood, civil war, ethnic cleansing and being close to death or suffering serious injury) are all risk factors for developing mental disorders, particularly depression and anxiety... Economic conditions are also a predictor of psychological distress. Poverty and unemployment lead to migration and to vulnerability among migrants. We can mention here perinatal consequences of poverty when it leads to malnutrition and its impact on the development of the fetal brain. Motivations to migration play a great role in migrant mental health. In the case of forced migration, subjects are not prepared and are traumatised by the decision to move and leave their home, their country and family" (100-111).

its own stress factors, a closer look at the post-migration stage can trace Yalaan's adjustments and reactions.¹²⁹

Yalaan's adaptation in the face of the new culture opposes the idea of post-World War II Europe as a migrant- and minority-friendly destination, as made explicit during his inner speech when he pays a visit to Mac:

I would never tell people who have stayed in Africa that the mirage of Europe eats like a tapeworm, to send their shoes instead of themselves. The only thing an Arabo can do in Europe is to walk – in search of happiness ... or, first of all to bring their own air, their own space, their own sun...; none of the propaganda of book, of periodical, or of philosophy is worth any more than this: the affirmation that comes from doubting. No, I would not tell them any of that. They have different eyes from mine, different nerves, different good will. There might come a time of understanding and even of mercy. I do not see myself as the representative of any person or thing whatsoever, except myself. Even those who love me – Rauss and the Butts – have always considered me a stranger, a case apart. But, good Lord, how I have learned to love what I was once (60-61).¹³⁰

Yalaan's negative reaction is directed towards Europe, its dishonest self-promotion in an undisputable favourable light, and the fallacious advertising that voluntarily omits to mention the risks attached to migration. Yalaan targets those who are responsible for the manipulative enterprise at the root of the North African mass migration, and he ironically unveils the propagandistic manipulation by offering an absurd set of recommendations and advice to future candidates for trans-Mediterranean migration. As for Yalaan's poor psychological

¹²⁹ On the migrant's experience of loss Bhugra et al. write "Following the process of migration and then settling down in the new society, the individual may experience cultural bereavement, culture shock or culture conflict. It is possible that all these may occur at the same time or may do so at different times or not at all. It is likely that cultural shock may occur probably soon after arrival, whereas cultural bereavement may take some time to develop. Cultural conflict is generally related to a difficulty between one's own cultural values in comparison with those of the family or the society at large" (139-140).

¹³⁰ "Je ne dirai jamais à ceux qui sont restés en Afrique mais que travaille comme un ténia le mirage de l'Europe, d'y expédier simplement leurs souliers : tout ce que peut faire un Bicot en Europe : mâcher – à la recherche du bonheur ... ou qu'au préalable, ils y amènent leur air, leur espace, leur soleil... ; ni que la propagande livresque, journalistique ou philosophique ne vaut que ce qu'elle vaut : affirmation issue du doute. Non, je ne leur dirais rien de tout cela. Ils ont d'autres yeux que les miens, d'autres nerfs, d'autres bonnes volentés – et peut-être viendrait-il un temps de compréhension, sinon de miséricorde. Je ne me crois représentant de qui ou de quoi que ce soit, hormis de moi. Ceux-là même qui m'aiment – Raus et les Boucs – m'ont toujours considéré comme un étranger, un cas à part. Mais mon Dieu, comme j'ai appris à aimer ce que naguère j'ai fui" (88-89).

adjustment, he acknowledges the exclusionary attitude of his community while recognizing the effect of being overtly rejected by the French and covertly rejected by the immigrants: paradoxically, he admits a closer proximity and attachment with the group he has long tried to detach himself from. In this sense, a series of elements are provided by Yalaan that enable the reader to gain more insight into the migrant's acculturation process:

I remember that banquet of rats. Pan-fried in their own grease and seasoned with shallots. Only Simone turned green. I never reproached her for that. She isn't as strong as we are. That night she went to eat corned beef and cabbage at the Josephs'. One of the thirty-two families that live here. Their door is always open to her. With a lot of contempt, a lot of misunderstanding, and a dose of Christian charity, they would say, one day that North African will kill you, dear ... Even Simone was fully aware that she was living with two filthy Arabs. With Rauss, whom she hated – can it be called hatred? – and me, by whom she had a child ... The wind was sweeping everything away. The only thing we had to keep us going was our nerves. Our only doings with the society around us took the form of curses or theft or violence that we ate slept walked saw heard lived ... with rebellion and hatred ... and that was the only way I loved Simone too. Even my sperm spurted hatred. (14-16)¹³¹

Far from containing factors that could work to stabilize a relationship, these remarks on Yalaan and Simone's couple are characterized by a strained atmosphere along economic and ethnic tensions. The narrator's ironic remarks on the religiously motivated hospitality offered exclusively to Simone by the neighbours adds to Yalaan's sense of alienation and isolation. He also hints ironically at their attitude of deep suspicion towards him and derides the warning they endearingly address to Simone as one of their own. It is on Yalaan's presumed dangerousness¹³² that their preventive recommendations focus, and the striking level of

¹³¹ “Je me rappelais ce festin de rats. Frits à la poêle dans leur propre graisse et assaisonnés d'échalotes. Seule Simone avait verdi. Je ne l'ai jamais accusée. Elle n'a pas notre résistance. Ce soir-là, elle s'en fut manger des choux au lard chez les Joseph. Une des trente-deux familles qui m'avoisinaient. Leur porte lui était toujours ouverte. Avec beaucoup de mépris, beaucoup d'incompréhension, une large charité chrétienne – ce Nord-Africain vous tuera, ma petite ... Même Simone savait qu'elle vivait entre deux norafs. Raus qu'elle haïssait – et peut-on appeler cela une haine ? – moi dont elle avait un enfant ... Le vent nous balayait tous. Nous n'avions que nos ataxies pour vivre. Notre commerce avec la société s'exprimait sous forme d'injures, ou de vols, ou de coup de poing, nous mangions dormions marchions voyions écoutions vivions... avec révolte et haine – et ce n'était pas autrement que j'aimais Simone, même mon sperme giclait haineux” (17-19).

¹³² According to Griffiths: “the Foreign Criminal is the Other not only of the Good Citizen but also of the Citizen Criminal, who can be rehabilitated and reformed, and of the Good Migrant, be it the ‘genuine’ refugee or the rich or highly skilled economic migrant” (73).

hostility towards Simone's partner goes together with the criminalization of the migrant to whom murderous inclinations are attributed.¹³³

The life-threatening illness¹³⁴ of Fabrice, the young child of Yalaan and Simone, puts great strain on their relationship.¹³⁵ Their personal and family life is profoundly affected¹³⁶ by the serious illness of their son:

Not even that concept of love – like all European concepts that come in contact with an Arabo – had changed a thing inside of me, in all the four years we had lived together, in a sticky residue of madness and murder. Hunger had not penetrated a single pore of her skin. I couldn't comprehend that either. And I couldn't comprehend why this animal, a cat – I couldn't accept, couldn't assimilate – why ... I had never

¹³³ In "Trauma and Migration: The Role of Stigma" Levent Küey writes "We consider stigmatisation and discrimination, among other variables, to have the highest traumatising impacts on the lives of immigrants. Furthermore, we consider stigmatisation and discrimination to be closely and negatively related to the working and living conditions of the immigrants and their psychosocial status in the society. This could lead to a vicious cycle, lower social status causing higher discrimination and vice-versa. Discriminative behaviours put the immigrants in a double-bind situation: they must either reject the host society and become marginalised or accept being assimilated. In other words, it creates ghettos on one side or loss of identities on the other. Neither of these alternatives leads to better mental health. A part of the story that is often neglected is that discrimination and stigmatisation of social groups with a migration background are also harmful for the host societies. Discriminative acts prevent the members of the host societies from finding creative solutions which lead to new possibilities of enrichment via confrontation with different cultural backgrounds. The possibility of reaching 'transnational citizenship' ... is lost due to stigmatisation and discrimination" (63).

¹³⁴ For a parallel between the sickness of Fabrice and the death of Chraïbi's younger brother, see Basfao, 477-479.

¹³⁵ In "Couple Therapy Across Cultures" Bughra and De Silva assert that among the sources of difficulty in intercultural couples "One is society's overall attitude to such relationships, which varies from curiosity to open prejudice, including the extreme case non-acceptance of the partners by each other's families and cultures. The second stems from the differences in habits, beliefs, values and customs that the two partners have. A greater adjustment is needed by such couples when compared with same-culture couples. Communication difficulties are common, not just verbal but non-verbal as well. The expression of moods may be non-congruent and often misunderstood ... There may also be discrepancies with regard to child-rearing practices and the role of the extended family. These mismatches can cause much couple disharmony and lead to the couple having to seek help. The couple may not always articulate these culturally based difficulties as their problem, but may complain of general incompatibility, one partner's unreasonableness or simply stress" (186-187).

¹³⁶ In *Parenting Stress*, Kirby Deater-Deckard writes "Learning to cope as a parent of an ill or dying child is unlike any other stressful experience. It not only disrupts the daily lives of family members but threatens the most basic foundation of adults' beliefs about their children and families – that they can protect their children from harm, that their family relationships will have years to grow and flourish, and that they will not outlive their own children. The connection between parenting distress and child illness extends well beyond infancy and early childhood, and it includes a variety of child illness and impairment ... Compared to parents of healthy children, those of children who are disabled, impaired, or critically ill are far more likely to be acutely or chronically distressed ... One reason that it is difficult to cope when a child is ill or severely disabled is that the parent has little or no control over the symptoms or severity of the condition. The daunting prospects of coping in the long term with a child's illness are compounded when they are accompanied by a parent's own depression, anxiety, or chronic marital conflict. Furthermore, these experiences may be different for mothers and fathers. On average, women may be more susceptible to the maladaptive effects of coping with an ill child ... for some families of children with illnesses or disabilities parenting stress may be tied most strongly to financial difficulties and the lack of social support, rather than the child's disability per se" (59).

stopped her hunger and I had done nothing to deserve her love. A few yards away from here there were always Christians and murals showing Christian meals, and Rauss beat on his stomach like the skin of a drum, and the ambulance was shrieking in the distance... here he was with his misery glued to mine like a moth. I lifted him up to my eyes, hanging from my fist, by the neck – and my presentiment cried out: what you're really doing, really doing, is strangling Simone – and I yelled: “You have epileptic fits, epileptic!... You've killed my son – you dirty epileptic!” While Rauss was downstairs yelling at me to shut up, that if I didn't shut up he was going to put me into an ambulance too and ship me off to an asylum... (17-18)¹³⁷

It is beyond doubt that Fabrice's illness has a direct impact on the parenting stress experienced by Yalaan and Simone, and within this context the narrator's thoughts and behaviour indicate a pronounced sense of restlessness. His sentimental imperviousness suggests that Simone's feelings are not the bearers of any meaningful change for him. In contrast with Simone's resilience in the face of hardship, Yalaan's rigidity shows the limits of his adjustment as he remains unmoved by the Western notion of love from which he critically distances himself. Simone's degree of endurance, as evidenced by her extended period of single parenthood during her partner's incarceration, and Yalaan's romantic numbness cannot obscure the fact that his own mental health is profoundly affected by their son's illness. Yalaan's powerlessness and lack of control over Fabrice's meningitis translates into a violent response, and while contemplating the killing of Simone it is onto the cat that Yalaan transfers his angry and murderous impulses.

The incongruous dimension of the scene can be attributed, on the one hand, to the couple's dissociation and, on the other, to the association of Simone with the cat, that is Yalaan's back and forth focus on Simone and the cat. In other words, the parallel between (and the merging of) Simone and the famished pet illustrates Yalaan's increasingly troubled

¹³⁷ “Si ce concept même d'amour – comme tout concept européen à l'usage d'un Bicot – ne s'était mué en moi, au terme de quatre années de vie commune, en un visqueux magma de folies et de meurtres. Alors que la faim n'avait pas creusé un seul pore de sa peau. Cela non plus je ne le comprenais pas. Et non plus je ne comprenais pas pourquoi cette bête, un chat – je n'acceptais pas, je n'assimilais pas – pourquoi... je n'avais cessé de l'affamer, je n'avais rien fait pour mériter son amour, à cent mètres d'ici il y a toujours eu des Chrétiens et des reliefs de repas de Chrétiens, Raus faisait battre son ventre comme une peau de tambour, au loin gémit l'ambulance... il restait ici collant sa misère à ma misère comme une teigne. Et je l'élevai à hauteur de mes yeux, au bout de mon poing, par le cou – et ma prescience criait : virtuellement, tu étrangles Simone virtuellement – et je criais : - Mais tu as des crises d'épilepsie, épileptique !... Tu as tué mon enfant... sale espèce d'épileptique !... Pendant que Raus criait lui aussi, d'en bas, de me taire, que si je ne me taisais pas il allait m'enfourner à mon tour dans la voiture-ambulance en direction d'un asile d'aliénés” (22).

sense of perception. Furthermore, the interruption of Yalaan's enraged reprimand by the irruption of Rauss's non-negotiable command disrupts the aggressive episode and deflates the frantic outburst. Yet, one can argue that the severity of Yalaan's tantrum is low considering that it is counterbalanced by Rauss's grotesque de-escalating intervention which takes the form of a reverberating scream, an intimidating order to keep silent and a threat uttered and issued from a distant room in Simone's crumbling house.

A certain hierarchy takes shape between Yalaan and Rauss in which Yalaan clearly becomes gripped by a sense of fear and submission. The risk of being sent to a mental institution brings Yalaan temporarily to his senses. However, the insufferable presence of Rauss in the house increases Simone's anxiety who declares to be on the verge of madness:

Get that damned Arab out of here... I'm going crazy, crazy, crazy..." "Now, now. Calm down," said Mac O'Mac. "Crazy," she screamed bitterly. "Morning, noon and night, he's always there circling like some kind of bird of bad omen. Even in my sleep, in my nightmares, there he is. In every dream and everything I do all day! I've never done anything to him, I don't say anything to him... He's going to drive me crazy. Do you hear me?" "Now, now," said Mac. He pushed Rauss to one side and helped Simone to her feet. She pulled away from him and faced Rauss. On the edges of her lips you could see foam, and I could see how she was changing – tares, avatars, education, civilization, inhibitions, fifteen centuries of European supremacy, everything was swallowed up in an instant – a good deep hatred without any fancy trimmings: flesh, guts, instincts. "And if ever," she screamed, "if ever my child should die, do you hear me? ... Get out! ... Get out of here!" Come on now," said Mac in a strong voice. He quickly took her out. The roar of his car reverberated like the slam of a door. I smiled. I was relaxed. I hadn't felt so relaxed in a long time. (30)¹³⁸

¹³⁸ "Foutez-moi cet Arabe dehors... je vais devenir folle, folle, folle... - Allons ! calmez-vous, dit Mac O'Mac.- Folle, cria-t-elle au terme des sons aigus.« Il est là à circuler comme un oiseau de mauvais augure, à toute heure du jour et de la nuit, même dans mon sommeil et mes cauchemars il est là et dans mes rêves et dans mes actes quotidiens, je ne lui fais rien, je ne lui dis rien... il va finir par me rendre folle, vous entendez ?- Allons ! venez, dit Mac. Il écarta Raus, la mit debout. Elle lui échappa des bras, fit face à Raus. Aux commissures de ses lèvres il y avait un filet d'écume et je la vis telle qu'elle-même la nature la changeait – tares, avatars, éducation, civilisation, refoulements, quinze siècles de suprématie européenne, tout s'était englouti en un instant – une bonne vieille haine exempte de brimborions : chair, organes, instincts.- Et si jamais, criait-elle... jamais, vous entendez ? jamais mon enfant venait à mourir... fous-moi le camp... fous-moi...- Allons ! Venez, dit Mac d'une voix ferme. Il l'entraîna rapidement. Le ronflement de sa voiture retentit comme un claquement de porte. Je souriais. J'étais apaisé. Il y avait si longtemps que je ne m'étais senti aussi calme" (41-42).

The worries and stressors of parenthood help to explain the anger of Simone, who is distressed by the life-threatening medical problems of her son. By focusing on her screams and convulsions, Yalaan's attention is directed towards Simone's signs of emotional and behavioural hardship. Simone's hostile reaction towards Rauss provides an opportunity to examine her response to parenting stress. It is of interest that Rauss is the target of Simone's animosity because of his invasive presence: he is on the receiving end of her rage and occupies a disproportionate position in Simone's thoughts and becomes an *idée fixe* only madness, she believes, can liberate her from. Rauss does not reply but Yalaan realizes that the screams of his partner are loaded with a xenophobic upsurge. One could argue that instead of siding with his partner against Rauss and his stressful ubiquitous presence, Yalaan is unmasking Simone. Yalaan observes Simone's metamorphosis that reveals the depth of her emotional exhaustion and hatred. In fact, while Rauss is dehumanized by being compared to an animal, another mutation is simultaneously taking place: Yalaan gazes with astonishment at Simone's transfiguration and notes with irony the uncovering of his partner's deeply rooted and hardly repressed feeling of superiority, and until now unavowed racism.¹³⁹ The stress originating outside Yalaan and Simone's intimate relationship, that is Fabrice's illness and Rauss's perceived omnipresence bring to the fore her parental exhaustion and vulnerability. Yet, one of the surprising realizations that emerges from Simone's fits of anger is Yalaan's relative passivity, the total absence of emotional support, his detachment, and the satisfaction with which he welcomes Simone's departure with Mac.

In his attempt to understand what happened exactly when Simone brought his manuscript to Mac, Yalaan conducts a conversation with his partner in which he imitates several characters: "Even if I had to bellow in the ears of a cadaver, I wouldn't go to bed until I knew what happened" (47).¹⁴⁰ As evidenced by his macabre allusion Yalaan is determined to carry out an extensive interrogation, yet along the search for truth he performs a whole series of impersonations. He starts with the imitation of what seems to be an unidentifiable and singular voice who endearingly prompts Simone to pull herself back together. By underscoring Yalaan's harmful influence on Simone, the anonymous voice hints at the intrinsic toxicity of the migrant and the degrading effects of such a relationship: "Yes, Simone, my poor child, but you're wasting your time with that Arab, wasting your youth and

¹³⁹ On hidden forms of racism, see Rodney Coates' *Covert Racism: Theories, Institutions, and Experiences*.

¹⁴⁰ "Dussé-je beugler dans une oreille de cadavre, je ne me coucherai pas avant de savoir ce qui s'est passé" (67).

even your resources” (48).¹⁴¹ The anonymous voice attempts to establish a hierarchy in which the Arab, by its very nature, is pulling Simone downwards from her supposedly position of superiority. Due to its length, a wider range of interpretations can be formulated when considering Yalaan’s imitation of Mac O’Mac:¹⁴²

I knew by the inflections of voice, the nominal value of words and of pauses, so unconsidered that I thought: *Mac may not have said any of those things. He may not even have thought them.* But I could hear him: he doesn’t even have a job, he said. He confuses what he wants with reality. I’ve reread his letters several times. He’s the typical example of an intellectual, or rather of a pseudo-intellectual from another continent, from another compendium of history. He handles our language fairly well and our European pettifoggeries, but that’s as far as it goes. Our history, the efforts of two millennia of Frenchmen, accumulated drop by drop, idea by idea, life by life, and our institutions that have grown one out of the other, all of that is foreign to him. He is not the end product, as we both are. Even in the problem of the North Africans which is so close to his heart, he is absolutely not with it. He forgets that he wanted to address a French audience with French reactions, and that he anticipates nothing beyond the printed page. It’s precisely in the area of his private life that he has been wrong as far as you are concerned. Not only does he not comport himself as a pseudo-European, not only does he destroy our concepts of the standard Arabo, he even goes as far as to forget that all we ask of him is to be purely and simply an Arabo. But he has the pretension, the ambition, and the naiveté to want (his writing makes it very clear) to impose the Orient on Europe. (48-49)¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ “Oui : Simone ma pauvre fille, mais vous perdez votre temps avec cet Arabe, votre jeunesse, votre substance même. Ne voyez-vous donc pas qu’il vous avilit ?” (69).

¹⁴² For the parallel between Mac O’Mac and François Mauriac, see Basfao, 450.

¹⁴³ “Je savais – inflexions de la voix, valeur nominale des mots, temps d’arrêt – si inconsidérément que je pensais : *Mac n’a peut-être rien dit de tout cela. N’en a même rien pensé.* Mais je l’entendais : Il ne travaille même pas, disait-il. Il prend ses désirs pour des réalités, j’ai souvent relu ses lettres. Le cas typique d’un intellectuel ou plutôt d’un néo-intellectuel venant d’un autre continent, d’une autre somme d’histoire. Maniant avec quelque aisance notre langue et nos avocasseries européennes, mais uniquement cela ; - notre histoire, l’effort de deux millénaires de Français amassé goutte à goutte, idée après idée, vie après vie ; et nos institutions l’une enfantée par l’autre : tout cela lui est étranger, il n’en est pas *l’aboutissement*, comme vous et moi. Même pour le problème des Nord-Africains qui lui tient à cœur, il n’est absolument pas dans le coup. Parce qu’il oublie que c’est à un public français doué de réactions françaises qu’il désirerait s’adresser, et qu’il ne prévoit rien au-delà de la chose imprimée. Et c’est exactement, dans le domaine de sa vie privée, ce qui a été son erreur en ce qui vous concerne : non seulement il ne se comporte pas en néo-Européen, non seulement il détruit nos conceptions du Bicot standard et a le tort d’oublier que tout ce qu’on lui demande c’est d’être purement et simplement un Bicot : mais il a la prétention, l’ambition, la naïveté de vouloir (ses lettres le dénotent clairement) imposer l’Orient en Europe” (69-70).

At first glance, Yalaan mocks Mac, but it quickly becomes evident that, in turn, Mac is mocking Yalaan, and it can be inferred that by means of a circular movement Yalaan is indeed mocking himself. Yet, Yalaan's irony is extensively targeted at Mac's strictly rigid views according to which he derives a whole set of binary oppositions: the intellectual against the pseudo-intellectual, and the pseudo-European versus the standard Arabo. Yalaan's effort to meet the intellectual requirements of the French intelligentsia becomes an object of ridicule. His name is not even mentioned once, he remains nameless, only a third person pronoun for the whole duration of the imitation, and both his public and intimate failing enterprises are put under stifling scrutiny. Yalaan's degree of acculturation and assimilation is deemed insufficient, and the stereotyping of the Arab intellectual is an indicator of Mac's participation in a process of othering through the creation and definition of monolithic categories. It is because of his refusal to comply with a reductionist definition of the intellectual that his position unsettles Mac's binary views and receives sarcastic rejection. Rather than welcoming the migrant intellectual, Mac keeps him in the margin in the reason of his threatening ambivalence. One could see that Yalaan, as a migrant intellectual, is kept in the periphery because of his disruptive position in the role distribution orchestrated by the French intellectual elite, and also for the fact that the promotion of Yalaan to a higher level of intellectual recognition by the French elite could lead to a destabilization of the power relationship between Europe and the Orient.

One may also argue that through his series of imitations, Yalaan reveals a distorted self-portrait which is tinted with ironic self-deprecation:

“I'd still be here, Simone. An Arab. Even intellectual. You don't feed an Arab, even if he is an intellectual, with words of love, concepts of love, of a home and family, with expressions he has never heard before, words that no one knows in the mountains of Algeria and that my co-religionists would take for the voice of machine tools or the whirling of birds' wings. So European that this poor dumbbell of an Arab would only understand them four years later: hmmm; you won't do... you don't have a diploma... I thought... so what can be done about it?... after all, it's not my fault...”
(50).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ “Resterai moi, Simone. Un Arabe. Même intellectuel. On ne nourrit pas un Arabe, fût-il intellectuel, avec des mots d'amour, des concepts d'amour, de foyer, de famille, avec des termes jamais encore entendus et que ma Kabylie ignore et que mes coreligionnaires prendraient pour des voix de machines-outils ou des sifflements d'ailes d'oiseaux – si européennement que cette pauvre gourde d'Arabe s'entendrait signifier quatre ans plus

Because of its concern with self-deprecating and arrogant practices Linda Hutcheon's notion of the "self-protective" function of irony is operative in this context (1995, 47-48). Hutcheon relates the self-protective to the practice of irony as a defence mechanism. Hence, by attributing a relatively negative image to himself and the migrant community, Yalaan seeks to suggest his self-positioning vis à vis the European mindset which manifests itself in the form of brutally imposed conceptual formulations. By mocking his community's inability to understand and adhere to the European definition of love, home and family, Yalaan also mocks and condemns the violent imposition of a dissonant set of values on the stereotyped migrant population. The derisive self-portrayal of the North African migrant as a primitive and underdeveloped individual, suggests the extent of the intellectual gap between the two populations; it puts Europe in a dominant position and underscores the migrant's impossible adjustment to the expectations of the host society. And if, on the one hand, failure to comply with the requirements imposed by the host country hinders the migrant's integration, on the other, a delayed adoption of the host country's theoretical considerations on love, home and family does not offer more guarantee for successful integration.

Through the use of immoderate self-deprecation, one of Yalaan's aims is to provoke Simone's reaction, which in turn insinuates that one of Chraïbi's objectives by presenting a distorted picture of the migrant intellectual and his community is to bring forward issues of inequality. In this regard, self-deprecation can be interpreted as a reversal of the power relation, as a way for Yalaan to reclaim his worth, and in the context of the night conversation with his partner, it can be assumed that hyperbole is persistently used with the purpose of generating a contradiction. Yet, one may argue that Yalaan's use of self-deprecating irony in contesting the unjust treatment of the immigrants acts to show his genuine modesty. In contrast, Yalaan's self-degradation and demotion can also be inversely interpreted as false humility in the sense that it is a confirmation of his elevated moral standing and own worth that Yalaan is soliciting. Still, the asymmetrical power relations between Europe and the immigrants generate resentment on the part of Yalaan, and while self-deprecation may be regarded as relief-generating tool to achieve equality, the degrading of a vulnerable group to which he belongs, after all, directs the reader towards issues of self-hatred, and internalized racism.¹⁴⁵ It can also be argued that Yalaan is internalizing the

tard : heu... tu ne fais pas l'affaire, tu n'es pas titularisé... j'avais cru... qu'est-ce que tu veux ?... ce n'est pas de ma faute..." (72).

¹⁴⁵ On internalized racism, see Speight, 129-131.

European disregard for the North African values of love, home and family and that self-hatred¹⁴⁶ is a direct consequence of the migration process, thereby underscoring the oppressive nature of the migrant experience.

Through another imitation Yalaan explores his feelings of failure as Fabrice's father. The bitterness stems in part from the poor economic situation that bars him from assuming his paternal role, but also from the realization that he is not officially recognized as Fabrice's legitimate father. In other words, paternal inefficacy plays a significant role in Yalaan's mental health, and his hopelessness adds to other anxieties: "There would still be our son: without my name, I have no legal right to him – and I've never bought anything for him, not even a bottle of milk. That means that I have no human right to him either. Take that father's love, wrap it up in a newspaper and toss it in the garbage! Like refuse, amen!" (50).¹⁴⁷ As far as involvement in childcare is concerned, poverty and bureaucratic obstacles are Yalaan's main burden as they annihilate the hope of ever experiencing the joys of paternal love. Feelings of inadequacy do not appear to be linked in any way to his mental state, yet, Yalaan's parenting is compromised as he struggles to grasp the complexity of the French environment. Yalaan's use of irony as a degrading principle illustrates the perceived worthlessness of Yalaan's paternal love and the violent blow inflicted on the father-child attachment. Yet, he counteracts the severity of his predicament by ironically attributing a celestial origin to his hardship, and in parodying the divine command he deflates the seriousness of his misfortunes.

Undoubtedly, Yalaan's mental health is adversely affected by migration-related issues, however, the situation worsens even more when he starts suspecting Simone of infidelity with Mac O'Mac. The accumulation of failures as a rejected immigrant, a failed intellectual and a disgraced father reaches a critical point when in a moment of distress Simone's insistently mistrustful lover makes an attempt on his life:

I put the sleeping pills into my mouth one by one, like chick-peas. I was standing up, rigid, soulless, and began to chew them methodically. I was conscious of the fact that this act later on, in the opinion of a staid and stolid critic, would be the action of a

¹⁴⁶ On self-hatred, see Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*; Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*; and Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*.

¹⁴⁷ "Resterait le fils. Ne portant pas mon nom, je n'ai aucun droit légal sur lui – et je ne lui ai jamais rien acheté, pas même une carafe de lait. Cela veut dire : tu n'as nul droit humain sur lui, non plus. Alors, prends ton amour de père, enveloppe-le dans un papier-journal : à la poubelle ! Comme des détritrus, amen !" (72-73).

paranoiac: lives must make an impression and cause comment to be taken seriously. Later on I would also have the occasion to read the novelized life of Joan of Arc and would understand then what one means by developing anxiety, all that remains of Christ except for the Cross. She dropped the apron and cried out that she didn't want any trouble. She'd had enough already that she was just a poor soul that wanted nothing but a little peace. There were other parts of France or of Algeria to die in. I had to choose her house just to annoy her, to make a spectacle of myself even in dying. She had just phoned Mac O'Mac, and he was waiting for me. As for her, no thanks, she wanted nothing more to do with writers or with Arabs. Then she called for help. Standing in my duck cloth trousers and my old military jacket, I watched her cry out, and kept chewing, balancing myself on the balls of my feet. It was like chewing and swallowing every cry she made. Footsteps, and then a cloud of voices, drew nearer. Above my head, the sky was lowering and heavy, so heavy that I threw the empty vial toward it, and so low it must have struck it. (58-59)¹⁴⁸

Yalaan's attempt to end his life¹⁴⁹ is the result of a number of interlinked reasons.¹⁵⁰ The succession of failures since his departure from Algeria culminates in a suicide attempt.

¹⁴⁸ "J'introduisis dans ma bouche les comprimés de gardénal, un à un, comme des pois chiches, debout, rigide, sans âme, et me mis à les mâcher méthodiquement, conscient que cette manifestation ne serait plus tard, aux yeux d'un critique assis – ou rassis – somme toute qu'une manifestation paranoïaque : les vies s'impriment, se commentent – pour qu'elles soient prises en considération. Plus tard aussi j'aurai l'occasion de lire la vie romancée de Jeanne d'Arc – et comprendrai alors ce que l'on désigne par l'inquiétude évolutive : tout ce qui reste du Christ, à part la Croix. Elle avait laissé tomber la serpillière et criait qu'elle ne voulait pas de scandale, qu'elle en avait assez, qu'elle était une toute petite et pauvre chose ne demandant qu'une toute petite et pauvre paix, qu'il y avait d'autres coins de France et de Biribie où mourir mais que je choisisais exprès, pour l'embêter, sa propriété pour m'exhiber ainsi jusque dans la mort, qu'elle venait de téléphoner à Mac et qu'il m'attendait, quant à elle non merci elle ne voulait plus de ce monde de littérateurs et d'Arabes – appelait à l'aide. Debout dans mon pantalon de coutil et ma vareuse de soldat, je la regardais crier, mâchant, me balançant sur mes pieds joints – et c'était comme si je mâchais et absorbais chaque cri. Des pas s'approchaient, une nuée de voix. Au-dessus de ma tête, le ciel était bas et pesant, si pesant que je lançai le tube vide et si bas qu'il dut l'atteindre" (85-86).

¹⁴⁹ For a general introduction to the theory and causes of suicide, see Émile Durkheim's *Suicide: a Study in Sociology* (1952).

¹⁵⁰ On issues related to the definition of suicide, Mukherjee and Kumar write "Silverman ... provides a succinct summary of fifteen frequently referred definitions of suicide, ranging from Durkheim's (1897/1951) classic definition of suicide as "All cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result" to the more contemporary conceptualizations like the one provided by DeLeo and colleagues ... as "An act with a fatal outcome which the deceased, knowing or expecting a potentially fatal outcome, has initiated and carried out with the purpose of bringing about wanted change." The core of these definitions is essentially constructed by one of the three perspectives – (a) a deliberate act of self-destruction that results in death; (b) a conscious self-directed act with the intent to die; or (c) a wilful self-inflicted life-threatening act resulting in death ... posits the differences in perspective in these definitions stem from variations in disciplinary orientations, and differences in values and belief systems of the creators. Four key aspects inherent in any definition of suicide have been identified – outcome, agency, intention, and awareness ... – and these are used to determine what constitutes suicide" (6-7).

According to experts, the migration process¹⁵¹ is accompanied by risk and protective factors,¹⁵² yet, “There is no doubt that migration itself brings about changes in the socio-economic, vocational, cultural and legal status for the migrant, and discrepancies in aspiration and achievement will further contribute to the stress of settling down” (Bhugra and Gupta 3). With regard to the Maghrebi¹⁵³ migrants, Moussaoui and Ferrey¹⁵⁴ claim that rural-urban migrants moving from low-income countries to a developed one are doubly exposed to a suicide risk. Furthermore, the migration of Algerian workers to France led to the formation of numerous mixed couples,¹⁵⁵ which have been represented¹⁵⁶ in a large number of fictions. On

¹⁵¹ On migration and suicide, Liu and Cheng write: “How can we explain the controversial findings between common mental disorders and suicide related to migration? Perhaps the heterogeneity of immigrant populations implies that there is a small subgroup among them with a particularly higher risk for suicide (e.g. those suffering from severe depression before or after migration, and/or having experienced severe traumas which may or may not come from involuntary migration). On the other hand, a substantial proportion of immigrants, particularly those in internal migration, might belong to the positive migration category (healthy migrants)” (51).

¹⁵² For further study on migration and suicide attempt, see Sharma and Bhugra’s “Suicide among Migrants.”

¹⁵³ On Algerian emigration and immigration to France, the sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad writes: “Always torn between his permanent present, which he dare not admit to himself, and the ‘return’ which, whilst it is never resolutely ruled out, is never seriously contemplated, the immigrant is doomed to oscillate constantly between, on the one hand, the preoccupations of the here and now and, on the other, yesterday’s retrospective hopes and the eschatological expectation that there will be an end to his immigration. Because this seems to be the condition of the immigrant, and especially the Maghrebin immigrant, the slightest crisis in his itinerary – unemployment, illness, an accident, an infraction of the regulation that concern him specifically, and the more general regulations – necessarily has repercussions that affect him very deeply. It affects his very identity as an immigrant. If the effects of each of these crises on his behavioural system and his system of representations border upon the pathological, this is presumably because it is not merely a crisis that affects the status that defines him, and it is completely imposed upon him from outside” (215).

¹⁵⁴ In *Psychopathologie des migrants*, Moussaoui and Ferrey write: “Les diverses études sociologiques faites dans des pays très divers (Grande-Bretagne, Australie, pays scandinaves, Italie) montrent que les populations et les catégories socioprofessionnelles ne sont pas atteintes par un même taux de suicides et de tentatives à travers le monde. Les sociétés traditionnelles, rurales, à fortes contraintes religieuses, connaissent un taux très bas, qui peut être multiplié par cinq dans les sociétés occidentales, citadines et industrialisées. Les tentatives de suicide ne sont pas un équivalent dépressif strict ; il s’agit plus habituellement d’un acte réactionnel, impulsif, ayant la valeur d’un appel au secours ou d’une protestation vis-à-vis de l’entourage. L’entretien au décours d’une tentative de suicide met à jour fréquemment un conflit personnel, familial, ou sentimental, représentant souvent la lutte entre les normes traditionnelles d’une culture et les nouvelles possibilités offertes par la société d’accueil, diffusées par les contacts scolaires, la télévision et le cinéma. Une bonne partie de la migration de notre époque étant constituée par un mouvement simultané des campagnes vers les villes et des pays sous-développés vers les pays industrialisés, comporte doublement le risque de glissement depuis le taux traditionnel de suicides et de tentatives de suicide vers des taux bien plus élevés. Chez les migrants, le taux d’origine tend à se maintenir par rapport à celui de la population d’origine. C’est avec les années de présence et d’acculturation progressive que la tendance à rejoindre les caractéristiques locales se confirme. Ce phénomène s’amplifie avec les conduites de la seconde génération née au pays d’émigration, dont la fréquence est considérable, au même titre que les retards scolaires, la toxicomanie et les conduites délinquantes. Ainsi, pour les pays maghrébins qui se caractérisaient naguère par un taux particulièrement bas des tentatives et des suicides, on observe dans tout le Maghreb parmi les populations urbanisées une augmentation considérable du taux en dehors de toute émigration” (39-40).

¹⁵⁵ On French-Maghrebi interracial couples, see Streiff-Fenart’s *Les couples franco-maghrébins en France*.

¹⁵⁶ On the representation of the foreign woman in francophone Maghrebi literature, Déjeux writes: “La littérature (30% des romans sur les 316 parus de 1920 à la fin de 1987) est plutôt au noir, sauf exception : un certain nombre de figures positives d’étrangères se répètent effectivement ici ou là depuis 1920, mais peu en fait. Les unions ou les mariages conclus aboutissent à l’impasse ou à l’échec. On s’aime bien pendant un temps puis les obstacles et les difficultés divers l’emportent. Les récits de vie et les opinions recourent en partie cet imaginaire littéraire. Le vécu intervient ici et déjà des nuances sont en effet apportées qu’en général dans la

the presence of the foreign woman in the francophone Maghrebi novel, Déjeux writes: “Her image is much present, even obsessive, occupying the imagination of writers. She is the *fitna* par excellence, the test and troubling temptation that destabilizes the inner being” (qtd. in MacMaster 362). The termination of Simone and Yalaan’s intimate relationship plays a significant part in the novel. Yalaan’s urge to end his life¹⁵⁷ is strengthened by Simone’s decision to end the relationship and throw him out of her house.

In attempting¹⁵⁸ suicide,¹⁵⁹ what is perhaps surprising is that Yalaan tries to kill himself in the presence¹⁶⁰ of Simone as a form of punishment¹⁶¹ that resembles a Samsonic suicide,¹⁶² and his level of impulsivity¹⁶³ which suggests that the drug overdose,¹⁶⁴ being moderately lethal,¹⁶⁵ is not part of a carefully designed plan. Yalaan’s suicide attempt can

littérature de fiction on ne discerne pas, sauf exception. Elle est, en effet, en re-présentation : elle pousse à l’extrême, jusqu’à l’excès et à la caricature” (1989, 247).

¹⁵⁷ On romantic rejection see Ben-Ze’ev and Goussinsky’s *In the Name of Love. Romantic Ideology and its Victims* (56).

¹⁵⁸ On romantic love and suicide see Fisher’s *Why We Love. The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*, 179.

¹⁵⁹ See Meyer et al.’s *Explaining Suicide. Patterns, Motivations, and What Notes Reveal* for a discussion on relationship suicides, reciprocity theory, and the four modes of adaptation (suicide as retreat, suicide as exploitation, suicide as retaliation, and suicide due to exploiter guilt) (55).

¹⁶⁰ In *Witnessed Suicides*, McDowell et al. write: “A unique class of suicides are those that occur in the presence of another person. These “witnessed suicides” are uncommon and have not been intensively reported, although they have been previously mentioned anecdotally in a clinical context ... In addition to their rarity, this class of suicides may have received only limited attention because current research has focused on such variable as the victim’s state of mind, the methods employed, and the larger sociological context of suicide, and less on the intent or meaning of the act of suicide. As Smith and Bloom (1985) have previously noted (...) ‘In most research, a direct approach to the suicidal person’s logic is camouflaged either by the examination of the sociological or by the psychological periphery of the human struggle; that is, the study of causes and conditions is emphasized rather than that of individual choice and reasoning’” (213).

¹⁶¹ According to Meyer et al.: “The violent divorce cases are most applicable to the present discussion. They indicate that in these cases, “The wish to kill becomes sublimated by a wish to *punish*, which the victim accomplishes by forcing the spouse to witness the trauma of his or her death, leaving its memory like a Trojan horse in the spouse’s psyche. The act is always violent and often impulsive, usually with diminished restraint fueled by alcohol” ... the suicides convey a message to the witnesses that they are responsible and the victim wants them to suffer. Although we can never know the exact reasons an individual chooses to kill himself in front of another person, especially someone he indicated that he loved, a clear relationship appears to exist between physical and emotional abuse and these suicides” (61).

¹⁶² On Samsonic Suicide, see Mervyn Jeffreys’ “Samsonic suicide or suicide of revenge among Africans.”

¹⁶³ On reciprocal abandonment, see McDowell et al.’s *Witnessed Suicides* (220).

¹⁶⁴ Archana and Updesh Kumar write: “Firearms, drowning and hanging are considered to be the most lethal methods used for suicide, whereas methods like consuming poison, drug overdose and cutting wrist are rated as the least lethal methods adopted for committing suicide” (107-108).

¹⁶⁵ Mukherjee and Kumar write: “The most difficult to determine among these [outcome, agency, intention, and awareness] is the intention of the individual. Intent might be implicit in the behaviour or might have been expressed explicitly by the individual. However, perceptions of intent are often confounded by the individual’s denial, minimization or inflation of their intent to die ... Many scholars recommend correlating the intent to die with the lethality of the methods used for causing self-harm, while others feel that intent is more important than lethality in determining if a particular behavioural incidence constituted suicide ... On the whole, this leads to a lot of subjectivity and inferences on the part of the clinician or the medical staff responsible for classification based on their knowledge and previous experience ... the issues of intent and lethality methods are also important for determining the definition of attempted suicide ... The term suicide attempt has been considered inherently ambiguous ... The alternative terms being used in place of the term ‘attempted suicide’ are

also be read in relation with his religious disbelief¹⁶⁶ as it violates Islamic law,¹⁶⁷ thereby touching upon the religious dimension of acculturation and Yalaan's religious scepticism. Yet, another level of reading brings to the fore the incongruity of the suicide event.

The incident takes place on the threshold of Simone's house, at the top of the stairs, as Yalaan returns home two hours after their initial argument. In view of this, one of the first observations relates to the striking contrast between the two behavioural responses: on the one hand Yalaan's attitude denotes a sense of remoteness vis-à-vis the incident, on the other, Simone's emotional and physical reactions indicate the intensity of her agitation. Yalaan is passive and silent, he does not utter a single word after the absorption of the drugs and his moves are extremely limited. The focus is put on Yalaan's mechanical inflexibility and almost lifeless state. The attention given to Yalaan's silent chewing and balancing is indicative of the further detachment and alienation from his own body. In contrast, Simone's reaction consists in distancing herself from Yalaan so much so that she vociferously blames him for trying to take his life in her presence. Furthermore, a faster tempo accompanies the extensive list of shouted out reproaches directed towards Yalaan as to reinforce the irreconcilable opposition between her psychological distress and his apparent state of apathy. A sense of confusion is also caused by the chronological interruption produced by the self-deprecating prolepsis through which Yalaan anticipates the ulterior degrading of his deliberate self-poisoning by a diagnostician into a paranoid episode that minimizes the severity of the trauma at the root of his suffering. In a certain sense, the chronological

'deliberate self-harm', 'non-fatal suicidal behaviour', or 'parasuicide'. These varied terms are used to denote non-fatal self-injurious behaviour without taking into consideration the question of intent, and end up as the core reason for introducing unaccounted heterogeneity in research data." (7-8).

¹⁶⁶ In "Suicide in Islam" Ahmed and Tarek Okasha write: "Suicide is prohibited by Islam. It is *haram* – forbidden. The logic behind the prohibition is that it is an act that manipulates something, in this case life itself, which is meant to be only God's concern. Furthermore, it indicates lack of trust in God who is capable of making things better. However, *haram* also means acting in a way that is unjust to self and to others ... Islam bans self-destructive behaviour as an act of violation of the will of God in taking away life ... Those who contemplate suicide know of never-ending graphic descriptions of torture in hell awaiting the person who takes their own life ... In Islam, the suicidal individual is considered to have violated God's decisions ... Suicide is dishonoured because it connotes a lack of belief in God's creation and a lack of adherence to the codes of Islam" (50-51).

¹⁶⁷ In *The Ethics of Suicide. Historical Sources*, Margaret Pabst Battin writes: "The Quran itself does not contain an explicit, incontrovertible prohibition of suicide. The hadith, however, do; both Bukhari and Muslim make fully explicit the unlawfulness of suicide. As Franz Rosenthal pointed out, by the time of Muhammad, both Judaism and Christianity had developed negative attitudes toward suicide, and it is likely that Muhammad would have shared these. Bukhari reports a saying of Muhammad's that the person who commits suicide is punished eternally by a perpetual, forced repetition of the act of self-killing. Suicide is equated in severity with the sin of murder. Muslim gives an account of self-mutilation resulting in death. No distinction is made between suicide associated with what would now be recognized as mental illness and suicide associated with principle, religious zeal, military self-sacrifice, jihad, or the like. These hadiths are the clearest canonical sources for the Islamic belief that suicide is a violation of divine law" (198).

confusion can be read as a mirroring of Yalaan's acculturative stress and mental disorientation.

One may notice that Yalaan reduces his self-poisoning through sleeping pill overdose to a mere masticating exercise,¹⁶⁸ and such trivialization of lethal means serves to ironically puncture the solemnity of the event. He also appropriates Simone's voice by mimicking her lengthy series of grievances, and it is helpful to note the ironic undertone in the "no thanks" uttered by Simone which signals her vehement exasperation and definitive rejection of Yalaan, the world of literature and the Arabs. Yet, one could argue that beyond the appropriation of Simone's voice by her intimate partner, Yalaan is in fact silencing her voice and attempting to disempower Simone by assuming the grotesque role of a ventriloquist.

The noisy neighbours and Rauss manage to arrive quickly on the scene to witness the domestic dispute, and Yalaan survives the awkward farewell.¹⁶⁹ However, in the process of reading the scene one can see that Yalaan is making explicit albeit obscure reference to religious characters and symbols by drawing attention to Joan of Arc, Christ and the Cross; Chraïbi's explicit use of a religious imagery in *Les Boucs* provides another level of interpretation.

1.2.4 Religious Imagery

In addition to dealing with the problematics of migration and diaspora, the artist novel, and mental health, *Les Boucs* also makes numerous explicit references to religious imagery. Interestingly, most of the references contained in the novel relate to the biblical tradition. There are, however, direct references to the Islamic tradition but one may question Chraïbi's insistence on the use of biblical allusions to depict the migrants' condition. In certain instances, a pronounced degree of gravity accompanies the references to the Quran, as is the

¹⁶⁸ In *Littérature et suicide. De Werther à Madame Bovary*, François Jost writes : "Les réponses fournies par la littérature ne sont point érudites comme celles des psychiatres : elles demeurent de l'ordre de l'intuition. A quoi songe l'homme qui met dans sa ceinture une charge de dynamite, qui colle sa nuque contre un rail de chemin de fer, qui saute la barrière d'une ménagerie pour se jeter dans la gueule d'un lion ? C'est l'écrivain, mieux que Freud et ses disciples, qui peint ces tragédies-là. Il sonde les motifs qui mènent aux fatales solutions, qui déclenchent le mécanisme. Le suicidé cesse donc d'être objet de science : il est le prochain de l'auteur, le prochain du lecteur. L'écrivain s'occupe des états d'âme. Or, un état d'âme s'évoque plus qu'il ne s'explique. C'est toute la différence entre la littérature et la psychanalyse aux fonctions, ici, complémentaires. L'une est art dans son essence, l'autre est une science dont cet art peut souvent s'inspirer. Art et science posent les mêmes questions, mais formulent les réponses sur deux plans différents" (170-171).

¹⁶⁹ For further studies on suicide, see Kral's "Suicide and the Internalization of Culture: Three Questions" (1998); Thomas Osborne's "Fascinated Dispossession: Suicide and the Aesthetics of Freedom" (2005); Holly Laird's "Between the (Disciplinary) Acts. Modernist Suicidology" (2011); Kristian Petrov's "The Art of Dying as an Art of Living" (2013).

case with the nostalgic episode of the Sheikh's Quranic recitation on the radio: "That voice! It was all he could have hoped for! It was the voice of a sheik chanting the Koran. It reminded him that Man had to be worthy of God and assured him that in the eyes of the Sublime Creator he had not suffered ... This Koranic incantation went beyond words or ideas or human values (96).¹⁷⁰ Yet, Chraïbi inserts religious references in scenes that also portray the immigrants in an unflattering manner, as is made clear with the episode of the meat lorry's dismantling in which the immigrants' hunger bears a tone of derision and the execution speed of the theft is ironically compared to the rapidity of an Islamic prayer:

Normally not a day went by without laying hands on something in a grocery near the Seine. Rauss told him that one night even the Corporal and the Scapegoats had stolen a butcher's truck parked by the central market. They had driven it up to Nanterre as fast as they could and unloaded it piece by piece in the space of a few Koranic prayers. By dawn everything saleable had been negotiated with a fence and the money all drunk up, buried in some lot, or sent off to the villages of North Africa to take care of the clan. As for the meat – six steers – it lasted two full days. (101)¹⁷¹

While at Simone's house, the insults uttered by Rauss, as well as the wind are directed towards the Arabs and can be interpreted as evidences of self-hatred; yet, Yalaan's sarcastic distortion of the Islamic profession of faith also indicates the bitterness that accompanies the metamorphosis of the immigrants into godless, lawless individuals:

He also said : I won't work, I'll wander around, I'll steal, I'll kill... since the world, Europe, the Christians won't look at us dirty Arabs except through a heavy screen (that they had set up, protected with bars, and labelled: there's the Arab, the real Arab, the only one) showing up our own worst instincts, making us look at our own worst failure... damned Arabs, stinking Arabs, filthy Afro... a profession of faith if you want to call it that, and why not? (15)¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ "Cette voix ! c'était tout ce qu'il avait désiré – et il l'avait désiré : la voix d'un cheikh chantant le Koran et qui lui rappelait qu'il fallait savoir mériter Dieu et qui lui affirmait qu'en regard du Créateur Sublime il n'avait pas souffert ... Cet incantatoire Koranique qui dépassait les mots, les idées et les valeurs humaines" (140).

¹⁷¹ "D'ordinaire pas un jour ne se passait sans une main basse sur une épicerie de la Seine. Raus lui raconta qu'une nuit même le Caporal et ses Boucs avaient subtilisé un camion de viande qui stationnait aux Halles. Ils l'avaient fait grimper à Nanterre à toute vitesse, et démonté pièce par pièce, en l'espace de quelques prières koraniques, de sorte qu'au lever du jour tout avait été négocié chez des receleurs et l'argent bu, enterré dans un terrain vague ou même envoyé dans les douars d'Afrique du Nord par les soins de la *chaîne*. Quant à la viande, six bœufs, elle dura bien deux jours" (147).

¹⁷² "Il disait aussi: je chômerai, je vagabonderai, je volerai, je tuerai... puisque le monde, l'Europe, le Chrétien ne veulent nous considérer, nous Bicots, que par ce petit vasistas (qu'ils ont percé, muni de barreaux, fait

Most of the French characters in the novel are grouped under the category of “Christians,” and one may argue that such labelling is established, first, as a direct response to the grouping of the North African migrants under the label “Arabs,” second, as to signal a division of the French society along religious lines, and third, as an attempt to stress the contradiction between the name and the behaviour of the hosts; in other words, Chraïbi’s use of the term “Christian” serves the purpose of tarnishing the dissonant image of the French domestic population by systematically recalling how their actions differ from their religious duties and moral obligations towards foreign guests. Yet, while Yalaan mocks French hospitality and Christian charity or lack thereof, he also refers explicitly to Christ, as emerges from his conversation with Simone following his release from prison: “to carry something inside yourself ... just as Christ carried his cross” (45-46).¹⁷³ The direct reference to Christ directs the reader to question Yalaan’s view on the role of suffering. In drawing a parallel with the biblical episode in which Christ carries the Cross on the way to his crucifixion, Yalaan brings to the fore questions related to the nature and the function of his suffering. Believing in the redeeming properties of his suffering which he has translated into a book, Yalaan also attributes a protective value to his physical and emotional agony, thereby pointing to the proximity between his quest and Christ’s prophetic mission. However, upon the murder of the French contractor, the solemnity with which Yalaan undertakes his duty towards his fellow-countrymen is challenged by Rauss:

And the Butts! Don’t forget that they did not name you their guide or chief or spokesman or any identifiable official whatsoever: that’s how the corporal serves them; they made you their soul. Even the idea of hope, of a social and human solution to their miseries, of a destiny finally man’s destiny, it’s you yourself (talking, gesturing, saying such words as liberty, happiness, ideal, right to their face as you would throw a coin to a beggar), you yourself who forged it and sealed it in them. It’s the only thing that makes a man live or die. The only thing that can’t be manipulated, like the Word of God or nitro-glycerine, neither by prophet nor by expert ... But one day you came along and told them: you will be men, you will be happy, and you will be free. Prophet of a pigmy’s stature, you should know that that night they killed. Killed as a group, deliberately, like a single man, with a single knife, at the same

surmonter d’un écriteau : voilà l’Arabe, le seul, le vrai) ouvrant sur nos mauvais instincts, sur nos déchéances à nos propres yeux... foi de bicot, de malfrat, d’arabe, de crouillat, de sidi, de noraf... profession de foi, si l’on veut, et pourquoi ne voudrait-on pas?” (18).

¹⁷³ “[P]orter quelque chose en soi ... comme le Christ a porté sa Croix ” (65).

fraction of a second. Killed because they began to see that the soul you have given them, unsatisfied, unused, made them suffer too much (36).¹⁷⁴

For Rauss, Yalaan's responsibility in the murder of the construction entrepreneur is unequivocal. In fact, Yalaan's preaching enterprise turns against the ones he intends to emancipate, given that in awakening their consciousness he makes them aware of their unbearable condition, and such realization leads in turn to a murderous reaction.¹⁷⁵ One could argue that Rauss is inflating Yalaan's role in the bloody episode in particular, and the North African community at large; such aggrandizement is all the more striking as it is followed by the sarcastic deflating remark with which Rauss mocks the prophetic and salvific dimension of Yalaan's religious calling. Interpreted from another point of view, the ironic labelling of Yalaan as a Prophet can be read, first as a highly controversial manoeuvre given the status of prophet in Islam as one who establishes a new religious law,¹⁷⁶ and second, as a blasphemous hint stemming from Yalaan's admission into the chain of prophethood and the ensuing negation of Prophet Muhammad's station as the Seal of the Prophets.¹⁷⁷ Yet, from the recognition of Yalaan as a fictional transfiguration of Jesus,¹⁷⁸ as a pseudonym¹⁷⁹ for Christ

¹⁷⁴ "Et les Boucs ! Rappelle-toi qu'ils t'ont nommé, non pas leur guide – ni leur chef ni leur porte-parole ou quelque désignation sociale que ce soit : pour cela ils ont toujours eu leur Caporal – mais leur âme. L'idée même d'un espoir, d'une solution sociale et humaine de leurs misères, d'un destin enfin destin d'hommes, c'est toi-même (parlant, gesticulant, leur jetant à la face des mots dangereux tels que liberté, bonheur, idéal : comme l'on jetterait à un mendiant des louis d'or) c'est toi-même qui l'as forgée, toi-même qui l'as incrustée en eux. La seule chose qui fait vivre ou mourir un homme. La seule chose que l'on ne manie, comme le Verbe de Dieu ou de la nitroglycérine, qu'en prophète ou en expert ... Mais tu es venu un jour leur dire : vous serez des hommes, vous serez heureux, vous serez libres. Prophète à taille de pygmée, j'ai à t'apprendre que cette nuit ils ont tué. Tué en groupe, posément, comme un seul homme, avec un seul couteau, à la même fraction de seconde. Tué parce qu'ils ont commencé à s'apercevoir que trop lourde était cette âme que tu leur as donnée – ou redonnée – insatisfaite, inemployée, et qu'elle les faisait trop souffrir" (49-51).

¹⁷⁵ According to Houaria Kadra-Hadjadji: "Sur tous les plans, la mission du « prophète » des Boucs se solde par un échec" (71) [On every aspect, the mission of the « prophet » of the *Butts* ends in failure].

¹⁷⁶ On the distinction between prophets and messengers Uri Rubin writes: "al-Baydāwī (d. 685-716/1282-1316) says that *rasul* is a prophet who establishes a new *shari'a* (religious law), whereas *nabi* is he who continues an old one" (255).

¹⁷⁷ On Prophet Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets," see Christopher Buck's "Discovering"; Hartmut Bobzin's "The 'Seal of the Prophets': Towards an Understanding of Muhammad's Prophethood"; Uri Rubin's "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy"

¹⁷⁸ On the fictional transfiguration of Jesus, see Theodore Ziolkowski's *Fictional Transfiguration of Jesus* (1972).

¹⁷⁹ On pseudonyms for Christ, C.W. du Toit writes: "This broad category includes any novel in which the hero is felt to be somehow 'Christlike'. The plot is highly relative and depends on the author's understanding and interpretation of Christianity. This does not mean that the figure of Christ must play a redemptive role, although this is often the case. The common denominator in this category is, however, not the New Testament figure of Jesus but the archetypal figure of the redeemer. It introduces the modern hero and not the historical Jesus himself. His actions are based on the life of the historical Jesus as depicted in the Gospels and not on the Christ of faith. Examples of this genre are Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and *Crime and Punishment*, Camus' *The Stranger*, Faulkner's *The Bear*, Hemingways' *The Old Man and the Sea* and Kafka's *The Trial*" (822).

(du Toit 822), one could further argue that *Les Boucs*, provides reflections on the issues of sacrifice, scapegoatism, and salvation.

According to Susan Ireland, “Like the narrator’s manuscript, Chraïbi’s novel is a provocative, polemical cry of revolt which uses images of violence and recurrent allusions to sacrifice to depict immigrant workers as sacrificial victims” (33). The encounter between Yalaan and Isabelle is particularly relevant for the examination of the notion of sacrifice in the novel; during their heated conversation she says “From the beginning, you have seen yourself as someone who was sacrificed” (115),¹⁸⁰ thereby condemning Yalaan’s logic of victimhood, and undermining the validity of his Christ-like redemptive self-sacrifice.

According to René Girard:

If we look at the extremely wide spectrum of human victims sacrificed by various societies, the list seems heterogeneous... it ranges from the very dregs of society such as the Greek pharmakos, to the king himself... We notice at first glance beings who are either outside or on the fringes of society... Their status as foreigners or enemies, their servile condition, or simply their age prevents these future victims from fully integrating themselves into the community. (12)

As such, the North African labourers fit with the Girardian view on the processes of discrimination and exclusion at the root of the sacrificial process, and the festival of sacrifice provides further insight into the multi-layered significance of sacrifice in the novel:

Each of them watched the mutton cooking as though he were watching Mohammed himself, and each one deep inside realized that this was not just a ritual that was reborn in this way every year, but their very flesh, their organs, their instincts, and their thirst for life ... The only conclusion they had drawn was the recognition that in all times and in all places there had always been men – and not just North Africans in France – whose fate it was to be sacrificial victims, whether the Negro in America, the Jew in the Middle East, the Moslem in India, the slaves of ancient Rome or Greece, unassimilated into a civilization, as though to prove that no creation of man has ever been for everyone or ever been perfect. Their circumstances as sacrificial victims should have gladdened them, as the Butts rejoiced in themselves, twenty-two North Africans of the 300,000 in France, they alone who had comprehended the

¹⁸⁰ “[D]ès le départ tu t’es considéré comme sacrifié” (169).

opportunity that had been granted to them to utilize their misery as one would a knife ... being reborn in spring. (120)¹⁸¹

The fascination exerted by the animal sacrifice stems in large part from the physical and mental health benefits associated with the consumption of the sacrificial lamb; and in addition to its regenerating properties the common meal points to the re-establishment of a sense of unity¹⁸² among the migrants. The depiction of the sacrificial rite gives Chraïbi the opportunity to put forward the idea of the North African immigrant as sacrificial victim. In the original text, the ironic use of the oxymoronic promotion of the Arabs to sacrifice (“promus au sacrifice”) serves to indicate in fact that the status of victim is held in high regard, as it brings the North African immigrants closer to other historical victims of collective persecution, and therefore raises them to a higher rank. Interestingly, the narrator’s use of an oxymoronic formulation in the context of the common meal insists on the didactic value of the festival of sacrifice by referring to its ambivalent function: the North Africans come to realize their promotion to the rank of sacrificial victims, and simultaneously their triumphant demotion to the rank of “plain creatures of God in the natural state of creature” (120).¹⁸³ Therefore, following Chraïbi’s line of thought, along with its propitiatory function it is to the formation of a collective consciousness that the festival of sacrifice contributes.

The killing of the French entrepreneur can also be read as a sacrifice considering that the accumulated anger of the North African migrant community is appeased by the violent murder that involves each one of the twenty-two immigrants. Yet, due to the nature of the sacrifice, the appeasement is only a temporary truce, as it fails to bring “harmony and abundance” (Girard 95). Thus, for the angrily unemployed foreigners the racist contractor becomes the target of a scapegoat polarization.

¹⁸¹ “Mais même ainsi, chacun d’eux, regardant le mouton cuire comme s’il eût regardé Mahomet même, avait la connaissance tout intérieure que ce n’était pas seulement un rite qui renaissait ainsi tous les ans, mais leur chair même, leurs organes et leurs instincts, leur appétit de la vie ... Tout ce qu’ils en avaient extrait, c’était la connaissance que de tout temps, en tout lieu, toujours il y avait eu un lot d’hommes – et non seulement les Nord-Africains en France – promus au sacrifice : Nègres en Amérique, Juifs dans le Proche-Orient, Musulmans de l’Inde, esclaves de l’ancienne Rome ou de la Grèce antique... inadaptés à une civilisation, quelle qu’elle fût, comme pour prouver qu’aucune création de l’homme n’a jamais été générale ou parfaite. Leur condition même de sacrifiés eût dû les réjouir : comme les Boucs s’étaient réjouis des leurs, 22 Nord-Africains parmi les 300 000 en France, qui seuls avaient compris la chance qui leur était offerte de se servir de leur misère comme d’un couteau ... renaissant au printemps ...” (176-178).

¹⁸² On the Quran in *Les Boucs*, Zaïmi writes: “La parole coranique devient la réponse de l’immigré qui ressoude une communauté fragilisée par l’expérience du bouc. Le roman s’efface derrière la parole sacrée” (189).

¹⁸³ “[S]imples créatures de Dieu à l’état de simples créatures” (177-178).

Throughout the novel, Chraïbi's interest in the portraying of the exclusion mechanisms in French society comes with a concern for the scapegoat theme, more specifically in the North African immigrants as collective scapegoats. The use of disparaging terms¹⁸⁴ to refer to the North African migrants shows the degree to which they are despised and reveals the dynamic of naming used to underscore the inferiority of the foreigner. The twenty-two North Africans are interchangeably called "Boucs," "Arabes," "Nord-Africains," and among the derogatory labels "Bicots" is a term that attracts particular attention. Yalaan uses the term "bicot" when he refers to any Arab, whereas the term "Boucs" refers specifically to the twenty-two immigrants. Interestingly, Yalaan uses the term "bicots" not only when he refers to any group of Maghrebi immigrants, but he calls himself "bicot" too. One may argue that Yalaan's use of a racist insult is an indicator of a form of internalized oppression, yet, one can contend that the constant repetition of the derogatory term deflates and distorts the verbal abuse. The appropriation of the humiliating insult, the seizing of the oppressor's language can be interpreted as a mimicry and mockery of the racist dynamic of naming which disrupt the validity of Yalaan's internalized racism.

Furthermore, the novel makes multiple references to the animal world, whether through direct comparisons with the characters or zoological metaphors. In that regard, the author's choice of caprids for the original title in French¹⁸⁵ is open to a wide range of interpretations among which the presumption that migration and animalization are related, and that acculturation has dehumanizing effects. However, another layer of meaning appears while reading the final scene:

He persuaded his father to sell his last goat by telling him that with the price of this single goat he could buy him a thousand, in ten years' time. And he left for France. The priest said aloud: "I have saved a soul" (123).¹⁸⁶

Interestingly, the goat at the centre of the transaction is the last one available for sale, as to indicate the singularity and narrowness of Yalaan's field of action. Yalaan convinces his father on the prospect of enormous gains without thinking of the consequences of this

¹⁸⁴ On the use of the word "Bicot," Legras asks: "Pourquoi un Maghrébin emploie-t-il un lexique aussi dépréciatif à l'égard de sa propre race? La question mérite d'être posée" (39).

¹⁸⁵ For an interpretation of the novel's title, see Legras 56.

¹⁸⁶ "Il persuada son père de vendre son dernier bouc, lui expliquant qu'avec le prix de ce bouc il en pourrait acheter mille, dans dix ans. Et il embarqua vers la France. Et le prêtre dit à voix haute : - J'ai sauvé une âme" (181-182).

operation. Therefore, one could read the selling of the goat as a first sacrifice that prefigures Yalaan's Way of the Cross. Moreover, the novel ends with Chraïbi's satirical attack on the priest in Algeria and by association on the clergy's role in the French colonial enterprise. The irony of the final remark lies in the miserable failure of the priest's pretention. Yet, if the priest is far from serving as an agent of salvation, Isabelle appears as a redemptive figure in Yalaan's geographical and spiritual journey. She is a Second World-War survivor who refuses Yalaan's indulging in self-pity, and she confronts his defeatism by insisting on the role he has played in his own fall. Isabelle emphasizes uncompromisingly Yalaan's responsibility in his descent into hell, yet, she also provides an opening, as evidenced by the Corporal's remarks concerning Yalaan in the final scene of the festival:

“Take him away,” he said in a breath. “Take him away with you and give him children and a home and the stability of a civilized man. That is what he has tended toward, and what he's always wanted. Nothing else.” She looked into his eyes. They were sunken so deeply into their orbits that the brows looked like the visor of a cap. *Yes*, she thought, *as if to protect oneself from life*. “All I possess,” he added, “is this rusty shack. I'd gladly sell it ... to help you. What the devil! There are caves around here.” They looked for Rauss for quite a while. It was only after the sun came up that they found him, peacefully asleep under his jalopy. He never had been an Arabo. (121-122)¹⁸⁷

Yalaan's self-redemption is not possible, he cannot set himself free and without Isabelle he will certainly not be liberated from bondage. Therefore, Isabelle is understood to bring balance into Yalaan's life, to offer a possibility of salvation and rebirth. One could interpret the redeeming role of Isabelle as an indicator of Chraïbi's faith in interracial relationships, given that the French woman offers an alternative to the failure of Yalaan's prophetic mission and an end to his Calvary.

In consideration of the religious imagery used by Chraïbi in *Les Boucs*, it appears clearly that the author has opted whole-heartedly for Christian symbols and motifs. Chraïbi's

¹⁸⁷ “Emmenez-le, dit-il en un souffle. Emmenez-le et donnez-lui des enfants, un foyer, une stabilité d'homme civilisé : c'est à cela qu'il a toujours tendu, cela qu'il a toujours envié – et rien d'autre. Elle regarda ses yeux. Ils étaient si enfoncés dans les orbites que les arcades sourcilières en semblaient deux visières de casquette. Oui, pensa-t-elle, comme pour se protéger de la vie. – Tout ce que j'ai, ajouta-t-il, c'est cette cabine rouillée. Mais je la vendrais bien volontiers... pour vous aider. Que diable ! il se trouve bien des cavernes dans cette région. On chercha longtemps Raus. Ce ne fut qu'au soleil levant qu'on le trouva : paisiblement endormi sous son tacot. Il n'avait jamais été un Bicot” (179-180).

examination of the notions of sacrifice, scapegoat and salvation in the context of the Muslim North African migration to France through a Christian lens calls into question the figure of the reader. While critics have rejected the heaviness with which Chraïbi has handled the dark representation of France's inhospitality after World War II, and formulated his acerbic views on Maghrebi migration, little effort has been made to interpret the presence of irony along Christian symbols. One can also argue that Chraïbi is delivering a dissonant response to a critical situation which does not have a one-time solution. In fact, the presence of irony and humour in *Les Boucs*, as evidenced by the examination of issues related to migration and diaspora, the *Künstlerroman*, mental health and religious imagery, unveils different levels of meaning and helps grasping the nuances of Chraïbi's text.

1.3 Driss Chraïbi on *Les Boucs*

The examination of Chraïbi's interviews and memoirs serves the purpose of bringing to light the author's intention behind the writing of *Les Boucs*. The objective is to shed light on Chraïbi's worldview by exploring the various levels of interpretation that the author's interviews and the context allow for. In his interviews, Chraïbi insists on France's inhospitality towards immigrants, in general, and more specifically on the squalid living conditions of the North African community. Still, the examination of the interviews in combination with the various contexts contribute to the discovery of different layers and levels of signification. The recurring themes in the interviews are related to migrancy, love, suffering, madness and insanity, the encounter between Europe and Islam, and humour. Therefore, through the combined exploration of the context and the interviews which cover these subjects the reader uncovers new levels of meaning in Chraïbi's speech.

1.3.1 Driss Chraïbi interviewed by Jean Prasteau (1955)

In a 1955 interview¹⁸⁸ given to Jean Prasteau, Driss Chraïbi talks about the reasons that led him to write *Les Boucs*: "Last year, he says, I did Simone Weil's experiment. For six months, in Paris, in the periphery and in Strasbourg – ah! How atrocious the North Africans' situation is in Strasbourg – I have interviewed young and old Muslims. Broadly speaking, I can say that I have met fifty thousand of them... And each one has told me the same story" (2).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ All the translations of Chraïbi's interviews are mine.

¹⁸⁹ "L'année passée, me dit-il, j'ai fait l'expérience de Simone Weil. Pendant six mois, à Paris, en banlieue et à Strasbourg – ah! Que la situation des Nord Africains est atroce, à Strasbourg – j'ai interrogé des jeunes et des vieux musulmans. En gros, je puis dire que j'en ai rencontré cinquante mille ... Et chacun m'a raconté la même histoire" (2).

The parallel with Simone Weil is of crucial importance as it points to the experiment made by the French philosopher who took a year off from her teaching position in 1935 in order to work incognito in several French factories. She recorded her experience in *La Condition Ouvrière*,¹⁹⁰ which “contains Simone Weil’s journal and the notes she made after her day’s work in the Renault, Alsthom and Basse-Indres Forges factories in Paris. In it she argues against the so-called ‘rationalization’ or ‘Taylorization’ of labour, which reduces the worker to a series of gestures unconnected with reality” (Miles 264). Weil¹⁹¹ is preoccupied with the oppression of the working class, and Chraïbi is concerned with the tragic fate of the North Africans. Both authors share a direct experience with oppressed populations which turns into a source of inspiration for Weil’s essay and Chraïbi’s novel. What draws attention in Chraïbi’s remark is the enormous number of individuals which he asserts he has met over a 12-month period. Yet, the staggering number of Maghrebi immigrants does not necessarily equate to a wide variety of experiences. Regardless of the interviewees’ age, Chraïbi takes notice of the prevalent similarity that characterizes the immigrants’ personal stories:

And here they are disillusioned. They realize that, like over there, they only enjoy a tenth of their citizenship rights. Obviously, many of them earn a thousand francs whereas they used to earn only three hundred over there... What about the others? They face the employers’ prejudices who conceive of them as mere thieves, unstable, unable to perform... Then, they are out of work, become bitter, pile up in slums ... Look, in Nanterre, I have seen twenty of them living in a truck’s cabin! (2)¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ In *Simone Weil as We Knew Her*, Joseph Perrin writes: “in 1934 she decided to embrace the workers’ lot in its utmost severity. She knew hunger and weariness, the rebuffs and tyranny of work in a chain factory, the agony of being unemployed. It was never just an experiment with her but it was a real and total self-giving” (20-21).

¹⁹¹ In *Waiting for God*, Weil writes: “After my year in the factory ... I was, as it were, in pieces, soul and body. That contact with affliction had killed my youth. Until then I had not had any experience of affliction, unless we count my own, which, as it was my own, seemed to me, to have little importance, and which moreover was only a partial affliction, being biological and not social. I knew quite well that there was a great deal of affliction in the world, I was obsessed with the idea, but I had prolonged and first-hand experience of it. As I worked in the factory, indistinguishable to all eyes, including my own, from the anonymous mass, the affliction of others entered into my flesh and soul. Nothing separated me from it, for I had really forgotten my past and I looked forward to no future, finding it difficult to imagine the possibility of surviving all the fatigue. What I went through there marked me in so lasting a manner that still today when any human being, whoever he may be and in whatever circumstances, speaks to me without brutality, I cannot help having the impression that there must be a mistake and that unfortunately the mistake will in all probability disappear. There I received forever the mark of a slave, like the branding of the red-hot iron the Romans put on the foreheads of their most despised slaves. Since then I have always regarded myself as a slave” (66-67).

¹⁹² “Et les voilà désenchantés. Ils s’aperçoivent qu’ils ne jouissent, comme là-bas, que d’un dixième de leurs droits de citoyens. Évidemment, beaucoup gagnent mille francs alors qu’ils n’en gagnaient que trois cents, là-bas... Mais les autres ? Ils se heurtent aux préjugés des patrons, qui les imaginent exclusivement voleurs, instables, incapables de rendement... Alors, ils chôment, s’aigrissent, s’entassent dans des taudis... Tenez, à Nanterre, j’en ai vu vivre vingt dans une cabine de camion !” (2).

One point of convergence is the Maghrebis' disillusionment that develops following the post-migration arrival. That is to say that, prior to their journey, the majority of the Maghrebis interviewed by Chraïbi held high expectations of France, and that the post-migration conditions in the resettlement society do not meet these expectations. According to Chraïbi, the resettlement in France does not offer more citizenship rights to the Maghrebi migrants than in their home country, and by insisting on the vulnerability of the marginalized Maghrebis, the writer singles out France's appalling attitude towards its North African labourers. He objects to the abuse of his fellow countrymen: the Maghrebis do not enjoy equal rights in practice whether they live in the Maghreb or in France, in the colonial peripheries or in the metropolitan centres.

In contrast with the financial growth of a portion of the Maghrebi population residing on the French territory, Chraïbi looks into the daily obstacles and barriers faced by the North Africans. And it is in the nature of the relationship between the French employers and the North African employees that Chraïbi identifies a major source of contention. In his view, the employers are quick to wrongly label Maghrebi labourers, and reinforce derogatory stereotypes through degrading clichés. Moreover, the hierarchical structure of capitalist production puts the labour migrants in a position of inferiority and vulnerability; the labourers' adjustment is further complicated by the hostile attitude of the profit-driven employers who build on a set of caricatural representations and beliefs in which the Maghrebi labourers are seen as inadequate and dishonest. For Chraïbi, the result of such inhospitality is a growing feeling of resentment and isolation, and he is aware of the harmful effects of unemployment on the migrants' psychology. As a response to the sense of being rejected by the French population, the Maghrebis use the withdrawal in the slums as a coping mechanism. Yet, Chraïbi underscores the incongruous impact and consequence of such social exclusion on the close-knit Maghrebi community.

Another area of interest is Chraïbi's decision to distance himself from the approach he had adopted in his previous novel *Le Passé simple*: "First, I did not want to do any more regionalism. I wanted to write a French writer's novel" (2).¹⁹³ In *Regionalism and the Reading Class*, Wendy Griswold identifies six markers¹⁹⁴ of the regionalist literary aesthetic,

¹⁹³ "D'abord, je ne voulais plus faire de régionalisme. Je voulais faire un roman d'écrivain français" (2).

¹⁹⁴ According to Wendy Griswold: "While different regions provide different materials, regionalist writing from anywhere presents some common characteristics. The works that are most readily recognized as "regionalism" share features that amount to a family resemblance. The most important literary expressions of the regional

yet, a definition of literary regionalism needs to take into consideration the intentionality and institutional framing of such literary production given that “In the broadest sense, regional literature can be anything written by someone from or associated with a region” (Griswold 20). One could argue that if Chraïbi’s first novel meets some of the regionalist aesthetic criteria, *Les Boucs*, in spite of its attention to a sense of place, unsettles the boundaries of the regional mode through its attention to the diasporic condition of the labour migrants. Chraïbi makes a clear distinction between his two novels: while *Le Passé simple*¹⁹⁵ puts the author in the regional lineage of Francophone North African authors,¹⁹⁶ with *Les Boucs* his intention is to move from what he considers to be a form of regionalist literature. If, as Griswold believes, “Literature expresses place through content (the pastoral-derived regionalist aesthetic), through intention (regionalist cultural movements), and through framing (classification and association of authors with a particular place)” (101) then it would not be an overstatement to say that institutions have firmly placed *Le Passé simple* at the margin of French literature. With these remarks, Chraïbi simultaneously points to the politics of labelling, and engages in self-promotion as a French writer, and by doing so he offers a hint as to his target audiences. Chraïbi wants to achieve a higher status by producing a novel that ranks alongside the works of French writers. Therefore, one can deduce that Chraïbi’s intention in writing *Les boucs* is to broaden his audience.

To the interviewer’s comments on the masterful success of *Les Boucs* as a “livre d’amour” [book of love] in which the reader is “pris d’un vertige hallucinant” [seized by an unsettling vertigo] Chraïbi replies, “I want to restore two worlds ... My goal is to build a bridge between two worlds” (2).¹⁹⁷ Chraïbi’s statement is of peculiar interest as it brings to the fore the potential of literature as a tool for restoration and mutual understanding. The portrayal of Maghrebi labour migrants in France, and of Yalaan in particular, serves to put face to face two populations engaged in a hierarchical and conflictual relationship. Yet, the author implies that both worlds have collapsed, that is to say that on the one hand, Chraïbi repeats the negative views on the current backward state of affairs in North Africa, and by

aesthetic are: Rural or small-town settings; Working-class or rustic characters, depicted as tough, unyielding, traditional; Closely observed descriptions of land, weather, flora, fauna, folkways; Plots driven by conflict between insiders and outsiders; outsiders (often urban) are agents of change who threaten local way of life; Reference to the past, to simpler ways now disappearing; Tension over insider/outsider differences in reading, writing, education, intellectual sophistication” (21).

¹⁹⁵ For a summary of the controversy surrounding Chraïbi’s first novel published in 1954, see McLarney.

¹⁹⁶ As mentioned above, Albert Memmi puts Chraïbi among the authors who form the “Génération de 1952.”

¹⁹⁷ “Je veux restaurer deux mondes ... Mon but est de jeter un pont entre deux mondes...” (2).

extension in the Arab and Muslim world he had expressed earlier in *Le passé simple*, and on the other, he applies the same criticism to the West in reason of its inability to turn its technological progress into the establishment of a more equal society.

The encounter in the metropolis of the French colonial power takes the shape of a violent collision between the French nationals and the North African migrants who are both, according to Chraïbi, heirs of two great civilizations in ruins a decade after the end of World War II. What one cannot fail to notice is that while the author's objective is to facilitate the mutual exchanges between the two parts involved in the conflict, it is by a revival of the past that he intends to undertake his literary project. The metaphor of the bridge underscores the polarized position of the two worlds and the in-betweenness of the author; however, the author's expression of nostalgia is useful to the extent that in his longing for a lost time and a lost space the Western and Arab worlds have an equal importance.

1.3.2 Driss Chraïbi interviewed by Kacem Basfao (1973)

In 1973, Driss Chraïbi gives a series of interviews to Kacem Basfao, who is writing a dissertation on the works of the Moroccan writer. Chraïbi explains how he became interested in the condition of the North African migrants in France:

I lived, let's say, in one way or another, the situation of the immigrants that had arisen and is currently being posed here or anywhere else, I do say anywhere else in the world, even during my childhood there were emigrants coming from where I am from: and that's terrible. I became aware of this, and instead of producing a well-constructed book - in the way that would have been expected of me - I just did the opposite: that is, in *Les Boucs*, the expectation was to see the North African immigrants, and to judge them. Instead, I saw the problem from within, that is to say, it is these North Africans who are judging and trying to understand the society in which they are living ... I even went a little step further by showing that there are - it is not a demonstration but a widening of the problem - that there have always been immigrants and unfortunately, as CAMUS used to say, the bacillus of the plague does not die, it never disappears (that of racism) in any society. (428)¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ “[J]’ai vécu, disons de près ou de loin, la situation des immigrés qui s’était posée et qui se pose actuellement ici ou partout ailleurs, je dis bien partout ailleurs dans le monde, même du temps de mon enfance il y avait des émigrés de chez nous : et ça c’est terrible. J’en ai pris conscience, et au lieu de fabriquer un livre bien construit – dans le genre de ce qu’on aurait pu attendre de moi – j’ai fait juste le contraire : c’est-à-dire, dans « Les Boucs », on attendait de voir les immigrés Nord-Africains, et qu’on les juge. Au lieu de cela, j’ai vu le problème de

It is therefore on the idea of reversal that the author insists, and which can be interpreted as a form of resistance. In his remarks, Chraïbi explains how he has tried not only to disrupt but to reverse the structures of domination by writing against the expectations of the reader. The construction of Chraïbi's second novel differs greatly from the one used in *Le Passé simple*, and the deviation is not only in the construction of the book but in the perspective from which the main issue is viewed. The relationship between observation and judgement is central to the discussion on *Les Boucs*, and Chraïbi's reversal of the dominant surveillance allows Yalaan and the labour migrants to direct the gaze upon the French society and momentarily reverse the orientation of power.

The reference to Camus is of particular interest too as Chraïbi aims to maintain a continuity with the French Algerian-born writer's denunciation of varied forms of oppression. In line with Camus' use of the bacterial infection metaphor, Chraïbi does not hide his scepticism as to the total eradication of racism. The timeless presence of immigrants goes hand in hand with the existence of a racist ideology that spreads like an unstoppable infectious disease and against which the Moroccan author believes his novel can function as potential element of cure through the questions it asks.

Chraïbi raises another interesting point when he describes the central character of the novel:

the hero YALAN WALDIK, I called him so faced with society ... And in the first part he says "I," but his humanity dies little by little, he loses the "I" and becomes "he," that's it! ... It's a form of style. But, in fact, you take – I am returning to my hobby which is psychoanalysis – you have someone who dies little by little to himself and loses his body and soul: it is a characterized psychosis. (428)¹⁹⁹

The peculiarity of the name given by Driss Chraïbi to the main character of the novel resides in its uniqueness: it is not a name that a reader might encounter in traditional French and

l'intérieur, c'est-à-dire que ce sont ces Nord-Africains-là qui jugent et essayent de comprendre la société dans laquelle ils vivent ... Je suis même allé un peu plus loin en montrant qu'il y a – ce n'est pas une démonstration mais un élargissement du problème que de tout temps il y a eu des immigrés et malheureusement, comme disait CAMUS, le bacille de la peste ne meurt pas, il ne disparaît jamais (celui du racisme) et ce dans n'importe quelle société" (428).

¹⁹⁹ "[L]e héros YALAN WALDIK, je l'ai appelé ainsi face à la société (...) Et dans la première partie il dit « je, » mais son humanité meurt peu à peu, il perd le « je » et devient « il, » c'est ça ! (...) C'est une forme de style. Mais, en fait, vous prenez – j'en reviens à mon dada qui est la psychanalyse – vous prenez quelqu'un qui meurt peu à peu à lui-même et qui perd et son corps et son âme : c'est une psychose caractérisée" (428).

North African literature. While Chraïbi has often repeated that *Les Boucs* is not an autobiography, it should be noted that the name chosen for the central character of the Algerian migrant is a play on the Arabic curse meaning “May Allah curse your parents.” Such choice thereby indicates the Islamic dimension of the curse and points to the specific role of Yalaan’s ancestors. To better understand the intricacies of such a choice, Devin Stewart’s definition of curses as “wishes referring to a possible future event,” allows for a better understanding of Chraïbi’s stance towards Yalaan’s parents, and the use of the curse²⁰⁰ as “denouncement, castigation, or reprimand” (705). From this angle, Chraïbi associates the adaptation and adjustment to a new culture with the experience of loss, a double decomposition, physical and spiritual, and this lingering death is transcribed in the text through the abrupt transition from a first to a third person narrative. The decay of Yalaan’s physical and spiritual state, leaves no doubt as to his mental state, that Chraïbi diagnoses in psychiatric terms.

Chraïbi’s enterprise carries a reflection on the role of the writer as he personally refuses to take on a patronising stance towards the reader:

What I do: I do not give solutions in my books, no! I ask questions, I disturb the consciences. The novelist is the navigator who casts salutary doubts... both in scientific certainty as well as in political certainty, isn’t he? He instigates a kind of movement by questioning things... and questioning himself, doesn’t he? Is there not for an individual, and for a people or a group of peoples, a march forward and a perpetual quest? (448)²⁰¹

Far from believing in his ability to provide the reader with ready-made answers to the various issues addressed in *Les Boucs*, Chraïbi finds satisfaction in the questions he is able to ask within the space provided by the novel. For Chraïbi, the variety of the questions he asks, and the depth of his inquiry should lead to a disruption of the reader’s assumptions, and to a reconsideration of the reader’s firmest beliefs. If the author believes to be the instigator of the

²⁰⁰ Devin J. Stewart writes: “Westermarck points out the logical connection between a curse and the infraction for which it serves as retribution: the punishment fits the crime” (705).

²⁰¹ “Ce que je fais : je ne donne pas de solutions dans mes livres, non ! Je pose des questions, je déränge les consciences. Est-ce que le romancier n’est pas en fait le navigateur qui sème des doutes salutaires... aussi bien dans les certitudes scientifiques que dans les certitudes politiques ? Est-ce qu’il n’imprime pas une espèce de mouvement en remettant les choses en question... et soi-même en question ? Est-ce qu’il n’y a pas pour un individu, et aussi bien pour un peuple ou un groupe de peuples, une marche vers l’avant et une quête perpétuelle ?” (448).

reader's self-questioning, Chraïbi also considers that the role of the writer is to initiate a movement, and that questioning²⁰² is crucial for both the individual and the community.

Furthermore, Chraïbi affirms that he does not take into consideration his audience when writing a novel: "I do not write for the reader. Or else I will be asked to write books that always take place in North Africa, with Arab characters, North Africans. Since I write in French, I would be asked to write books located here in France. I do not write any. There are no French heroes in my books" (468).²⁰³ More than shedding light on his intended audience, Chraïbi clarifies the source of motivation for his choice not to integrate French heroic figures in his novels. While the character of Isabelle is distinguished by an elevated sense of courage, the other French nationals present in the novel are far from enjoying a hero status, and one may add that the figure of the hero²⁰⁴ in *Les Boucs* remains highly problematic. Chraïbi explains how the constraints of having to write for a limited group of readers would put automatic restrictions on his writing, and the detrimental effects that writing for a consumer-oriented readership would have on his craft. Chraïbi implies that there is a demand on the part of the French audience to read about the Maghreb, and that such readers are filled with a set of expectations, and essentializing tendencies that he does not want to be entrapped with. In other words, one of Chraïbi's particular traits consists in his refusal to produce novels that fit the taste of the time.

Chraïbi is also firm in his stance against an Orientalist view of the North Africans and the Arabs, and when Basfao points to the presence of caricatures (468) in his novels, such as Mac O'Mac in *Les Boucs*, Chraïbi replies: "I do not create heroes, there are no heroes in my books. The real heroes are the problems addressed ... For example, the problem of immigrants that has only worsened and that I described in *Les Boucs*. These problems are somewhat transcendental ... That's why they are still relevant" (468-469).²⁰⁵ These remarks indicate that Chraïbi believes that there really is a difference between a traditional and a more personal crafting of heroes. By insisting on the nonphysical dimension of the issues he

²⁰² For a philosophical approach of questions, see Peter W. Hanks' "Questions."

²⁰³ "Je n'écris pas pour le lecteur. Ou alors on me demandera d'écrire des livres qui se situent toujours en Afrique du Nord, avec des personnages arabes, des africains du Nord. Puisque j'écris en français on me demanderait écrire (sic) des livres se situant ici, en France. Je n'en écris aucun. Il n'y a aucun héros français dans mes livres" (468).

²⁰⁴ I have covered this issue above when studying the successive failures of Yalaan, in contrast with the redeeming role of Isabelle.

²⁰⁵ "Je ne fabrique pas de héros, il n'y a pas de héros dans mes livres. Les véritables héros ce sont les problèmes abordés ... Par exemple le problème des immigrés qui n'a fait qu'empirer et que j'ai décrit dans *Les Boucs*. Ces problèmes sont quelques peu transcendants ... C'est pour cela que c'est toujours actuel" (468-469).

addresses in his novels, Chraïbi aims to redirect the reader's attention from the individual hero to issues of a more general order. One may interpret Chraïbi's move as an attempt to challenge the traditional concept of heroism in French literature. For the author, the condemnation of racism takes precedence over Yalaan's personal condition due to its transcendental nature, and the author establishes therefore a hierarchy in which the emerging hero is overtaken by the immensity of a problem that is irrespective of time and space.

In parallel to this, *Les Boucs*, as mentioned above, abounds in religious references, and Chraïbi constantly stresses the spiritual dimension of his work:

going back to the origin, what could have happened in the soul of this North African that penetrates his journey, his itinerary in Europe? And, as a key, we find a small child, the little child he had been, shoe-shine boy in Algeria lured by the Catholic priest's mirage of the civilizing West. In all cases, in all my books it is a non-sentimental crisis, a crisis that I will call of credence, of belief in man. (487)²⁰⁶

Not only is the author interested in the politics of migrancy, and the movement of populations between North Africa and France, but he is first and foremost determined to explore the spiritual aspect of the migrant experience. According to Chraïbi, it is because he manages to reach the soul of the ten-year old Yalaan, that the Catholic priest in Bône convinces the Algerian child to later embark for France. The vulnerability of the innocent child is presented in sharp contrast with the clergyman's false promise as to condemn the trickery at the origin of the migration process. The deceit at the root of Yalaan's departure is read by Chraïbi as a spiritual treason that further alienates individuals from each other, and one could read the inclusion of a deceiving priest as an indicator of Chraïbi's emphasis on the deception at the origin of the civilizing mission undertaken by the French colonial authorities in North Africa.

Another issue of particular interest for Chraïbi is the dilemma associated with the language used by the labour migrants in the novel:

For a while I had wondered what right did I have to make Yalaan Waldik, the hero of *Les Boucs*, speak French? In a first version I made him speak a bit in Kabyle, a bit in

²⁰⁶ “[E]n remontant jusqu’à l’origine, qu’est-ce qui a pu se passer dans l’âme de cet africain du Nord qui traverse son périple, son itinéraire en Europe ? Et, comme clé, on retrouve un petit enfant, le petit enfant qu’il avait été, cireur en Algérie à qui un prêtre catholique a fait miroiter le mirage de l’Occident civilisateur. Dans tous les cas, dans tous mes livres il s’agit d’une crise non sentimentale, une crise que j’appellerai de créance, de croyance en l’homme” (487).

Arabic, a bit in Algerian French; and I said to myself: I will not be received by the reader. But if I had been courageous all the way through, not giving a single damn about the receptiveness of the reader, and then the sale, the distribution, I would happily have done so by breaking the French novel. You see what I mean. YALAN WALDIK or RAUSS would bluntly have expressed themselves in Algerian in the middle of a very French sentence, a very well-built one. (491)²⁰⁷

Behind Chraïbi's concern with the language used by Yalaan and the Maghrebi migrants, the author broadens the scope of his reflection to include the literary experience of the reader. The realization that the presence of tri-lingual characters in the novel would have complicated the interaction between the reader and the text leads Chraïbi to opt for the use of French language as the main tool for communication. Chraïbi's choice has been the target of harsh criticism, partly because of the young shoe-shine's unexplained and unrealistic level of fluency in French, yet, the author implies that the expectations of the French-speaking audience along with the pressures of the market are two major constraints he had to operate under. It can thus be said that the mechanisms of adjustment show the extent to which Chraïbi gives precedence to reaching a larger audience over a realistic rendering of the linguistic variety that characterizes the Franco-Maghrebi encounter.

1.3.3 Driss Chraïbi interviewed by Guy Dugas (1999)

In 1999, Driss Chraïbi was interviewed by Professor Guy Dugas at the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information (BPI) of the Pompidou Centre in Paris. The Moroccan author was given the opportunity to talk about the context in which he wrote *Les Boucs*, and clarify his personal reaction to his second novel's success:

I wrote *Les Boucs* on racism. It was in 1955. By the time I was writing it, I really, really ... - because there was a huge press - I really believed that the Algerian war was going to stop. Reread the press of the time: one page in *Le Monde*, three-quarters of a

²⁰⁷ "J'en étais arrivé, pendant un certain temps, à me demander de quel droit fais-je parler en français Yalann Waldik, le héros des Boucs ? Dans une première version je l'ai fait parler un peu en kabyle, un peu en arabe, un peu en français algérien ; et je me suis dit : je ne vais pas être reçu par le lecteur. Mais si j'avais été jusqu'au bout du courage, en me foutant totalement de la réceptivité du lecteur, et puis de la vente, de la diffusion, je l'aurais fait volontiers en cassant le roman français. Tu vois ce que je veux dire. YALAN WALDIK ou RAUS se seraient exprimés carrément en algérien au beau milieu d'une phrase très française, très bien construite" (491).

page in *Le Figaro*, etc. What did I do? I hit the road ... so as not to be a prisoner of the media. (165)²⁰⁸

It is worth noting Chraïbi's insistence on racism as the essential thread that can be found in the book. Due to the media attention showered upon *Les Boucs*, Chraïbi began to think that his novel could put an end to the armed confrontation in Algeria. Still, the author's level of distrust towards the media is such that he decides to isolate himself. While his withdrawal can be read as a cynical response to the media interest, one could argue that by refusing to take part in the game of exoticism, Chraïbi breaks the rules imposed upon him by the publishing industry of the time, and rejects the offers to play the part of a token, aware of the risks posed by such role entrapment.

During the interview Chraïbi delves into the new dynamics of the European publishing industry and provides the audience with his own views on matters related to Western civilization:

The creative and editorial centre of Europe is no longer Paris, it's Milan. I can testify: every time I went there (I went there 13 or 14 times, invited by the regions, the libraries), what do we talk about? Major themes, such as the Mediterranean for example, Europe not vis-à-vis the Muslim world, but rather in itself and what poses a problem there. The West is the problem, and I'm a Westerner. Go to Madrid, it's the same. (169)²⁰⁹

Chraïbi's remark presents an interest in that it underscores the emergence of the Lombard capital as a leading intellectual centre at the expense of the French capital where the author has lived and worked for several years. The crux of the argument is that, instead of focusing on issues such as the clash of civilization, the Milanese debates are instrumental to the process of Western self-inquiry. It is as if Chraïbi were considering the ability to exercise introspection as an indicator of intellectual advancement and superiority. Thus, from

²⁰⁸ "J'ai écrit *Les Boucs*, sur le racisme. C'était en 1955. Au moment où je l'écrivais, j'avais vraiment, vraiment... - parce qu'il y a eu une presse énorme - je croyais vraiment que la guerre d'Algérie allait s'arrêter. Relisez la presse de l'époque : une page dans *Le Monde*, trois-quarts de page dans *Le Figaro*, etc... Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ? J'ai foutu le camp... pour ne pas être prisonnier des médias" (165).

²⁰⁹ "Le centre créatif et éditorial de l'Europe, ce n'est plus Paris, c'est Milan. Je peux en témoigner : chaque fois que je suis allé là-bas (j'y suis allé 13 ou 14 fois, invité par les régions, les bibliothèques), on parle de quoi ? De grands thèmes, comme la Méditerranée par exemple, l'Europe non pas face au monde musulman, mais plutôt en elle-même et ce qui y pose problème. C'est l'Occident qui pose problème, et je suis occidental. Allez à Madrid, c'est pareil" (169).

Chraïbi's point of view, the Parisian's intellectual discussions and debates centre on minor issues, and function as a way to avoid carrying a self-examination. An additional point of interest is Chraïbi's self-identification as a Westerner, yet, the remark is loaded with irony and the implied message is that the Moroccan-born author has become a Westerner who assumes a responsibility in the crisis of the West. Chraïbi's statement can be read as an actual attack on the Western authors, and through the appropriation of a Western identity, he is certainly targeting the intellectuals who are still reluctant to undertake a more in-depth analysis of Western centrism.

The interview with Professor Dugas gives Chraïbi the opportunity to express his weariness regarding the repeated attempts made by scholars to apply labels on writers: "And you, please, stop naming us, us all, labelling us ... I know that there are studies that have been done on Maghrebi literature. But that's dated, that's dated" (169).²¹⁰ One can argue that the tone of the conversation between Chraïbi and the expert in Francophone literature from the Maghreb is cordial, albeit heated; yet, the Moroccan author objects to the French scholars' participation in the politics of essentialist labelling. His criticism is primarily aimed at the inaccuracy, invalidity and outdatedness of the critical labels used by the academic caste which function as substantial elements in the tactics of othering; in essence, the author aims at the scholars' role in manipulating and silencing the Maghrebi voice, and the Francophone one in particular.

When asked by a member of the audience about the representativeness of the Francophone Maghrebi writers, Chraïbi elaborates on what he considers to be the function of literature: "I have always considered myself a cultural ambassador for my country and the Maghreb. Writing, for me, was an attempt to break the economic, political and media wall, and build a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean" (176).²¹¹ What is of particular significance in Chraïbi's comment is that he identifies himself as an agent of promotion for his native country of Morocco, and that he believes his contribution extends to the cultural promotion of the Maghreb at large. He identifies three major barriers that prevent the West and the Maghreb from achieving a mutual understanding. Economics, politics and media, in Chraïbi's opinion, work to reinforce the divisions between the two separate worlds

²¹⁰ "Et vous, je vous en prie, arrêtez de nous dénommer, nous autres, de nous étiqueter... Je sais bien qu'il y a des études faites sur la littérature maghrébine. Mais ça date, ça date..." (169).

²¹¹ "[J]e me suis toujours considéré comme un ambassadeur culturel de mon pays et du Maghreb. Écrire, pour moi, c'était essayer de tenter de briser le mur économique, politique et celui des médias, et d'établir un pont entre les deux rives de la Méditerranée" (176).

and it is the responsibility of the writer to establish a *rapprochement*. As to the question about the audience the author writes for, he responds:

Every time I write a book, I do not wonder about its readership. I have a childhood friend who is a psychoanalyst. The only time I laid on his couch ... I fell asleep after one minute! The writer who watches himself writing, who wonders what it's going to be, produces only straw fires, books that last three or four months. If we don't initially look at which store can distribute you, according to which mode of promotion and for which reader, if we do not take all this into account all, the pleasure of writing, of knowing that we have a small talent is enough. At that moment, we acquire durability (176-177).²¹²

If Chraïbi is to be believed, the primary concern of the author is not the targeting of a specific audience. In giving priority to the pleasure taken in the act of writing over the readerly reception, Chraïbi institutes a hierarchy where a clear distinction is made between the writers motivated by achieving either a short or a long-term recognition. Chraïbi's intervention uncovers his sceptical attitude towards the counter productivity of any attempt at satisfying the publishing industry. By humorously bringing into his remarks the episode of the psychoanalytical couch, Chraïbi mocks the writers' narcissistic tendencies, and the efforts put in place by various theorists in order to discover the mechanisms of the unconscious. One may also interpret Chraïbi's sudden sleep as a reminder that any method that sets to explore and meet the tastes of the reader may produce unexpected and unwelcome results.

1.3.4 Foreword to Michel Legras' *Étude sur Les Boucs* (1999)

In 1999, Chraïbi writes the foreword to Michel Legras' *Driss Chraïbi. Étude sur Les Boucs*, where he returns to the fundamental questions raised by the novel forty-five years earlier: "One might ask whether the ignorance of the Other, his pure and simple rejection and his slow human decrystallization find a part to play at the end of this millennium" (5).²¹³ In raising questions about the durability of various mechanisms of exclusion, and the

²¹² "[A] chaque fois que j'écris un livre, je ne m'interroge pas sur son lectorat. J'ai un ami d'enfance qui est psychanalyste. La seule fois où je me suis allongé sur son divan... Je me suis endormi au bout d'une minute ! L'écrivain qui se regarde écrire, qui se demande qu'est-ce que ça va être, ne fabrique que des feux de paille, des livres qui durent trois ou quatre mois. Si on ne recherche pas au départ quel magasin peut vous distribuer, selon quel mode de promotion et pour quel lecteur, si on ne tient pas compte de tout cela, le plaisir d'écrire, de savoir que l'on a un petit talent vous suffit. À ce moment-là, on acquiert la durée" (176-177).

²¹³ "La méconnaissance de l'Autre, son rejet pur et simple et sa lente décrystallisation humaine trouvent-ils droit de cité dans cette fin de millénaire ?" (5)

psychological damages related to widespread deprivation, Chraïbi draws parallels between the French attitude towards Maghrebi immigrants after World War II and on the eve of the third millennium. In fact, by asking a rhetorical question Chraïbi implies that the answer is more or less self-evident. Yet, the preface is also used to recall the context in which the young author published his second novel:

I had written this book in complete disarray, an intense disarray right to the style. I was wounded in my appetite for belief, I, whose childhood and adolescence had been nourished by book-based humanities. Coming from another world, I had to testify from the inside, go outside the traditional framework of the novel in order to make the words of reality live. It was a heroic and trying time, commensurate with that France which was rebuilding itself morally in the aftermath of the world war. (5)²¹⁴

The state of acute mental confusion is described as having a direct effect on the stylistic orientation of the author, as to suggest that a direct correlation can be established between the writer's mental condition and the disorderliness of the text. *Les Boucs* is presented as the result of an injury that stems from Chraïbi's becoming aware of the inaccuracy of his extensive academic knowledge when confronted with the reality of life in the West. As a response to the high level of dissonance he experiences upon his arrival in France, Chraïbi feels the need to innovate, by experimenting beyond what he considered at that time to be the boundaries of the traditional novel and the conventional realist model. He contextualizes his approach, and through the reference to World War II, he attempts to establish a close correlation between the post conflict's reconstruction and the crafting of his novel while highlighting the fact that even in war-affected France humanity could be found.

As he looks at the current situation regarding the existing mechanisms of marginalisation, Chraïbi declares his unbroken belief in man: "And now? Well! I still believe in man, capable of reaching his greatest humanity. My children and grandchildren prove it to me every day. Thank you, life!" (5).²¹⁵ Before expressing his gratitude to life, he affirms his belief in man's humanity by virtue of the sense of familial fulfilment provided by his

²¹⁴ "J'avais écrit ce livre en plein désarroi, un désarroi intense jusque dans le style. J'étais meurtri dans mon appétit de croire, moi dont l'enfance et l'adolescence avaient été nourries par les humanités livresques. Venu d'un autre monde, il me fallait témoigner de l'intérieur, sortir du cadre traditionnel du roman pour faire vivre les mots de la réalité. Ce fut une époque héroïque et éprouvante, à la mesure de cette France qui se reconstruisait moralement au lendemain de la guerre mondiale" (5).

²¹⁵ "Et maintenant ? Eh bien ! Je crois toujours en l'homme, capable d'atteindre sa plus grande humanité. Mes enfants et mes petits-enfants me le prouvent chaque jour. Merci, la vie !" (5).

progeny, as a parallel with the Caporal's remarks to Isabelle regarding Yalaan's need for "children and a home and the stability of a civilized man" (121).²¹⁶

1.3.5 *Les Boucs* in Chraïbi's memoirs

In 2001, three years after the publication of the first part of his memoir, Chraïbi uncovers some details about the reception of *Les Boucs*,²¹⁷ he writes in *Le Monde à côté*:

Les Boucs had just appeared in bookstores, some journalists wanted to interview me, the war in Algeria was raging. I do not have to recall here the eulogistic reception that the press greeted this work with ... Suffice it to say that I had hit the nail on the head: prevailing racism was tarnishing sweet France; and I noticed with mixed feelings of astonishment and pleasure that, instead of brandishing shields against this diatribe written in black and white with violence, literary critics were reporting on it over and over again, without hiding it down. I was far, far away, from the harsh condemnations that *The Simple Past* had provoked in Morocco. (84-85)²¹⁸

Chraïbi drags the attention to the context in which he has written his second novel, and the great consideration acquired because of the armed conflict occurring at the same time in Algeria between France and the Algerian National Liberation Front. Several layers of meaning can be deduced from Chraïbi's self-congratulation: the Moroccan writer notes with satisfaction, first, the accuracy of what he considers to be an in-depth understanding of the animosity between the two populations; second, the acceptance of textual violence by the French critics can be read as an evidence that *Les Boucs* has also been able to mobilize a

²¹⁶ "[D]es enfants, un foyer, une stabilité d'homme civilisé" (179).

²¹⁷ Several critics have pointed to the similarities between Chraïbi and William Faulkner, to which the Moroccan writer responds in *Le Monde à côté*: "Faulkner fut pour moi une révélation, un éblouissement. À un certain moment, je me suis demandé si, à lui seul, il n'était pas plusieurs auteurs à la fois, doués du même talent. Il me prit dès les premières pages du premier livre que j'ouvris et il ne me lâcha plus, même lorsque j'eus refermé sa dernière œuvre ... C'est lui qui me secoua en quelque sorte – me « secoua les puces », dit Catherine – et me fit inconsciemment retrouver l'usage de ma machine à écrire. Mais ce ne fut pas dans *Les Boucs* qu'il se manifesta ; ce fut dans l'âne" (75-76). [Faulkner was for me a revelation, a dazzlement. At one point, I wondered if he alone was not several authors at once, gifted with the same talent. He took me from the first pages of the first book that I opened, and he never let go of me, even when I had closed his last work ... In a way, it was he who shook me - "gave me a kick up the backside," said Catherine - and unconsciously made me regain the use of my typewriter. But it was not in *Les Boucs* that he manifested himself; it was in *L'Âne*.]

²¹⁸ "Les Boucs venait de paraître en librairie, des journalistes désiraient m'interroger, la guerre d'Algérie faisait rage. Je n'ai pas à rappeler ici l'accueil élogieux que la presse réserva à cet ouvrage ... Qu'il me suffise de dire que j'avais visé juste : le racisme ambiant entachait la douce France ; et je constatais avec un mélange de stupéfaction et de plaisir que les critiques littéraires, au lieu de brandir des boucliers face à ce brûlot écrit noir sur blanc avec violence, en rendaient compte à l'envi, sans le cacher sous le boisseau. J'étais loin, très loin, des condamnations sans appel qu'avait suscitées *Le Passé simple* au Maroc" (84-85).

large consensus against the French racist and xenophobic ideology of the time. By putting into perspective the positive reception of *Les Boucs* with the controversy that has accompanied the publication of *Le Passé simple*, Chraïbi underscores the clear distinction between the French and Moroccan audiences, hinting thereby at the readers' capacity for self-criticism, and to a certain extent the advantage of the French audience over the Moroccan one.

Judging by the enthusiasm with which *Les Boucs* has been received, Chraïbi wonders about the scope of his novel:

It is in Port-Joinville that I learned from the newspapers that some reckless members of the Goncourt Academy nominated *Les Boucs* for their literary prize. I ironed my best suit, polished my shoes and did not sleep that night. My name disappeared overnight. I had a crazy dream: by publishing this book, I was sure that the war in Algeria was going to stop, just by that book. (90-91)²¹⁹

Interestingly, Chraïbi's humorous recounting of his reaction to the nomination by a marginal number of literary critics underlines the importance he gives to ironic self-deprecation which is produced here by the incongruous and ridiculous behaviour of the writer, his grotesque ceremonialism and disproportionate excitement which is abruptly stopped in its tracks. Despite the fact that he does not receive a prize from the Paris based literary organization, Chraïbi confesses his firm belief in the peace-making power of *Les Boucs*, and by extension the conviction that anti-war and pro-peace literature can lead to proper military truce.

One may argue that *Les Boucs* does not explicitly make mention of the French colonization of Algeria, and even less of the Algerian war of independence. Yet, the author implies that the mass migration of hundreds of thousands of Maghrebis is just another side-effect of the French colonial enterprise in North Africa; and as such the denunciation of racism towards North Africans cannot be dissociated from the denunciation of other manifestations of the colonial presence in the Maghreb and the war. In fact, Chraïbi points to the interdependence of the two issues, but as he anticipates the accusations of naivety, he also understands that his trust in the cease-firing potential of his novel belongs to the realm of

²¹⁹ "C'est à Port-Joinville que j'appris par les journaux que quelques membres téméraires de l'académie Goncourt citaient Les Boucs pour leur prix littéraire. Je repassai mon meilleur costume, cirai mes chaussures et ne dormis pas cette nuit-là. Mon nom disparut du jour au lendemain. J'avais fait un rêve fou : en publiant ce livre, j'étais sûr que la guerre d'Algérie allait s'arrêter, rien que par ce livre-là" (90-91).

dream and madness, that is to say that he is at the same time aware of the gravity of the conflict in Algeria and conscious of the limited impact of his novel on the peace-building effort.

Chapter Two - Authorship, Travel Writing and Descent: The Diaspora in Methnani and Fortunato's *Immigrato*

2.1 The Critical Reception of *Immigrato*

2.1.1 Critical Reception of *Immigrato* in Italy

In one of the earliest reviews of *Immigrato* Remo Cacciatori provides interesting comments on the book's singularities. Opening his review with a comparison between *Immigrato* and *Io, venditore di elefanti* written by Senegalese-born Pap Khouma's text, Cacciatori writes, "Omitting for now a discourse on the value of the texts, it is enough to begin with the cultural question of the possible readers, to ascertain that it is precisely the marginality of the authors that led them to a literary legitimacy" (163).²²⁰ Cacciatori's comments are of particular interest as he believes that the readers' attention is caught by the position of the writer rather than the aesthetic value of the text. The critic does not provide further details about what he means when he refers to the marginality of the authors, but he adds, "the two texts of Pap Khouma and Salah Methnani find position in the group of autobiographical narratives, between investigation and fiction" (166).²²¹ The question of genre is underscored by Cacciatori who insists on the autobiographical dimension of the text, and he is of the opinion that *Immigrato* is indeed a hybrid text which borrows from the "romanzo picaresco" [picaresque novel] and the "romanzo di formazione" [Bildungsroman] (168).

While *Immigrato* can be read as a text that crosses generic borders, and a call for a reassessment of generic conventions, Methnani's condition of marginality enables a reading of *Immigrato* as a hybrid cultural form. According to Homi Bhabha,

the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (1990, 211)

²²⁰ "[T]ralasciando per ora un discorso sul valore dei testi, basta partire dalla domanda culturale dei possibili lettori, per constatare che è proprio la marginalità degli autori che ha reso possibile la loro legittimazione letteraria" (163). Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

²²¹ "[I] due testi di Pap Khouma e Salah Methnani si collocano nel gruppo delle narrazioni autobiografiche, a cavallo tra documentazione e finzione" (166).

and in taking advantage of parody's "ambivalence between conservative repetition and revolutionary difference" (Hutcheon 2000, 77), it can be argued that *Immigrato* constitutes a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (Bhabha 2004, 55). From this space of enunciation Methnani articulates a counter-discourse through references to spaces such as bars, restaurants, hostels, street corners and soup kitchens. Although such locations are characterized by violence and terror, the recognition of parody's transgressive potential allows for an enhanced reading experience of *Immigrato*.

According to Cacciatori, the particularity of *Immigrato* is that, in spite of the blending together of investigative and fictive elements, the text still fits into the genre of the autobiography. By integrating *Immigrato* into the category of "thematic biographies" (167),²²² Cacciatori suggests that the choice of the events depicted is motivated by the author's willingness to display his own "particular social condition" (167).²²³ In Cacciatori's view, the author is therefore in favour of both a biographical and a sociological reading of his text, a reading that takes into consideration the biography of the author and the social context.

Considering the presence of a co-author in *Immigrato* as being both an "anomaly" and "audacious innovation" (167)²²⁴ Cacciatori points to the ambiguous identity of the author, which results in a single narrating voice in a text told in the first person. In fact, Cacciatori sees Mario Fortunato's task as being limited to the re-writing of Salah Methnani's "original story" (167).²²⁵ Yet, Cacciatori does not dwell on the implications of co-authorship in *Immigrato*.

In his review, Cacciatori produces a series of comments on *Immigrato* and *Io venditore di elefanti* as "strange novels of formation" (168).²²⁶ The strangeness of *Immigrato* does not reside in the central character's conventional journey towards maturity, but in the fact that the stories being told by immigrants "in essence, invite who is hosting them to accept the foreigners' way of life" (168).²²⁷ The critic identifies the peculiarity of *Immigrato* in its transgressing the conventional boundaries of the Bildungsroman by way of focusing not

²²² "[A]utobiografie tematiche" (167).

²²³ "[P]articolare condizione sociale" (167).

²²⁴ "Anomalia ... audace novità" (167).

²²⁵ "Racconto originario" (167).

²²⁶ "Strani romanzi di formazione" (168).

²²⁷ "Invitano nella sostanza chi li ospita ad accettare i modi di vita degli stranieri" (168).

only on the growth of the central character, but on the imperative growth of the Italian society as a host nation for young foreigners.

A particular point of interest in Cacciatori's review is the depiction of the central character of *Immigrato* as "a middle-class and educated character" (168).²²⁸ By highlighting the social class of the main character, it is the inevitable "disillusionment" (168)²²⁹ produced by the migration to Italy that gains prominence in the text. However, Cacciatori does not further extend his comments on the degrading dimension of Methnani's physical displacement. Instead of looking at Salah's feelings of alienation in *Immigrato*, Cacciatori reiterates his criticism of Italy as a destination country "unprepared to welcome the new one" (168).²³⁰ Reading *Immigrato* through the lens of the Bildungsroman, Cacciatori recognizes Salah's growth and distinguishes the "decisively literary writing" (170)²³¹ of the first and the last chapter as indicative of his maturation. In the critic's view, the peculiarity of the first chapter titled "In Tunis" (9)²³² and the last one "In Kairouan" (123)²³³ consists in the presence of "the fundamental figure of the protagonist's father on whom is built the transformation of the journalist into a young man who wants to know the world and the metamorphosis of the narrative into a novel" (170).²³⁴ Except for the initial and final chapters, therefore, Cacciatori reads *Immigrato* as a "journalistic inquiry" (170).²³⁵

For the critic, the presence of Salah's father and the simultaneous intrusion of the "remote past tense" (170)²³⁶ in the text play a prevalent role in the growth of his son, and the literary style of the narrative. And it should be pointed out, however, that Salah's transformation is not limited to the two chapters mentioned above, and that the value added to the text through the use of an additional tense should not overshadow the critical role of irony in *Immigrato*. In fact, Salah's transformation occurs throughout his whole journey, with several episodes during which he is describing and questioning his state of mind; and the various forms of irony encountered in the text, outside the initial and final chapters, also add to the literary value and complexity of the text.

²²⁸ "Un protagonista borghese e istruito" (168).

²²⁹ "Disillusione" (168).

²³⁰ "Impreparata ad accogliere il nuovo" (168).

²³¹ "Scrittura ... decisamente letteraria" (170).

²³² "A Tunisi" (9).

²³³ "A Kairouan" (123).

²³⁴ "[L]a figura fondamentale del padre del protagonista su cui si costruisce la trasformazione del giornalista in ragazzo che vuol conoscere il mondo e la metamorfosi della narrazione in romanzo" (170).

²³⁵ "[I]nchiesta giornalistica" (170).

²³⁶ "[P]assato remoto" (170).

In his concluding remarks, Cacciatori refers to *Immigrato* as a “diary” (171)²³⁷ that is oriented towards the host destination, and among the objectives of an immigrant’s diary he puts on the same level “integration” (171)²³⁸ and “taking on of a new identity” (171).²³⁹ Yet, the critic does not mention the important role of the homeland for the protagonist, especially as Salah realizes that integration implies a challenging adaptation to the Italian society that he considers hostile. Salah uses the space of his personal diary to tell of his transformation and as he descends into a clandestine state of being, episodes of nostalgia increase, and questions over monolithic definitions of Tunisian or Italian identity are raised. While Cacciatori’s focus on the relationship between the central character and the host country is of particular interest, and more specifically the notion of transformation and metamorphosis, his review does not offer significant insight into the way in which *Immigrato* contributes to the debate on class, race, and gender in the Italian context of the 1990s, nor does it reflect on the instances of levity and irony that can be found in the text.

In his exploration of *Immigrato* in *Il rovescio del gioco*, Armando Gnisci builds his argument around what he believes to be the two main characteristics of the Maghrebi literature of migration in Italian: first, “the reversal of the voyage” (25),²⁴⁰ and second “the renewal of the ancient laws of hospitality” (25).²⁴¹ He commends *Immigrato* for being, along with Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *Dove lo stato non c’è*, one of the “books in a certain sense extraordinary, because it is the first time that modern Arab authors write in Italian about Italy and/even if in collaboration with Italian authors” (32).²⁴² And Gnisci also believes that the publication of *Immigrato* will be followed by “all the new extraordinary literature of the Maghreb” (32).²⁴³ The Italian critic welcomes the publication of Methnani’s “autobiographical novel-diary-chronicle” (29)²⁴⁴ and adds that Methnani’s “literary idols” (29)²⁴⁵ are Paul Bowles and Tahar Ben Jelloun. The categorization of *Immigrato* appears once again problematic as the genres available to Gnisci seem inadequate to fit Methnani’s text into a single literary category. By attributing to *Immigrato* the characteristics of the novel, the

²³⁷ “[D]iario” (171).

²³⁸ “[I]ntegrazione” (171).

²³⁹ “[A]ssunzione di una nuova identità” (171).

²⁴⁰ “[I]l rovescio del viaggio” (25).

²⁴¹ “[I]l rinnovo delle antiche leggi dell’ospitalità” (25).

²⁴² “[L]ibri in un certo senso straordinari, perché è la prima volta che scrittori arabi moderni scrivono in italiano dell’Italia e/anche se in collaborazione con scrittori italiani” (32).

²⁴³ “[T]utta la straordinaria nuova letteratura del Magreb” (32).

²⁴⁴ “[R]omanzo-diario-cronaca autobiografico” (29).

²⁴⁵ “[I]doli letterari” (29).

diary and the chronicle, Gnisci stresses the multifacetedness of the migrant text which offers in turn multiple approaches. And by indicating two of Methnani's main sources of inspiration, Gnisci reveals Methnani's particular inclination towards two major literary figures of the Maghreb while suggesting a literary affinity with two prominent men of letters strongly attached to Morocco.

After speculating on the potential sources of inspiration for Methnani's literary enterprise, Gnisci adds, "S.M. has written his novel in Italian with the collaboration of Mario Fortunato, a young writer of southern origin who has ... curated the Italian edition of *For Bread Alone* by the Moroccan Mohamed Choukri" (29-30).²⁴⁶ As a point of convergence, then, Methnani and Fortunato share a common interest in twentieth-century Moroccan literature and hold Choukri's work in high regard. Gnisci further extends his reflection on Methnani and Ben Jelloun and writes, "It is about two writers from the Maghreb ... with a French culture who ... are supported by and operate in collaboration with an Italian writer. Both books are manufactured with four hands and are intercultural texts in a very strict sense and original for Italian literature" (30-31).²⁴⁷

Gnisci insists upon Methnani's French cultural background due to Tunisia's colonial past as a French protectorate between 1881 and 1956 and pays tribute to Methnani and Fortunato for their innovative contribution to cultural diversity and the collaborative creation process at the origin of *Immigrato*. The literary critic adds, "*Immigrato* has on the cover as authors: MARIO FORTUNATO SALAH METHNANI; the two names are printed one above the other, the second one is indented, both are centred and in the same typeface, above the title (they are in alphabetical order, apparently, and in any case there is authorial parity)" (31).²⁴⁸

As far as the book cover is concerned, it is interesting to observe that the Italian critic establishes a relation of equality between the Tunisian and the Italian writer. Yet, Gnisci does not define what he means with such notion and does not expand his investigation to consider

²⁴⁶ "S.M. ha scritto il suo romanzo in italiano con la collaborazione di Mario Fortunato, un giovane scrittore di origine meridionale che ha ... curato l'edizione italiana de *Il pane nudo* del marocchino Mohamed Choukri" (29-30).

²⁴⁷ "[S]i tratta di due scrittori del Magreb ... di cultura francese che ... si appoggiano e operano in collaborazione con uno scrittore italiano. Tutti e due i libri sono confezionati a quattro mani e sono testi interculturali in senso strettissimo e originale per le lettere italiane" (30-31).

²⁴⁸ "*Immigrato* porta in copertina come autori: MARIO FORTUNATO SALAH METHNANI; i due nomi sono stampati l'uno sopra l'altro, con il secondo rientrato, centrati e nello stesso corpo tipografico, sopra al titolo (sono in ordine alfabetico, apparentemente, comunque c'è parità autoriale)" (31).

whether authorial parity is maintained or interrupted throughout *Immigrato*. While an assessment of authorial parity should take into account the presence (or absence) of the authors' names on the book cover, one could also add that an examination of the text itself, and the way in which Fortunato and Methnani have turned their intricate interactions into written form, are necessary in order to fully determine any claim to authorial equality. In other words, Gnisci supports the idea of parity without providing any detail as to Fortunato and Methnani's sharing of the tasks, and their individual role in the process of producing a written work.

In his enthusiastic appraisal of *Immigrato*, the literary critic does not elaborate any further on the challenges presented by dual authorship, instead he writes, "The two books that I am talking about ... have to be read and understood, therefore, inside the great blooming expression of the entire postcolonial Maghrebi literature in French and Arabic and in the bigger and new dimension of a *Weltliteratur*" (33).²⁴⁹ Just as he tries to establish intercultural links between Methnani, Fortunato and Moroccan-born author Mohamed Choukri, Gnisci creates a dynamic network around *Immigrato* which complicates its interpretation. Because of his upbringing in postcolonial Tunisia (under Francophile President Bourguiba), Methnani is bilingual in Arabic and French and as such, Gnisci believes, *Immigrato* is engaging with multiple literary traditions that broaden its scope beyond national boundaries.

Gnisci describes Salah's journey as a trip "towards a north, Italy, which is in turn the south of the north, Europe" (39)²⁵⁰ and introduces an additional level of interpretation when he writes, "From Montaigne to Goethe, from Chaucer to Stendhal to D.H. Lawrence to Henry James to Andersen, from Mozart to Mark Twain to Ady to Kafka ... to Hemingway. For who came down from the North, Italy has represented for centuries the well-cultivated, ancient and bright garden of Europe; the real and final location of imagined delights" (40).²⁵¹ The image of a uniformed North is dismantled and allows Gnisci to put forward the idea of a hierarchy among European countries where Italy now occupies a rather subordinate position.

²⁴⁹ "[I] due libri di cui parlo ... vanno letti e compresi, quindi, dentro la grande espressione fiorente di tutta la letteratura magrebina postcoloniale in francese e in arabo e dentro la più grande e nuova dimensione di una *Weltliteratur*" (33).

²⁵⁰ "[V]erso un nord, l'Italia, che è a sua volta il sud del nord, l'Europa" (39).

²⁵¹ "Da Montaigne a Goethe, da Chaucer a Stendhal a D.H. Lawrence a Henry James a Andersen, da Mozart a Mark Twain a Ady a Kafka ... a Hemingway. Per chi è sceso dal nord l'Italia ha rappresentato nei secoli il giardino ben coltivato, antico e luminoso, dell'Europa; il luogo reale e terminale delle delizie immaginate" (40).

²⁵¹ "L'Italia viaggiata dal sud verso il nord da scrittori emigrati arabo-magrebini, invece, è ben altra cosa. Risalita al rovescio ... è tutta'altra cosa di un giardino di bellezze un po' decaduto e disordinato. È un vero e proprio inferno" (40).

Italy's decline is made more explicit by bringing into the conversation the names of several illustrious literary figures associated with a certain sense of cultural elitism and refinement, as well as recalling the attraction and fascination Italy exerted until a not so distant past.

The journey undertaken by the Tunisian immigrant is put into a different perspective when the Italian critic asserts, "Travelled from south to north by Arabo-Maghrebi emigrant writers, instead, Italy is quite something else. Ascended in reverse ... it is something entirely different from a garden of wonders a bit impoverished and messy. It is a true and proper hell" (40). In a binary opposition, the geographical journey of the Tunisian emigrant is presented as a reversal of more privileged forms of travel in the Italian peninsula, and the insistence on the decay of once sophisticated Italian civilization emphasizes the role given by Fortunato and Methnani to hospitality and inhospitality in *Immigrato* as Salah's voyage turns rapidly into a descent into the underworld of Italian society.

Gnisci does not further elaborate on the hellish dimension of the Tunisian migrant's journey, yet an examination of *Immigrato* in relation with other representations of hell in Italian literature provides interesting and enriching interpretative elements.²⁵² Furthermore, Gnisci's emphasis on the gravity that the reader encounters in reading *Immigrato* is slightly nuanced when he asserts, "S. M. initially tells of his teenage dream of Italy, of his desire to leave Tunis, after graduating, towards our country seen as ... a kind of No-man's-land or the Land of Toys" (41-42).²⁵³ It can be argued that with these direct references to Boccaccio's *Decameron*²⁵⁴ and Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Gnisci is introducing an additional layer of interpretation. One can even go further and postulate that by establishing a parallel between No-man's-land and *Immigrato*'s Italy, Gnisci also hints at the shared naivety

²⁵² Alfredo Luzi also makes references to Dante: "È dunque lo scontro tra il mito introiettato dell'Italia come paese fortunato, luogo di delizie sessuali e libertà, e la constatazione di una realtà che assume i contorni di una bolgia dantesca, fatta di povertà, droga, violenza, emarginazione, prostituzione, a definire la condizione di immigrato del protagonista" ("It is therefore the clash between the integrated myth of Italy as a fortunate country, a place of sexual delights and freedom, and the finding of a reality that takes on the contours of a Dantesque bolgia, made of poverty, drugs, violence, marginalization, prostitution, that defines the immigrant condition of the protagonist"; 40).

²⁵³ "S.M. racconta inizialmente del suo sogno adolescenziale dell'Italia, della sua voglia di partire da Tunisi, dopo laureato, verso il nostro paese visto come ... una specie di Paese di Bengodi o di Paese dei Balocchi" (41-42).

²⁵⁴ In *The Decameron*, Boccaccio writes: "No-man's-land, the territory of the Basques, in a region called Cornucopia, where the vines are tied up with sausages, and you could buy a goose for a penny, with a gosling thrown in for good measure. And in those parts there was a mountain made entirely of grated Parmesan cheese, on whose slopes there were people who spent their whole time making macaroni and ravioli, which they cooked in chicken broth and then cast it to the four winds, and the faster you could pick it up, the more you got of it. And not far away, there was a stream of Vernaccia wine, the finest that was ever drunk, without a single drop of water in it" (VIII, 3).

of the central characters: Salah's credulity echoes Bruno and Buffalmacco's mocking of Calandrino's simple-mindedness and belief in the powers of a magical stone.²⁵⁵ Then, the second parallel, that with the Land of Toys, can be interpreted as Gnisci's denunciation of Salah's immature belief²⁵⁶ in the existence of Italy as a haven for migrants. Therefore, the incorporation of direct references to Boccaccio and Collodi does complicate the discussion by adding a certain lightness to an otherwise heavily dark narrative about which he remarks, "Who narrates is *reduced* immediately to feel like *an immigrant*, to take upon himself the weight of this split and frightening identity from the beginning" (42).²⁵⁷ Accordingly, the process of migration from Tunisia to Italy participates in the downgrading of the individual, and such lowering in the case of *Immigrato* takes place at the very outset of the journey, right after the arrival in Sicily. In this respect, the narrative, which can be regarded as a literary elaboration on the theme of the fall, is peculiar in the abruptness with which it takes shape in the context of Maghrebi migration to Italy. According to Gnisci, the gravity generated by the identity issues of the Tunisian immigrant is worthy of attention given the precocity with which questions of a psychological nature appear in the text as to indicate the rapid impact of migration on Salah's mind.

Noteworthy of mention is also the interpretation key offered by Gnisci's reading of the final chapter of the text: "the return to Kairouan, for a working holiday, to tell everything to the father ... the text, at this point, reveals itself as a 'filial narrative'" (44).²⁵⁸ Because of the prominent role of Salah's father in the final pages, the Italian critic asserts that *Immigrato* turns into a filial²⁵⁹ memoir. And if the final chapter centres around Salah's retelling of his journey to Italy, Gnisci's comments imply that the return to Kairouan displays the patterns of

²⁵⁵ In *The Decameron*, Boccaccio writes: "the heliotrope ... has the miraculous power of making people invisible" (VIII, 3).

²⁵⁶ "You are wrong, Pinocchio. Believe me, if you do not go away, you will be sorry. Where can you find a better place for boys? There are no schools; there are no teachers; there are no books. In that blessed country they never study. On Saturdays you do not go to school here, and there every day is a Saturday except one, which is Sunday. Just think, the vacation begins the first day of January and ends the last day of December! That is the country for me. That is what I think all countries should be like" (154).

²⁵⁷ "Chi narra è *ridotto* subito a sentirsi *un immigrato*, a prendere su di sé il peso di questa identità scissa e spaventosa fin dall'inizio" (42).

²⁵⁸ "[I] ritorno a Kairouan, per una vacanza di lavoro, per raccontare tutto al padre (il testo, a questo punto, si rivela come "racconto filiale" (44).

²⁵⁹ In "Autobiography/biography, Knowledge, and Representation: The Theory and Practice of Filial Narrative" Thomas Couser writes: "My research so far suggests that the predominance of narratives of fathers is a result not of the domination of mothers by fathers, but rather of the relative inaccessibility of fathers to their children. When children write a parent's life, it seems, they feel compelled to write memoirs of the more distant parent. This explains why my working title for this project is "Claiming Paternity": I see the writing of the narratives as a way of enacting a relationship with the parent who seemed less available to the author. Thus, although I see the genre as a product of patriarchy, it is hardly a patriarchal genre" (162).

parent-child interactions by representing the relative closeness of Salah and his father, as to suggest that Salah who is now in the position of the adult child is ready to take responsibility for his ageing father. However, Gnisci's exploration of Salah's return to Tunisia appears insufficient as it limits itself to the intergenerational responsibility between the son and the father and does not elaborate on the intricacies of *Immigrato*'s reworking of the theme of the prodigal son's return in a transnational context.

In his study on the emergence of African Italian literature in the 1990s, Alessandro Portelli argues that "there is much of the picaresque in these stories of wanderers and marginal men" (296) indicating thereby how the texts produced by African immigrants in Italy include a journey motif. It should be noted that one of the basic components of the picaresque novel²⁶⁰ lies in its satiric dimension too. Yet, rather than taking into consideration the satirical characteristics of *Immigrato*, Portelli claims that in the African Italian literature "[t]he picaresque element combines enforced mobility with a subjective desire to see the world" (296). As a justification for his claim, he asserts that "Salah Methnani's narrative persona is moved less by economic need than by visions of Italy as "an enchanted, happy land" (296). In making this point, Portelli stresses the power of attraction that Italy has on Salah, the fascination exerted by Italy on the young educated Tunisian whose aspirations are somewhat atypical in the sense that, according to Portelli, it is not for economic betterment that Salah is travelling to Italy. Then, Portelli goes on to describe Salah's journey as a "downward spiral," which "culminates in a brush with prostitution and a brief experience as drug user and pusher (299)"; and the reference to a spiraling descent deserves special attention as this symbol indicates more than just Salah's drift to a lower socio-economic status. In fact, Portelli asserts that "*Immigrato* is structured around a dual emersion: arrival and discovery, disappointment, new emersion into identity" (299). The crisis produced by the fall of the immigrant is followed by the discovery of a new self, suggesting that immigration implies a necessary degree of adjustment, and that in light of Salah's disappointed expectations the process of acculturation leads to a redefinition of the Maghrebi immigrant's sense of self.

²⁶⁰ According to Gail Baylis: "Picaresques are novels of travel. As a form, the picaresque is characterized by a loose structure in which a number of episodes are held together by the nominal figure of the hero (occasionally a heroine) and the adventures he or she encounters on a journey. The journey motif is a basic component in picaresques, and it facilitates satiric commentary, knock-about comedy, and rapid-paced action" (941).

Portelli also regrets the text's silence over how Salah "escaped the streets" pointing thus to the predominance of urban landscapes in the Tunisian immigrant's odyssey, and finds another source of criticism in the fact that Methnani "elide[s] the mechanics of deliverance and ... ends with the completion of writing, the mastery of language, and a new beginning as a writer" (300). At first glance, this claim is particularly relevant given that it provides clues as to the general gravity of the text which, according to Portelli, insists at length on the agony of the central character. However, one may argue that mechanisms of deliverance do not need to be explicitly mentioned and that other mechanisms that anticipate Salah's final deliverance can be identified in the text. Though *Immigrato* can be read as a text that suffers from its lengthy attention to Salah's distressing experiences, insistences of resistance, descriptions of coping strategies can also be found in Methnani's autobiographical text.

In his review of *Immigrato*, Raffaele Taddeo turns to the immigrant character and to the peculiarity of its depiction: "One discovers through Methnani's text just about the existence of an original sin. It would seem that the very same status of immigrant is a bearer of deviance, illegality, and delinquency" (112).²⁶¹ As to determine why the figure of the immigrant in *Immigrato* is portrayed merely as a criminal, Taddeo's reading adds a religious layer to the interpretation of Salah's journey. In setting up a parallel with the sin of Adam and Eve Taddeo is of the view that *Immigrato* depicts Maghrebi immigration to Italy as a form of divinely punished transgression. Therefore, Taddeo assigns a religious dimension to migration and questions the extent to which Maghrebi immigrants exercise control over their own lives. He adds, "The protagonist ... in every city he goes to, finds abjection, delinquency, managed by immigrants. There is no corner of Italy where this phenomenon does not occur" (112).²⁶² For Taddeo, through the portrait of Maghrebi immigrants grappling with the burden of illegality and their ubiquitous presence throughout Italy, *Immigrato* positions immigrants as organizers of such situation, as to point to their own responsibility in the making of this sombre state of affairs. And commenting on the effects of immigration, Taddeo maintains that, "There are few immigrants encountered by the protagonist who are able to earn their living honestly, who can maintain a sense of dignity and morality, rather if somebody seems

²⁶¹ "Si scopre attraverso il testo di Methnani, quasi l'esistenza di un peccato originale. Sembrerebbe che lo stesso statuto di immigrato sia portatore di devianza, di illegalità, di delinquenza" (112).

²⁶² "Il protagonista ... in ogni città in cui si reca, trova abiezione, delinquenza, gestita dagli immigrati. Non c'è angolo d'Italia ove non avvenga questo fenomeno" (112).

to display some elements of dignity, morality seems completely absent” (113).²⁶³ Therefore, *Immigrato* offers a gloomy view of immigration as a breaking down of the immigrants’ system of values and principles of conduct. Although he seems to target *Immigrato*’s insistence on the depiction of immigrants as immoral characters, Taddeo does not provide specific examples to support his claim.

Further reservations regarding the way in which immigration is presented in *Immigrato* point to its verisimilitude, and lack thereof: “Through a careful reading, the world of immigration is a world of depravation. What emerges from Methnani’s text is anything but singing hosannas to immigrant’s “virginity,” to the honesty and goodness of the foreigner. It goes beyond reality” (113).²⁶⁴ Taddeo’s ironic reference to the liturgical cry expressing an appeal for divine help points to the fact that the immigrants and foreigners in *Immigrato* display moral values that are far from the Judeo-Christian ones that a reader would expect in texts dealing with issues of migration.

In his review of *Immigrato*, Amara Lakhous identifies the novel’s three fundamental themes, “la ghurba, which is nostalgia ... the narrative of everyday life ... the language of the new land” (157).²⁶⁵ Still, on the subject of Salah’s encounter with Italian language, Alfredo Luzi writes, “Through the language he uses, at the crossroad of idiolect and sociolect, Methnani accomplishes a sort of linguistic creolization which is the result of or the prerequisite to a process of social hybridization” (47).²⁶⁶ Yet, Salah’s attitude towards Italian language is further complicated, given that “the protagonist ... discovers that the knowledge of Italian is more an obstacle than an advantage because it risks taking away social acceptance by his peers” (47).²⁶⁷ Pressing on the notion of hybridity in *Immigrato*, Luzi also underscores Salah’s peripheral position, writing that, throughout the text, “the perception of imprisonment makes its way” (41),²⁶⁸ and whether it is in the South or in the North, the

²⁶³ “Sono pochi gli immigrati incontrati dal protagonista che sanno guadagnarsi onestamente la vita, che sanno mantenere dignità e moralità di vita, anzi se in qualcuno sembra manifestarsi qualche elemento di dignità, la moralità sembra del tutto assente” (113).

²⁶⁴ “Ad una lettura attenta il mondo dell’immigrazione è un mondo di depravazione. Quanto emerge dal testo di Methnani è tutt’altro che un canto osannate alla “virginità” dell’immigrato, alla onestà e bontà dello straniero. Esso supera la realtà” (113).

²⁶⁵ “[L]a ghurba, che è la nostalgia ... [i]l racconto della vita quotidiana ... la lingua della nuova terra” (157).

²⁶⁶ “Attraverso la lingua usata, nell’incrocio tra idioletto e socioletto, Methnani realizza una sorta di creolizzazione linguistica che è risultato o presupposto del processo di ibridazione sociale” (47).

²⁶⁷ “[I]l protagonista ... scopre che la conoscenza dell’italiano rappresenta più un ostacolo che un vantaggio perché rischia di allontanare l’accettazione sociale da parte dei pari” (47).

²⁶⁸ “[S]i fa strada la percezione della prigionia” (41).

Italian landscape is described as “labyrinths that disorient the newcomer” (41).²⁶⁹ This is in addition to Methnani’s wanderings, at times without any clear destination in mind, and that are part of his “uninterrupted move” (41).²⁷⁰

In her review written twenty years after the publication of Fortunato and Methnani’s text, Nora Moll is concerned with the question of the genre and asserts that in *Immigrato* “the autobiographical narrative becomes ... a container for the most ephemeral diary notes.”²⁷¹ For the Italian scholar Salah’s decision to fill his diary stems from a willingness to write “to actively oppose oblivion” (5),²⁷² and from this standpoint, the writing process acts as an “active memory” (11).²⁷³ In her view, one of the significant features of *Immigrato* is its “testimonial exemplarity” (11)²⁷⁴ as a pioneering text and the accompanying “ethical tension, on the part of the autobiographical subject, to narrate not only himself, but also the many stories of other destinies that he cuts across” (5).²⁷⁵

Caterina Romeo focuses instead on the question of race and ethnicity and singles out *Immigrato* because it “restates the problem of racial difference that North Africans perceive in relation to sub-Saharan Africans and vice versa ... but also introduces that of the feminization of the Arab man, who often becomes the object of desire and pleasure on the part of Italian men” (2001, 137).²⁷⁶ The binary opposition between immigrants and native Italians is complicated by the particularities of Italian society of the 1990s. Indeed, it can be argued that *Immigrato* provides the reader with an insight into the demographics of immigration in Italy and the heightened tensions that agitate racially mixed diasporic populations. The additional level of reading provided by Caterina Romeo brings unprecedented insights into the question of gender in *Immigrato*. In this regard, Romeo’s attempt at providing an elaboration on the situation of gendered subject in *Immigrato* appears useful as it underscores the objectification of the body of the migrant Maghrebi male. Building upon Romeo’s argument, one could argue that a reading of male desire in the text

²⁶⁹ “[L]abirinti che disorientano il nuovo arrivato” (41).

²⁷⁰ “[I]ninterrotto andare” (41).

²⁷¹ “[I]l racconto autobiografico diventa ... un contenitore per le più effimere annotazioni diaristiche.”

²⁷² “[P]er opporsi attivamente all’oblio” (5).

²⁷³ “[M]emoria attiva” (par. 11).

²⁷⁴ “[E]semplarietà testimoniale” (par. 11).

²⁷⁵ “[T]ensione etica, da parte del soggetto autobiografico, di narrare non solo il sé, ma anche le tante storie di altri destini con cui egli s’incrocia” (5).

²⁷⁶ “[R]ibadisce il tema della differenza razziale che i nordafricani percepiscono nei confronti degli africani sub-sahariani e viceversa ... ma introduce anche quello della femminilizzazione dell’uomo arabo, che spesso diviene oggetto di desiderio e di piacere da parte di uomini italiani” (137).

shows the importance given to the Italian man's gaze and unfolds new levels of interpretation in relation with gender construction and definitions of manhood in the context of Maghrebi migration to Italy.

Romeo opens up another range of interpretations in asserting that "Khouma, Methnani, and Bouchane's texts often evoke the dynamics of colonial racism, such as the feminization of the Arab male, who becomes an object of desire for Italian men, and the infantilization (Fanon) of nonwhite immigrants" (2012, 226). Thus, a key element in Salah's journey is the impact of displacement on gender roles and expectations, and the sense of confusion that Maghrebi immigrants experience with regard to gender identity. In addition, Romeo recognizes the treatment of Arab males as if infantile at work in the depiction of Salah's odyssey and points toward the responsibility of Italian native men in neglecting and mistreating immigrants.

One of Fortunato and Methnani's major interests appears to be the development process of the central character, and consequently, the metamorphosis and growth of the immigrant toward maturation and self-hood. In further describing the relationships between Arab and Italian men in the first three autobiographies written in Italian by African immigrants, Romeo asserts, "The three authors also show how the process of imitating the behavior of Italian natives is always expected of migrants (Bhabha's mimicry), but it must always remain incomplete, signaling an approximation that never becomes total identification" (226). Leaving aside the mockery contained in the migrants' copying of the Italian man's behavior, culture, manners, and values that can be found in *Io venditore di elefanti*, *Chiamatemi Ali* and *Immigrato*, Romeo believes that, "Italians fear an excessive proximity that might blur physical, and political borders, thus depriving them of their privileges" (227). In pointing to the anxiety that emerges from similarity and resemblance between Africans and Italians, Romeo's discussion of the agency and free will of the immigrants suggests that *Immigrato* gives precedence to the threatening dimension of mimicry over the role of mockery in unsettling the rigid Italian hierarchy.

Luigi Marfè includes *Immigrato* in his examination of Italian migration writing and considers Fortunato and Methnani's text "a book which expresses a radical demolition of the traditional idea of travel in Italy as a formative experience" (193). Marfè encourages the reader to establish parallels between Salah's journey and the more refined version of travel to Italy and indicates that "The *Bildung* of the *Grand Tour* became, in his eyes, a series of cruel

lessons that foreign countries impart to migrants” (193). Following this interpretation, one may read *Immigrato* primarily as a succession of sequences that focus primarily on the portrayal of Salah’s painful exposure to harsh Italian inhospitality. Moreover, Marfè looks at the impact of migration on individual characters in the text and writes: “Migration, in this travelogue, is a condition that renders people invisible and untouchable” (193). Rather than elaborating on the reasons that push immigrants to leave Africa, Marfè looks at the consequences of migration and the resulting sense of marginalization and alienation for migrants. He broadens the discussion on migrant literature in Italian by turning to the generic classification of Methnani and Fortunato’s text and writes: “*Immigrato* goes far beyond autobiography and investigates the difficulties of a type of travel experience that Westerners no longer comprehend” (193). According to Marfè, the mode of writing chosen by Fortunato and Methnani unsettles the system of codes and conventional rules that are usually applied to autobiography, and in examining the process of migration from Africa to Italy, they point towards the lack of understanding on the side of the host community, suggesting that this capacity to understand no longer exists. And in the Italian context, this failure to understand the experience of African migration to Italy is all the more striking given the Italian history of emigration.

Additionally, Marfè’s remarks on the reception of *Immigrato* are of particular interest: “Methnani and Fortunato’s book is a counter-travelogue that wittingly breeds anguish in its readers” (193). If he believes that *Immigrato* subverts the literary representation of the journey through Italy, Marfè is of the opinion that the main feature of *Immigrato* lies in the authors’ intention to produce a uniform reaction of intense pain or suffering which works to counterbalance the alleged partial coverage of migration by Italian mass media.

In his exploration of the problematic authorship of *Immigrato* as an autobiographical narrative where he compares Mario Fortunato to a “ventriloquist” (100)²⁷⁷ and Salah Methnani to a “puppet filled with charm” (100),²⁷⁸ Idriss Amid focuses his attention on the question of sexuality. While he does not elaborate on how the concepts of race and class intersect with gender, Amid follows in the footsteps of Romeo and contends that, “the idea of the migrant as object of desire, or target of homosexual interest, is found to be strongly

²⁷⁷ “[V]entriloquo” (100).

²⁷⁸ “[M]arionetta piena di fascino” (100).

present within *Immigrato* itself” (108).²⁷⁹ The suggestion Amid puts forth is that immigrants are presented as reified, and that as an immigrant Salah is under attack and occupies a position of vulnerability: “the presence in the text of episodes related to homosexuality is the consequence, or perhaps the symbol, of the impossible integration of the immigrant” (111).²⁸⁰ Therefore, Amid is of the opinion that homosexuality does not play any emancipatory function for the immigrants, and that the integration of Maghrebi males within the Italian society requires the availability of sexual choices that go beyond same sex relationships; but such reading of the homoerotic scenes depicted in *Immigrato* disregards the subversive role of non-heterosexual forms of sexuality in the encounters between Maghrebi and native Italian male characters, and how homosexuality complicates the power relation. Besides, Amid traces intertextual references that bring *Immigrato* closer to another autobiographical text from the Maghreb: “it was Mario Fortunato himself who translated *For Bread Alone* into Italian ... It is not inconceivable that this text had a role or an influence on the Calabrian author who would publish *Immigrato* two years later together with Salah Methnani” (107).²⁸¹

More background information on the genesis of the text is also provided by Marianna Salvioli, who explains that *Immigrato* is the expanded version of a previous text: “In the aftermath of the killing of the South African refugee Jerry Maslo, which took place at Villa Litterno on August 24th 1989, the weekly magazine “L’Espresso” entrusts Methnani with an investigation on immigration in Italy that takes him around the peninsula from South to North for three months, disguised as an illegal immigrant” (218).²⁸² According to Salvioli, the vast amount of material gathered by Methnani during his investigation, “is reworked by the author in a “four-handed” fictional story written with Mario Fortunato” (218).²⁸³ In other words, the autobiographical claims of the narrative are called into question when considering the elaboration process of the final text.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ “[L]’idea del migrante quale oggetto del desiderio, o bersaglio di un interesse omosessuale, la troviamo fortemente presente all’interno dello stesso *Immigrato*” (108).

²⁸⁰ “[L]a presenza nel testo degli episodi legati all’omosessualità è la conseguenza, o forse il simbolo, dell’impossibilità dell’integrazione dell’immigrato” (111).

²⁸¹ “[È] stato proprio Mario Fortunato a tradurre *For Bread Alone* in italiano ... Non è da escludere che questo testo abbia avuto un ruolo o un’influenza sull’autore calabrese che due anni dopo avrebbe pubblicato insieme a Salah Methnani *Immigrato*” (107).

²⁸² “All’indomani dell’uccisione del rifugiato sudafricano Jerry Maslo, avvenuta a Villa Litterno il 24 Agosto 1989, il settimanale “L’Espresso” affida infatti a Methnani un’inchiesta sull’immigrazione in Italia che lo porta in giro per la penisola da Sud a Nord per tre mesi, travestito da immigrato clandestino” (218).

²⁸³ “[V]iene rielaborato dall’autore in un racconto di finzione scritto “a quattro mani” con Mario Fortunato” (218).

²⁸⁴ The article in question is titled “Malvenuti in Italia” and was published on 1st April 1990.

2.1.2 Critical Reception of *Immigrato* outside Italy

In one of the earliest reviews of *Immigrato* published in English and outside Italy, Graziella Parati states that “Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato are the authors of *Immigrato* which, published in 1990, is one of the first immigrant texts published in Italy” (1995, 11). Being of the view that *Immigrato* is a pioneering text of the “letteratura della migrazione,” however, Parati does not elaborate further on the implications of the collaboration between the Italian and Tunisian writers, and she adds, “*Immigrato* is the autobiography of a Tunisian man who comes to Italy expecting to capitalize on his university degree in foreign languages, and on his fluency in Italian. He is confronted instead with a reality very different from the myth of Italy he had imagined” (11). Therefore, Parati reads *Immigrato* as the personal account of an educated character whose expectations are confounded by a hostile environment, insisting on the dissonance that stems from Salah’s idealism and the shock of the arrival in an inhospitable country. Unequivocally, the scholar’s attention is drawn by the pathetic tone with which the text relates the migration experience of the highly literate Tunisian young man: “From the south to the north, the protagonist explores this new country, and in so doing reveals his tragic life, his desperation, and that of many immigrants, a desperation that leads him to experiment with drugs and to witness the prostitution of his fellow men” (11). Through Salah’s journey it is the condition of the extended community of immigrants in Italy that is being examined, and in Parati’s view such exploration reveals the feelings of hopelessness that lead immigrants into two types of illegal activities during the post-migration stage: substance use/abuse and sex-work.

Interestingly, Parati indicates that a notable attention is given to male prostitution and argues later in “Strangers in Paradise. Foreigners and Shadows in Italian Literature:” “Both Kouma and Methnani describe the aggressive sexual invitation of Italian men who translate the African men’s economic-cultural and ethnic difference into a marketable objectification of their “exotic” bodies” (184). In making this comment, Parati suggests that the retelling of the African immigrant’s journey through Italy exposes the sexual violence against male immigrants and reveals the process of reification that both turns Salah into an object and the alienated immigrant population into a commodity.

In discussing the fragility of immigrant writing in Italian, Jennifer Burns emphasizes that “The radical nature of the texts lies not in their overt content, but in the immigrants’ potentially subversive move of appropriating the language of the host country in order to

analyze its society” (1998, 216). This claim on the precedence of language over the content rests upon the way in which *Immigrato* can be read as offering its authors a tool to conduct an analysis of Italian society. Attention to the question of language is not devoid of interest as *Immigrato* is the result of a collaborative work between a native and a non-native Italian speaker, and because it incorporates a significant number of Italian and immigrant characters. Yet, in reason of its pioneering position in the field of migrant writing, it can be argued that *Immigrato*'s peculiarity also lies in the content and ideas being put forward by Fortunato and Methnani. It is worth noting that on the substantial role played by Salah's itinerary, Burns remarks, “Methnani's journey is a parody of the traditional world tour of the educated, European, young man, intended to bring maturity and self-knowledge through interaction with foreign cultures” (224). Thus, Burns reads *Immigrato* as a text that transgresses a European literary tradition without, however, indicating whether the general conventions of that specific genre are voluntarily or involuntarily challenged.

Commenting on the peculiarity of Salah's journey, the scholar adds, “Rather than being ‘character-building’, the trip charts the gradual disintegration of the character's integrity as an educated, cultured, literature graduate into a faceless immigrant whose existence is either denied, or considered excessive” (224). The journey to and through Italy is understood as a series of events and episodes that, instead of being abrupt and sudden, show Salah's gradual loss of integrity. From this standpoint, adaptation to a new environment is for Salah a process of loss, and the loss of social status coincides with having to reevaluate his own moral values. One may also add that Salah's acculturation leads him to break perhaps at times reluctantly the standards that govern his behavior and choices.

When it comes to the diasporic issues that are brought forward by Fortunato and Methnani, Burns observes that “*Immigrato* is distinctive in stressing, as well as the impossibility of return, the impossibility of belonging – anywhere” (2002, 376). According to this view, Salah is unable to return to Tunisia and his geographical journey is an emotional one marked by events that prevent the central character from reaching a sense of belonging. After all, the numerous scenes of exclusion in *Immigrato* serve as a favorable ground for nostalgia, and a strong sense of longing is expressed in the text. Also, Salah's sense of loss and his desire to return to the past contrast sharply with the fearless thoughts about the future that he elaborates at the beginning of his journey; and in exploring the implications of a

return to the homeland the reader is led to consider the consequences for Salah of a return to Tunisia in terms of self-esteem, pride and shame.

For Burns, the diasporic subjects presented in *Immigrato* are torn between identification to their country of origin and the host land, suggesting that the text centres around the tensions that arise from Salah's difficulties in forming attachments. In regard to Salah and the immigrants' bonds to home, Burns argues that "Home is never figured as something stable or constant in this novel; rather, individual human experience is represented as essentially dislocated, essentially exilic" (376). Burns hints not only at the crucial role assigned to the notion of home for immigrants in the text but complicates matters further in suggesting that *Immigrato* articulates a theory on human condition. According to Burns, Salah's sense of dislocation is not triggered by the departure from Tunisia: "he is not "at home" at home, and ... departure from home is seen more as a personal evolution than as a breach" (376). The essence of Burns' argument is that the interplay between the presence and absence of home is particularly relevant in reading Salah's journey, and that Salah sees his departure from the homeland as an indicator of advancement, progress and betterment.

Furthermore, Burns also has a view on the issue of dual authorship in texts produced by italoophone migrant writers, and later argues that

An alternative perspective on the issue of collaboration, mediation, might, however, view it as an instance of patronage: the established and local writer or editor lends her name to a writer and a text which need support. The services which she offers – linguistic polishing, structural underpinning, cultural explanation – provide a sort of paratextual scaffolding to a text which implicitly is too weak to stand alone. What appears to be a gesture of support might also be interpreted as the confirmation of a lack. (2003, 388)

Burns acknowledges Fortunato's influence and implies that the native Italian writer's impact can also be identified in specific areas. As such, one is led to question the extent of Fortunato's impact on Methnani's autobiographical text. And while a close reading of the text does not allow for a precise calibrating of Methnani and Fortunato's contributions, a better understanding of their individual responsibilities can hardly be achieved without the examination of the interviews given by the Italian and the Tunisian authors.

Furthermore, Burns' interest in *Immigrato*'s dual authorship is accompanied by a focus on the role played by a particular dyad in the construction of Salah's identity. She writes, "[T]he discourse on sexuality as a framework for identity construction has, in *Immigrato*, a counterpart in the narrator's engagement with drug culture in Italy" (2013, 34). Accordingly, *Immigrato* offers a discussion on the role of sexuality and drug culture as the two main aspects to consider in examining the formation of Salah's identity. Burns adds,

The discourse regarding identity in *Immigrato* is, then, very much an individual and relatively introspective one, concerned predominantly with distinguishing the individual from any sort of collective identity and with establishing a distinct and recognizable identification which is valid and significant in itself, irrespective of the cultural context (home of the destination culture) in which it is posited. (35)

Therefore, following this line of argument *Immigrato* is concerned with processes of self-affirmation with an emphasis on the central character's self-examination and the way he distances himself from the various groups mentioned in the text. Yet, if the depiction of Salah's itinerary engages with issues of identity and identification, it can be argued that what appears from Fortunato and Methnani's rendering of the Tunisian immigrant journey through Italy is a rather negative portrait of the psychological consequences of immigration on Salah's mental wellbeing.

In their work on the figure of the co-author in testimonial literature in Italy, Daniele Comberiati and Bieke Van Camp bring together texts from the first phase of migrant literature and deportation and concentration camp testimonies written in Italian. In their view, "The foreign author ... is necessary as a witness, since having lived the narrated events gives legitimacy to the work, while for the literary legitimacy there is need for the Italian curator" (94).²⁸⁵ Two forms of legitimacy are put forward as to indicate that a clear distinction exists between Fortunato and Methnani's role. From this perspective, "the co-author seems to justify the text, as a scientific authority ... or a public/literary one ... guaranteeing the veracity or the quality of the witness' experience" (97).²⁸⁶ Therefore, in accordance with this interpretation, a certain hierarchy is established between the Maghrebi migrant author and the native Italian one, which puts Methnani in a position of inferiority. The emphasis is also put

²⁸⁵ "[L]'autore straniero ... è necessario come testimone, poiché l'aver vissuto le vicende narrate dà legittimità all'opera, mentre per la legittimità letteraria vi è bisogno del curatore italiano" (94).

²⁸⁶ "[I]l coautore pare giustificare il testo, in quanto autorità scientifica ... o pubblica/letteraria ... garantendo la veridicità o la qualità dell'esperienza del testimone" (97).

on the fact that the literary texts of the “first phase” (90)²⁸⁷ were written “with a pedagogical intent to raise public awareness on the problems of foreigners in Italy” (101).²⁸⁸ Yet, the critics do not further elaborate on the presence of an educational undercurrent in *Immigrato* and the role played by its didacticism in the appreciation of the “four-handed” autobiography’s literary merit. In their examination of the first phase of migration literature Comberinati and Van Camp further assert that in these texts “the happy ending is constant” (101),²⁸⁹ and one could argue that such statement would certainly benefit from being nuanced in the case of *Immigrato*.

As evidenced, critics of *Immigrato* from outside Italy have focused on the collaboration between the Tunisian and native Italian authors whose work offers an autobiographical depiction of the migrant condition, the harsh treatment of displaced populations and the (in)hospitality of Italy as a host destination for African immigrants. Along with interest in the mechanisms at the root of Fortunato and Methnani’s collaborative enterprise, the attention of the critics is also caught by the conditions of literary production, marketing and consumption of *Immigrato*. Yet, irony and instances of levity in the text have received little attention.

2.2 Echoes and Resonances

2.2.1 Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani’s Collaboration

It appears from the examination of *Immigrato*’s domestic and foreign reception that the question of the genre occupies a prominent place. In his *On Autobiography*, Philippe Lejeune brings forth the role played by the notion of contract in autobiographical texts and asserts, in the chapter on “The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write,” that

The device of the autobiographical contract results in facilitating a confusion between the author, the narrator, and the “model” and in neutralizing the perception of the writing, in rendering it transparent. This fusion takes place in the autobiographical signature, at the level of the name on the title page of the book ... the autobiography composed in collaboration such as it is practiced today in a more or less acknowledged manner, introduces a flaw into this system. (187)

²⁸⁷ “[P]rima fase” (90).

²⁸⁸ “[C]on un intento anche pedagogico per sensibilizzare il pubblico ai problemi degli stranieri in Italia” (101).

²⁸⁹ “[I]l lieto fine è costante” (101).

In fact, because of the presence of Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani's names on the title page of the book one can adhere to Lejeune's viewpoint,²⁹⁰ and while Mario Fortunato's name does not appear a single time in the text, the narrator's name is mentioned only twice, as "Salah". Furthermore, the occasion in which the narrator's name is explicitly mentioned for the first time carries an ironic undertone: "At college, I met a girl from Bari. Her name was Ketti, and she was very cute. Everyone was after her. She and I became friends. "Salah, after graduation, you've got to come to Italy," she always said. "It's not easy to live the way you want to, here" (Fortunato et al. 91). Attesting that Italy is a more favourable destination for Salah, the presence of Ketti's repeated and insistent commands also suggest that in spite of his academic merit Salah will not be offered the opportunities he deserves. Therefore, in appearing at the beginning of the narrative and the journey, the narrator's name is simultaneously associated with a departure project presented as logical and necessary: ironically Salah's name appears for the first time in the body of the text alongside the illusory incentive of better prospects in Italy. Yet, Fortunato and Methnani's paired presence complicates "the belief in a unity that underlies, in the autobiographical genre, the notion of author and that of person" (Lejeune 188). That is, the authorial presence of Mario Fortunato introduces a disjunction that undermines the apparent unity of *Immigrato* as autobiography, and its trustworthiness.

Besides, Lejeune further develops his formulation of collaborative writing by adding: "In the particular case of autobiography, the exercise of memory and the exercise of writing are ensured by different people, in the midst of a process of dialogue that is likely to leave oral and written traces" (188). Therefore, according to this approach a clear distinction is being made in terms of responsibilities. And it could be argued that Salah Methnani "the model is reduced to the state of *source*. Being free from the restraints related to written communication, he can let his memory take over" (188-189) and Mario Fortunato "[t]he writer, on the contrary is entrusted with all the duties of structuring, of control, of communication with the outside" (189). Therefore, the reading of *Immigrato* as an "autobiographical collaboration" (186) provides the possibility of an additional layer of meaning. However, providing an answer to the question "Who is the author of *Immigrato*?" is

²⁹⁰ In "Collaborative Autobiography" Thomas Couser writes: "There are different kinds and degrees of collaboration, but in the most familiar arrangement, "as-told-to" autobiography, the writer is one person, while the narrator and subject are someone else. (In this scenario, then, one partner supplies the "life" while the other provides the "writing.") Although the process by which the text is produced is dialogical, the product is monological; the two voices are permitted to engage in dialogue only in supplementary texts – forewords and afterwords – and even there, the dialogue is managed and presented by the nominal author" (222).

beyond the scope of this section. And if Lejeune's focus on the distribution of work in autobiographical collaborations directs the reader into considering the clear-cut tasks attributed to each contributor, it is necessary to consider the reader's expectation given that "it is especially a question of adapting what the model has said to the laws of the genre and to the demand of the public to which it is directed" (189). Following this line of thought, on the one hand, Mario Fortunato's task²⁹¹ can consist in maintaining a certain coherence between Salah Methnani's memory and the binding requirements of the collaborative autobiography²⁹² that would correspond to the demand and emerging interest of the Italian public in immigrant narratives at the time of the publication of *Immigrato*.²⁹³

Lejeune investigates the public perception of autobiographical collaborations and goes on to indicate that, "Even when the collaboration is not hidden, it is minimized. Especially, in these matters, the public is reduced to believing (or not believing) exactly what one wants to tell them, because the public obviously has no way to evaluate the work of the writer. The public is unaware, of what the initial contribution of the model consisted" (266). Contrary to what is stated here, *Immigrato*'s title page bears evidence of its dual authorship and one could argue that instead of being hidden the presence of Mario Fortunato's name can be interpreted as "a literary guarantee" which serves "to push away the phantom of the ghost-writer" (195). However, the extent of Salah Methnani's quantitative and qualitative contribution to the final text is not explicitly acknowledged in the narrative.

Interestingly, in "The Death of the Author" Barthes puts forth a significant elaboration on the relationship between readers, authors, and texts, and insists on the uselessness of the authors' biographies, subjectivities and intentions in interpreting their texts. When he asserts that "[w]riting is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our

²⁹¹ On the duties of the writer in autobiographical collaboration Lejeune writes: "the interviewer-writer does not impose his point of view or his personal style; he opens himself rather to a double exercise of pastiche, effecting a coming-and-going between this nebula or this rough draft that is the image of life floating in the memory and spoken word of the model, and the narrative forms that are currently on the market" (189).

²⁹² On autobiography and testimony, Linda Anderson writes in *Autobiography*: "autobiography as a form of testifying, to be distinguished from confession, which involves the speaker and the listener in a shared project to recover 'something the speaking subject is not – and cannot be – in possession of' ... To testify, in its legal sense, is to produce one's speech or one's story as part of a larger verdict yet to be made. Testimony is called for in a situation where the truth is not clear, where there is already a 'crisis of truth'" (127).

²⁹³ In his examination of autobiographical collaboration Philippe Lejeune asserts that "heterobiography in the first person ... would be a case exactly the inverse of that of 'autobiography in the third person.'" One who pretends to be two, two who pretend to be only one. But symmetry established in this way is deceiving: the pretense does not have the same function in the two cases, and especially is not situated on the same level ... In collaborative autobiography, the writer speaks of the model as if it were he, by constructing his role as autodiegetic narrator; the reader must forget this game for the text to keep its meaning" (264-265).

subject slips away” (142) he suggests therefore that texts do not have a unitary meaning, and he interrogates the authority of authors and critics involved in the interpretation of texts. From this standpoint Barthes’ contribution to the debate over authorship is particularly relevant as it undermines the idea of a single authorial authority and source of meaning in Fortunato and Methnani’s collaborative autobiography.

In using the term “scriptor” (145) Barthes replaces the traditional notion of the author by an act of writing which is devoid of authorial intentionality.²⁹⁴ Therefore, the reading of *Immigrato* through the prism of the scriptor allows for a possible resolution of the problematic collaboration between Methnani and Fortunato. By extrapolating Barthes’ theory, it can be argued that the “hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression)” (146), and which writes *Immigrato* also disqualifies the author as a unique source of meaning. In other words, when viewed as scriptors of a collaborative text, Fortunato and Methnani’s author status is called into question: they are no longer authoritative sources of meaning, no more than their biographies. Following this line of argument, Barthes elaborates on the issue of authorship attribution and writes, “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147). Nonetheless, as much as scholarly attention has welcomed the writing partnerships between Italians and immigrants, it is on the complexities engendered by their collaborative production that the critics have insisted predominantly; and one may add that the role of readership as a source of meaning in the context of the 1990s literary production of the Maghrebi diaspora in Italy calls for further investigation. Therefore, through a Barthesian reading of *Immigrato* the debates that aim to fix once and for all the hardly verifiable attribution of *Immigrato* to either Fortunato or Methnani lose their validity as they fail to acknowledge the irrelevance of the origin of a text as a source of meaning.

Roland Barthes challenges the author-centred interpretations of literature when he writes that “[A] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures, and entering into mutual relations of dialogue” (148); and in arguing that meaning does not lie in the author’s intention but in readers’ interpretations “The Death of the Author” points towards the multi-layered-ness of the text and further complicates the interpretation of *Immigrato*.

²⁹⁴ In *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson writes: “Attacked by the New Critics of the 1930s and 1940s as a fallacy, ‘intentionality’ signals the belief that the author is behind the text, controlling its meaning; the author becomes the guarantor of the ‘intentional’ meaning or truth of the text, and reading a text therefore leads back to the author as origin” (2).

On the author-question Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" offers a significant intervention. In the debate over authorship Foucault asks, "What, in short, is the strange unit designated by the term, work? What is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an "author?" (118), thereby indicating that the author is a precondition through which the text becomes a work. For a written text to become a work of a literary significance, the writer must be acknowledged as an author. Accordingly, in order to treat *Immigrato* as a work, it is necessary to presuppose that it is written by an author, and that presupposition implies the very presence of the author outside the text. In this regard, *Immigrato* is not the first work produced by Fortunato and Methnani; in fact, at the time of *Immigrato* Mario Fortunato had already published several literary texts²⁹⁵ while Methnani had published an Italian translation of Mohamed Choukri's *Majnun al-ward*²⁹⁶ originally written in Arabic.

Also, according to Foucault the author's name occupies an important position in the question of authorship as the play between designation and description is brought to light. And if "the author's name characterizes a particular manner of existence of discourse" (123), then, the author is a cultural construct and the author's name becomes a marker. Therefore, the idea can be put forward that the names of Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani are markers for unique discursivity. Additionally, Foucault's elaboration on the characteristics of the author discourse is of particular interest because it offers a further basis for the exploration of Fortunato and Methnani's collaborative work. And when Foucault asserts that "in our day, literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author" (126), it is to indicate that a literary text cannot stand on its own anymore. Consequently, the author function becomes the dominant marker for literary texts, and the examination of *Immigrato*'s reception confirms the special attention given to questions relating to "its author and the date, place, and circumstances of writing" (126). Yet, a parallel can also be drawn between literary anonymity and dual authorship, in the sense that Foucault describes the quest to find an author as "a puzzle to be solved" (126). In other words, one could find similarity between the challenges presented by an anonymous and a four-handed text because of the importance given to the identification of the author through the reading of the text.

²⁹⁵ *La casa del corpo* (1986) and *Luoghi Naturali* (1988).

²⁹⁶ Methnani, Salah. *Il folle delle rose*. Rome: Theoria, 1989.

Foucault indicates that the idea of authorship comes with a sense of unity and homogeneity, and as such the author function becomes a construct of closure, as if the text could be ultimately reduced to its author. Having said that, the findings based on the examination of *Immigrato*'s reception are in accordance with Foucault's assertion that, "the author explains the presence of certain events within a text, as well as their transformations, distortions, and their various modifications" (128). Indeed, while it complicates the idea of authenticity and attribution, the dual authorship of *Immigrato* can be understood as a convenient construct in the modern Italian industry of authorship, which accounts for contradictions, conformity and non-conformity. Although it is not my intention to argue that Fortunato and Methnani's authorship category corresponds to Foucault's "initiators of discursive practices" (131), the critical reception of *Immigrato* insists on the inaugural dimension of the text in initiating a discourse on the relationship between Italian literature and immigration.

As a support for his argument, Foucault brings Ann Radcliffe into the discussion and writes that she "did not simply write *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and a few other novels, but also made possible the appearance of Gothic Romances at the beginning of the nineteenth century" (132), and in a similar vein, it can be argued that Fortunato and Methnani offer a set of themes, structures, and a style perhaps in turn replicated and followed by other writers in the field of migrant literature in Italian.²⁹⁷ However, the argument that Fortunato and Methnani inaugurate a new form of authorship in Italian literature requires nuanced considerations given that instances of dual authorship can be found in earlier Italian literature.²⁹⁸ In fact, following Foucault's line of arguments, one could argue that Fortunato and Methnani do not seem to depart from any literary tradition that came before them. And it is not unreasonable to suggest the idea that, similarly to Ann Radcliffe's influence on the nineteenth-century Gothic romance, there are certain elements common to *Immigrato* and the subsequent migrant literature in Italian. Yet, when it comes to the parallels between Foucault's reference to the Gothic romance and *Immigrato*, the comparison falls short. Strictly speaking Fortunato and Methnani have not produced an oeuvre: *Immigrato* was not

²⁹⁷ In "What an Author is" Alexander Nehamas writes: "In interpreting a text we ask what *any* individual who can have produced it must be like. This is to ask what character is manifested in it, what other actions that character can perform, what relations our text bears to other texts and to the characters they manifest. We do not go beneath the text's surface, looking for a covert meaning. We juxtapose surfaces; we see what texts made ours possible and what texts, in turn, it made possible itself. This is the literal sense of metaphors of breadth and expansion" (690).

²⁹⁸ On dual authorship in Italian literature between 1950 and 1980, see Ferdinando Mirizzi's "Contadini del Sud tra valore documentario e dimensione letteraria" (2016).

followed by another collaborative literary project and if their collaboration complicates the system of ownership for texts, *Immigrato* has not been critically read and interpreted as a text inaugurating a tradition of thought. In other words, with *Immigrato* Fortunato and Methnani do not initiate a discursive practice.

Moving away from the specific study of the author to a more generic study of discourse, Foucault's essay pushes towards an examination of *Immigrato* in relation to the various literary traditions it stems, and potentially departs from. Accordingly, the question of *Immigrato*'s authenticity and originality becomes irrelevant and is outweighed by the "modes of existence" (137) of the discourse on immigration in Italian literature, and eventually by the idea of discourse appropriation²⁹⁹ and misappropriation in relation to the collaborative dimension of *Immigrato*. The presence of two author names on the cover of the book complicates the autobiographical dimension³⁰⁰ of the text, and in this case James Olney's remark on the inadequacy of a monolithic definition of autobiography is particularly pertinent: "This is one of the paradoxes of the subject: everyone knows what autobiography is, but not two observers, no matter how assured they may be, are in agreement" (7). Therefore, the paradoxical and incongruous dimension of the autobiographical genre allows for a reading of *Immigrato* in light of what is "between what is usual and what is unexpected" (Hutcheon 1995, 59). Therefore, Fortunato and Methnani's dual authorship leads the reader to a questioning of *Immigrato*'s problematic autobiographical claim to capture the truth.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin views appropriation as such: "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (293-294).

³⁰⁰ In "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" George Gusdorf asserts that "autobiography is not to be found outside of our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man" (29). Following this line of argument, Fortunato's Western closeness with the autobiographical genre receives precedence over Methnani Arabic literary tradition and indicates Methnani's inferior position and consequently reinforces the authority of the native Italian writer. Yet, Gusdorf overlooks, among others, the autobiographies produced in Arabic as examined by Dwight F. Reynolds in *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (2001).

³⁰¹ On the challenge posed by autobiographical truth Barrett J. Mandel writes: "The *content* of an autobiography is not alone sufficient to create truth. What actually transforms content into truth of life is the *context* that contains the content. By the context I mean the writer's intention to tell the truth; the ratification through the

In his examination of the conditions and limits of autobiography Georges Gusdorf writes,

[T]he prerogative of autobiography consists in this: that it shows us not the objective stages of a career – to discern these is the task of the historian – but that it reveals instead the effort of a creator to give the meaning of his own mythic tale. Every man is the first witness of himself; yet the testimony that he thus produces constitutes no ultimate, conclusive authority – not only because objective scrutiny will always discover inaccuracies but much more because there is never an end to this dialogue of a life with itself in search of its own absolute. (48)

Yet, arguably Fortunato and Methnani's signatures³⁰² distance *Immigrato* from the autobiographical genre, blur the distinction between autobiography and testimony³⁰³ and produce a particular kind of authorial authority which undermines the open-ended reflexivity of the autobiographical text. From the reader's perspective, Fortunato and Methnani share a textual space, however, the negotiation of such space implies some degree of complexity, and raises questions of authority over form and content; and in line with Eakin's argument that "autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and, further, that the self that is at the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (3), an examination of *Immigrato*'s relation to self-construction uncovers the ambiguity of its approach towards truth-telling.³⁰⁴

actual choices he makes word by word, as well as in his tone, style, and organization; the assumptions that permeate the book, giving rise to content while overlapping the reader's own sense of lived experience in the world. I would argue that it is the reader's willingness to experience and cocreate this context that allows autobiography to speak the truth" (72).

³⁰² In *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*, Wayne Koestenbaum asserts that male-male literary collaboration is intrinsically erotic. He puts forth the theory that male-male literary collaborators "express homoeroticism and they strive to conceal it," designating the type of writing produced "double talk": "When two men write together ... they rapidly patter to obscure their erotic burden" (3). For Koestenbaum, "collaboration is always a sublimation of erotic entanglement" (4). While Stone and Thompson argue that "this theory seems debatable" (244), Koestenbaum's hypothesis seems to align with Idriss Amid's interpretation of the series of homoerotic episodes depicted in *Immigrato* and discussed earlier.

³⁰³ According to Lejeune "Collaboration blurs in a disturbing way the question of responsibility, and even damages the notion of identity" (1989, 192).

³⁰⁴ On hoax narratives, Smith and Watson argue that "autobiographical fabrications and embellishments characterize moments of shift within post-modernity that are marked by mobility, migration, encounter, and changes in the composition of nation-states" (622).

If the position of Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani in the compositional activity, and the strategies they have used do not receive any explicit attention in the text (except in Fortunato's introduction to the 2006 edition), the interplay between the absence and presence of the authors' names in the narrative cannot be overlooked given the questionable centrality of Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato's position of marginality. The fact that Salah keeps a diary as he travels through Italy is a *mise en abîme* that further complicates the question of authorial parity. On the one hand, the presence of Salah's name in the narrative appears to emphasize the centrality of Methnani's authorial position, and gestures towards the truthfulness of his supposedly autobiographical account; on the other hand, the absence of Mario Fortunato from the narrative undermines his authorial position (overshadowed by Methnani's) and engages the truthfulness of the joint literary project. Mario Fortunato's absence from the body of the text creates a sense of ambiguity between facts and fiction, and further problematizes Salah's self-representation whose responsibility remains equivocal and cannot be ascribed. In other terms, the authorial uncertainty weakens the effectiveness of *Immigrato* in telling the truth. Consequently, it can be argued that the authorial vagueness has detrimental effects on the reading itself, given that the absence of a self-representation on the part of one of the authors raises suspicions over Fortunato and Methnani's intentions, and constitutes an interpretative obstacle for a reading of *Immigrato* as a transparent literary enterprise that conveys and speaks the truth.³⁰⁵

The reading of *Immigrato* as a testimony offers a different interpretation of authorial undecisiveness in relation to issues of self-representation³⁰⁶ (deflating suspicions of

³⁰⁵ In revisiting his earlier theory of autobiography, Philippe Lejeune writes in "The Autobiographical Pact (Bis)": "the paradox of the literary autobiography, its essential double game, is to pretend to be at the same time a truthful discourse and a work of art ... I should have designated as the centre of the present system this tension between referential transparency and aesthetic pursuit, and shown ... that on both sides of a point of balance, there existed a continuous gradation of texts going, on one side, toward the banality of the *curriculum vitae*, and on the other, toward pure poetry. At the two extremities of the spectrum, the autobiographical contract, for opposite reasons, is found to lose its credibility" (128).

³⁰⁶ In "Witness or False Witness?" Smith and Watson explore several kinds of I-formations and their implications in the politics of authenticity. They identify four prominent rhetorical configurations of witness narratives: "the composite I, the coalitional I, the translated I, and the negotiable I." Interestingly, the composite "I" is: "a figure often conflated collectively with the genre of testimony itself, because the speaking subject is often collectively produced by numerous actors positioned across asymmetries of power. These include the witness and the witness's community of affiliation; the intended audience within the narrative; the coxer or interlocutor, if there is one, usually with another affiliation and access to means of redress; a group of others including the editor, publisher, and translator of the text; and activist groups, marketers, and the persons, organizations, and forums who have solicited, facilitated, and circulated the act of witnessing. Within this ensemble production, the narrating "I" at once occupies, and is assigned, the subject position of a victim to be rescued. Because this I's apparently coherent narration is often in fact produced by collective "manufacture," it is vulnerable to suspicion, and has frequently been denounced in this digital age as a performance of false witnessing" (600-601).

misleading authorial intention) and truth telling; it also reconfigures the dynamics of power in the Fortunato-Methnani relationship. With this in mind, John Beverley's elaboration on "testimonio" in relation to Latin American Spanish narrative text offers an interesting perspective regarding the reading of *Immigrato*, and its classification. Beverley proposes for this form of literary expression a definition of "testimonio" as

a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually, a "life" or a significant life experience. *Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novela-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic literature.' (1989, 13)

In *Immigrato* the narrative is told in the first person³⁰⁷ by Salah who presents himself as a narrator-witness³⁰⁸ who tells the story of his journey. Direct references to Mario Fortunato are absent from the story, and his involvement in the text is hardly traceable. Yet, the standards of the "testimonio" allow *Immigrato* to circumvent the problematic presence of the two names on the title page while it supports Salah's central position³⁰⁹ and Mario Fortunato's eccentric one, and a commitment to truth. According to Beverley,

The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself. The position of the reader of *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom. Unlike the novel, *testimonio* promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness. (14)

³⁰⁷ Mieke Bal writes in *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*: "When in a text the narrator never refers explicitly to itself as a character, we speak of an *external narrator*. This term indicates that the narrating agent does not figure in the fabula as an actor. On the other hand, if the "I" is to be identified with a character, hence, also an actor in the fabula, we speak of a *character-bound narrator*" (13).

³⁰⁸ Smith and Watson identify five metrics through which "witness narratives project an aura of authenticity ... recognizable to many readers of first-person testimony: 1) the 'you-are-there' sense of immediacy; 2) the invocation of right discourse; 3) the affirmation of the duty to narrate a collective story; 4) the normative shape of victim experience and identity; 5) the ethno-documentation of cultural specificity" (593-594).

³⁰⁹ According to Bal: "Considering the narrative as told by a witness is a way of barring indifference and encouraging compassion. This, in turn, solicits questions of modesty versus voyeurism, or a resistance to an attitude of appropriation, hence, questions of an ethical nature" (20).

Criticism that is aimed at the literary quality of *Immigrato* can be dismissed through the interpretive framework provided by the testimonio category which gives precedence to sincerity over aesthetic merit. In dealing with the “problematic collective social situation” (15) that Salah lives with and alongside others, *Immigrato* merges Salah’s individual trajectory with that of the numerous immigrants mentioned in the text. And the “pledge to honesty” of the testimonio alleviates suspicions around the truthfulness of the story told by Salah, while also allowing Fortunato to become “part of, and dependent on, the “people” without at the same time losing his or her identity as an intellectual” (19). Yet, following Beverley, the testimonio offers an “entry into literature of persons who would normally, in those societies where literature is a form of class privilege, be excluded from direct literary expression, who have had to be ‘represented’ by professional writers” (17). While the testimonio insists on the representational value of Fortunato-Methnani’s collaborative work, the testimonio’s “legal or religious sense” (14) appears to suggest the imperative need for the reader to come up with a judgement thereby pointing again towards a construct of closure. However, if Beverley’s parallel with the courtroom implies a certain gravity, the opportunities offered by the dual authorship of *Immigrato* require further investigations and may lead to a more nuanced appreciation of the reader’s position.

It appears from the examination of Fortunato and Methnani’s collaboration that *Immigrato*’s “urgency to communicate” (14) has captured most of the critical attention of those interested in the literature of migration in Italian. It would also mean that it can be read as a “soft weapon” of protest. Furthermore, Methnani and Fortunato’s negotiation of the diasporic imaginary also has the potential³¹⁰ to disturb monolithic generalizations over the severity of the text. From this viewpoint, the examination of *Immigrato*’s relation with the literary field of travel literature, and more specifically the traditional Grand Tour can possibly uncover ways to unsettle the solemnity of the courtroom.

2.2.2 Diasporic Imaginary in *Immigrato*

The reader follows Salah during his journey from Tunis to Milan until he returns as a prodigal son to his father’s home in Tunisia, and the depiction of his wanderings puts forth

³¹⁰ Demonstrating the potentialities of the testimonio as a collaborative work (and incidentally its role in the panorama of Italian literature) Beverley writes: “Testimonio is a transitional cultural form appropriate to processes of rapid social and historical change but also destined to give way to different forms of representation as these processes move forward ... to other stages, and the human collectivities that are their agents come into the possession of new forms of power and knowledge” (1991, 21).

the dialectical relationship between Tunisia as a homeland and Italy as a host nation. While it could be argued that Salah's circuit follows an upward movement from Tunisia up to Northern Italy, the return to Kairouan in the last chapter does not mean the end of Salah's mobility. After many wanderings throughout the Italian peninsula (Mazara del Vallo, Palermo, Naples, Rome, Florence, Padua, Turin, Milan), Salah visits his father in Kairouan and then returns to Rome. The final question that his father asks before the return to Italy is particularly relevant in the discussion of spatiality in the text: "When are you coming back?". I thought that I would never come back or that instead I would have done only this for all my life" (129).³¹¹ The question raises the issue of (in)stability and Salah's position of pendulousness and inbetweenness, yet, if Italy and Tunisia are the two poles between which Salah navigates, the itinerary depicted as an upward topographical journey is interwoven with a downward movement. In fact, images of descent are important features of *Immigrato*, in a topographical and a psychological sense.

The diasporic dimension of the text lies not only in Methnani's reflection on the complexity of his physical and emotional encounter with the Italian population, but also in the recurring expressions of attachment to his homeland; and one of the particularities of Methnani's journey is that it depicts a host nation sprinkled with places which function as simulacra of the homeland. However, the presence of the "casbah" (24) in Mazara del Vallo, the "rostitteria" (30) [deli] and the Mancini street bar (40) in Napoli, or the "Ristorante Carthage" (53) [Carthage Restaurant] in Roma produces conflicting reactions:

I find a deli that also sells Tunisian food. I'm almost feeling emotional getting my teeth into a sandwich with *harissa*: the spiciness of the chilli, for a moment, makes me breathe, then I return to apnoea. I would also like to taste the *brik*, but I'm not in the mood anymore. From now on, I tell myself, better not to eat the food I was used to: in the end, it only leaves you with the flavour of what you no longer are. (30)³¹²

It is to be noted that the deli in Palermo does not provide Salah with a sense of comfort; instead, the delicatessen is a place of loneliness in which Salah's feelings illustrate the

³¹¹ "« Quando ritorni? ». Pensai che forse non sarei più tornato o che invece non avrei fatto altro per tutta la vita" (129).

³¹² "Trovo una rostitteria che ha anche cibo tunisino. Mi commuovo quasi a mettere sotto i denti un panino con la *harissa*: il piccante del peperoncino, per un attimo, mi fa respirare, poi ritorno in apnea. Vorrei assaggiare anche il *brik*, ma mi è passata la voglia. D'ora in poi, mi dico, meglio non mangiare il cibo cui sono stato abituato: alla fine, ti lascia solo il sapore di ciò che non sei più" (30).

underlying sensation of sadness. The presence of traditional Tunisian food provides Salah with a temporarily relief, and if his ambivalent attitude of acceptance and rejection towards Tunisian food is used here to illustrate the initial phase of his metamorphosis, the general atmosphere of seriousness indicates that his sense of self is beginning to shift. The scene at the deli shows the early stage of Salah's nostalgic reflection on his own sense of being, and it seeks to capture the reader through a tragic and solemn rendition of the loss that accompanies the beginning of his mutation.

Surprisingly, in spite of his inability to understand the local dialect, Methnani feels closer to the youngsters in the bar in Padova (88) than to his fellow-countrymen by the fact that they remind him more of his friends back in Tunisia. And if he regularly expresses nostalgia for his homeland (18) and regrets having left home (44), his journey is also marked by periods during which the thought of a lost time disappears as episodes of alcohol and substance abuse (80) become more frequent, and more acute. In addition to feelings of nostalgia for a lost stability and a pronounced desire to forget what has happened to him over the last few months (122), Salah's mind is considerably occupied by the question of the return to the homeland (32, 109) and to his father (61, 97).

Also, the bar in via Mancini plays a significant role in the narrative and offers particular insight into the diasporic imaginary depicted in *Immigrato*:

I keep going around the area until I end up in a bar in Mancini street which seems to be the headquarters of my compatriots. On the other side of the street, the door of a building with another signpost. In Arabic only, this time: "Please no loitering in front of the building." In response, a large group of Tunisians are standing right there. In the bar I start talking to Murad, a twenty-four-year-old boy from southern Tunisia who has been living in Naples for four months. I immediately ask him about job opportunities. (40-41)³¹³

Functioning as a response to the loss of a familiar environment the bar provides Salah and his countrymen with networking opportunities, and a strong sense of co-ethnic presence. The

³¹³ "Continuo a girare in zona finché capito in un bar di via Mancini che pare essere il quartier generale dei miei connazionali. Sull'altro lato della strada, il portone di un palazzo con un altro cartello. In arabo soltanto, questa volta: « Si prega di non sostare davanti al palazzo ». Per tutta risposta, un folto gruppo di tunisini staziona proprio lì. Nel bar attacco a parlare con Murad, un ragazzo di ventiquattro anni del Sud della Tunisia e che vive a Napoli da quattro mesi. Gli chiedo subito informazioni sulle possibilità di lavoro" (40-41).

aggrandisement of the function of the bar into a headquarter for the Tunisian diaspora of Napoli is an ironic distortion that problematizes the availability of social structures, networks and services for Tunisian immigrant populations in Italy. The inadequacy of governmental initiatives in terms of management of immigration is underscored by the recourse to an ethnically homogeneous support system that occupies a central position in the life of the Tunisian diaspora in Naples. The ironic attribution of a disproportionate role to the bar is reinforced by the incongruous signpost: beyond the irony and absurdity of the scene, it is the more general idea of mobility that is the target of Salah's irony.

By extension, the presence of Tunisian immigrants in the Italian public space is characterized by a tension between incessant movement and precarious immobility, as to reflect on the complexity of a territorial fixedness for Salah and the Tunisian diaspora. Yet, in the more private space of the bar, Tunisian regional differences are erased, and a new hierarchy is formed. It could be argued that in spite of his humble origins and because of the time spent in Naples, the younger interlocutor is portrayed as an authority figure from whom Salah, a graduate student from the capital city of Tunis, can extract useful information. That is, as a simulacrum of the homeland, the bar in Mancini street allows for a reallocation of the roles in the Tunisian diaspora in Naples. Another instance of aggrandizement can be found in *Immigrato* with regards to the Mancini's bar, when Salah writes that it is "in a certain way the real Tunisian consulate in Naples" (92).³¹⁴ After covertly mocking the absence of domestic support, the mentioning of the Tunisian public administration fulfils a satirical function in mocking in equal measure the inefficiencies of Tunisian official authorities. And such mechanism of denunciation, through the assailing and corrective function of satiric irony, allows for the production of comic effect.

The chapter dedicated to the Italian capital city is the longest and the depiction of the Carthage restaurant in Rome is particularly insightful as a simulacrum of the homeland and its contribution to a Tunisian diasporic imaginary:

I'm hungry. I'm going to eat at the Carthage restaurant. The place or rather the owner called Salah Rome is a kind of myth in Tunis. He is a stocky type dude, full of bracelets and gold chains, and spits continuously. In Tunisia, he was famous years ago because he was a very good boxer. He was a lightweight champion ... one day, Salah

³¹⁴ "[I]n un certo senso il vero consolato tunisino a Napoli" (42).

Rome came here, and he opened the restaurant. He was not short of money. And then, when someone was leaving from Tunis to Rome, it was always said: “Go to Salah Rome, he has been good at it”. Not surprisingly, like a surname the name of the city was added to his name: he is the new king of Rome. In the restaurant, to be honest, I only see ugly faces. Even a prostitute appears who I knew by sight in Tunis: now, she seems only dressed a bit better. I eat my couscous truly with gusto. The bill, for my budget, will be hyperbolic, but I’m happy anyway. I needed a real meal. (53-54)³¹⁵

Salah’s sense of mockery stems, in a Bakhtinian manner, from his presenting first the crowning and then the uncrowning of Salah Rome. The grandiose domestic success of the Tunisian boxing champion becomes a source of admiration in Tunisia, and his successful enterprise is a pull factor that attracts considerable attention. Because of its mythical dimension, the Carthage restaurant is idealized as an imperative destination that provides a reassuring co-ethnic presence. Functioning as a haven for those experiencing Tunisian food cravings, it can almost be considered a pilgrimage site for the Tunisian migrants in Rome. Yet, the aggrandised success of the restaurant owner is counterbalanced by Salah’s attention, first, to the incongruity of the boxer’s sense of hygiene in a food-serving establishment, then to characters that disrupt the overly romanticized and sanitized version of Salah Rome’s success. Described as a ghostly vision, the presence of the prostitute contributes to the degrading of the restaurant status; the sex worker’s unsatisfying camouflage attempt and the repulsive faces in the restaurant signal the decadence of the once-celebrated Tunisian champion. There is a clear opposition between the owner’s spitting mouth and Salah’s mouth in search of Tunisian food: if the present-day restaurant owner does not correspond any longer to the idealized version elaborated by his compatriots, Salah’s longing for his native food leads him to discover the degraded state of the Tunisian diaspora on Italian soil. In mentioning the heavy price paid to satisfy his appetite Salah delivers a final blow to ethnic solidarity, that can be read as a satirical irony directed towards food in the diaspora, but first and foremost towards the credulity and naivety of the Tunisian candidates to migration.

³¹⁵ “Ho fame. Vado a mangiare nel ristorante Carthage. Il locale, o meglio il suo proprietario, chiamato Salah Rome, a Tunisi è una specie di mito. Lui è un tipo tarchiato, pieno di bracciali e catene d’oro, e sputa in continuazione. In Tunisia, era famoso anni fa perché era un pugile molto bravo. È stato campione dei pesi leggeri ... un giorno, Salah Rome è venuto qui, e ha aperto il locale. I soldi non gli mancavano. E allora, quando qualcuno partiva da Tunisi per Roma, si diceva sempre: « Vai da Salah Rome, lui è uno che ci ha saputo fare ». Non a caso, al suo è stato aggiunto, come un cognome, il nome della città: lui è il nuovo re di Roma. Nel ristorante, a dire la verità, vedo solo brutte facce. Spunta anche una prostituta che conoscevo di vista a Tunisi: adesso, mi sembra solo vestita un pò meglio. Mangio il mio cuscus proprio con gusto. Il conto, per le mie finanze, sarà iperbolico, ma sono contento ugualmente. Avevo bisogno di un pasto vero” (53-54).

When looking at the forms of genealogical accounting, one of the characteristics of the “how-we-got-here” stories is that Methnani does not delve into the details of his first crossing of the Mediterranean when he travels as a tourist from Tunisia to Sicily with his friend Faisal:

One summer, with my friend Faisal we decided to visit Trapani. We took the ferry. We had little money, but we only wanted to spend a few days in Sicily. Many of my friends had already done that trip. They would come to Italy and buy blue jeans, Carrera or Levi’s, and T-shirts. We did not buy anything. In Palermo, we visited churches and museums, and one evening we went to the cinema and watched *Once Upon a Time in America*... After that trip, the desire to escape from my country grew stronger with every passing day. (11-12)³¹⁶

This first trip could be interpreted as a parody of the Grand Tour performed by wealthy European elite, and give an opportunity to speculate over the narrator’s intention to produce comic effect. However, what is striking in this first crossing is the ease with which Salah and Faisal manage to reach Sicily as tourists. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the means of transportation is mentioned while the border is simply ignored. Yet, the second crossing takes a different turn:

I was still living with my mother and I thought continuously that one day or the other I would have taken the ferry to Trapani again. I remembered my first trip ... My mother was terrified at the prospect of my abandoning her. I was the only male in the family, and I had to think about her. For her, I delayed by many months. Then, without really deciding it, I decided to leave. I knew that in Mazara del Vallo, in the province of Trapani, there was a whole colony of Tunisians. All in all, the location was quite close: I convinced myself that over there, in a way, I would feel like I was still at home, near my mother. (13-14)³¹⁷

³¹⁶ “Un’estate, con il mio amico Faisal decidemmo di visitare Trapani. Prendemmo il traghetto. Avevamo pochi soldi e volevamo solo stare pochi giorni in Sicilia. Molti miei amici avevano già fatto quel viaggio: venivano in Italia per acquistare jeans Carrera o Levi’s e qualche maglietta. Noi non comprammo niente. A Palermo, visitammo chiese e musei e, una sera, andammo al cinema, a vedere *C’era una volta in America* ... Dopo quel viaggio, il desiderio di evadere dal mio Paese crebbe di giorno in giorno” (11-12).

³¹⁷ “Io abitavo ancora con mia madre e pensavo di continuo che, un giorno o l’altro, avrei preso di nuovo il traghetto per Trapani. Ricordavo quell’altro viaggio ... Mia madre era terrorizzata all’idea che la abbandonassi. Io ero l’unico maschio, in famiglia, e dovevo pensare a lei. Per lei, temporeggiai parecchi mesi. Poi, senza deciderlo veramente, decisi di partire. Sapevo che a Mazara del Vallo, in provincia di Trapani, c’era un’intera colonia di tunisini. Tutto sommato, il posto era abbastanza vicino: mi dicevo che lì, in qualche modo, mi sarei sentito ancora a casa, vicino a mia madre” (13-14).

This time the surprise comes from the severity with which the trip to Sicily is depicted. It is now from a migrant perspective that sea crossing is taken into consideration. Worth mentioning is the fact that Salah's desire to migrate contrasts markedly with the tension it produces on his mother, and in a wider sense it contrasts with the consequences of separation on those left behind and their fear of abandonment. The solemnity of the scene lies in Salah's sense of duty towards his distressed mother and the presenting of the departure as inevitable. Yet, Salah finds consolation in the presence of a Tunisian diaspora on the other side of the sea. Here too one can identify a form of *agrandissement* in the depiction of the Tunisian diaspora. By pointing to the size of the Tunisian population in Mazara del Vallo, Salah leads the reader to believe that ethnic community support is already available, and that in a certain measure it will facilitate his migration.

It can also be argued that a collective quest motif pervades *Immigrato* as Methnani comes across illegal immigrants who yearn for the official legalization³¹⁸ of their political status as residents in Italy (88). About his visit in Padua to the "Association of Non-European Workers" (88),³¹⁹ Salah writes, "In the only room made available to the group, a meeting is under way. Around a desk, five people are discussing the increasingly likely regularisation that will allow many to emerge from the tunnel of illegality" (88).³²⁰ Without naming it, Salah is referring to the Martelli Law³²¹ that has the potential to put an end to the administrative chaos that forces the migrants into concealment. The relieving effect attributed to the amnesty can be read as an indication of the limbo where migrants are presently compelled to live. The reference to the seriously dark passage under or through the ground illustrates the role of hiding and dissimulation in the migrant's journey, and hints at the interplay between liminality and invisibility in the text. The mentioning of a possible end to the migrants' subterranean condition points to the variety of ascent and descent symbolism in the text, in which gaining legal status resembles a second birth. Yet, if the regularisation does

³¹⁸ On the amnesty Graziella Parati writes: "The importance of the Martelli Law lies in the fact that it is the first complete corpus of laws dealing with the presence within Italy of people originating from countries outside the European community" (298).

³¹⁹ "Associazione dei lavoratori extracomunitari" (88).

³²⁰ Nell'unica sala a disposizione del gruppo, è in corso una riunione. Intorno a una scrivania, cinque persone stanno discutendo della sempre più probabile sanatoria che permetterà a molti di uscire dal tunnel della clandestinità" (88).

³²¹ According to Graziella Parati: "Law number 39, dated February 28, 1990, was created to regularize the position of the illegal immigrants that had entered Italy before December 1989. About 220,000 immigrants took advantage of the *legge Martelli* (Martelli law) and contributed to restore the "health" of the country. Far from being successful, such a law applied to the people already present in Italy but did not create an efficient plan to solve future immigration to Italy" (170).

not appear to be a central preoccupation for most the Tunisians that Salah encounters during his journey, legal matters bring both migrants and Italians into bureaucratic contact as is the case in Turin when Salah pays a visit to the Foreign Office:

In an impersonal tone, the girl asks: “What is your nationality? How old are you? Why did you come to Turin? I answer all her questions. She’s like: “So, it is possible to find work in the factories, but it is necessary to wait until the end of the year. We know from official sources that there will be a regularisation to get you in order.” The girl is talking like a recorded tape. Before I go away, she says: “We will be happy to give you a hand”. Now, she’s like an advertising leaflet. (103)³²²

The attention is given to the mechanical speech of the employee and to the incongruity produced by the combination of a human and a machine-like behaviour on the part of the staff. In targeting the monotonous rigidity of the office clerk, Salah’s irony uncovers the inhumane bureaucracy in charge of migration in Italy, and the dehumanizing effect it has on those operating in the name of the state who are in fact reduced to automata. Stripped of her humanity, the clerk is downgraded to the rank of mere piece of machinery and her displaying of a form of empathy is discredited and mocked in becoming the object of Salah’s satire. By pointing to the oddity of the clerk’s expression of courtesy, Salah undermines her position of authority while illustrating his deeply rooted sense of distrust. And in mocking the clerk’s paying lip service that will not lead to any practical outcome for the migrant, it is the institutional self-proclaimed altruism and false promises that are satirically condemned.

Alongside the collective quest motif *Immigrato* illustrates how newly arrived migrants are met with hesitation, suspicion, indifference or opposition as is the case when Salah wanders through the streets of Turin:

On the street, I first meet a Senegalese, then a Brazilian who sells fake Vuitton bags. I try to engage in a conversation. Both look at me arrogantly. And so also does an Egyptian who, not far away, sells horrible oil paintings. That one even turns to me and articulates a “Yes Sir” that gives shudders. I explain to him that I have just arrived in

³²² “La ragazza con tono impersonale chiede: “Di che nazionalità sei? Quanti anni hai? Perché sei venuto a Torino?”. Rispondo a tutte le sue domande. Lei: « Ecco, è possibile trovare lavoro nelle fabbriche, ma bisogna aspettare la fine dell’anno. Sappiamo da fonti ufficiali che ci sarà una sanatoria che vi metta in regola ». La ragazza parla come un nastro registrato. Prima di andare via, dice: « Saremo lieti di darti una mano ». Adesso, sembra un *dépliant* pubblicitario” (103).

Turin and that I am looking for the place where I'll find the immigrants. Nothing. The Egyptian does not speak. Considering his arrogance, I tell him that, if he wants, I can also talk to him in Italian, if he has completely forgotten his Arabic. Anyway, I was not asking him for money or who knows what: just one stupid piece of information. The Egyptian adopts a vaguely offended face, he says: "Go to Carmine street. There you will find food and everything." I walk away, telling him to go to hell. (102-103)³²³

The attention is drawn to the street vendors' nationalities and their attitude of rejection towards Salah. And if the political status of the Senegalese, Brazilian and Egyptian vendors is not indicated, the display of counterfeit merchandize suggests that the peddlers are positioned and operate at the margins of legality. The selling of fake merchandize can be read as one of the migrants' survival strategies, and also as an attempt to expose and take advantage of the materialistic values of the Italian society. In pointing to the widespread presence of peddlers of counterfeit goods across Northern Italy, one can argue that Salah is mocking both street vendors and consumers for their participation in the absurd masquerade at the heart of the buying and selling of counterfeit goods. In fact, buyers and sellers join in a game of disguise where newcomers provide the customers with the equipment and camouflage they need to deceitfully signal their membership into a wealthier social stratum and mimic an aspirational group.

For the migrant the street corner is one of the first points of entry into the Italian market economy. Yet, the process through which Salah manages to extract information about the support available for migrants is rather aggressive. The ambiguous reaction of the only Arab speaker on the street reinforces the centrality of simulation and dissimulation in migrants' networks: through the use of a formal register, the Egyptian street vendor creates a distance, imposes a barrier that prevents Salah from engaging in a more colloquial exchange. Salah rejects the role of the customer and reacts with sarcasm to the sudden register variation and what he considers to be an unconvincing concealment attempt. Salah sarcastically pokes

³²³ "Per strada, incontro prima un senegalese, poi un brasiliano che vende finte borse di Vuitton. Provo ad attaccare un discorso. Tutti e due mi guardano con sufficienza. E così anche un egiziano che, poco distante, vende orribili quadri a olio. Quello addirittura si gira verso di me e scandisce un « Dica » da mettere i brividi. Gli spiego che sono appena arrivato a Torino e che sto cercando un posto dove trovare gli immigrati. Niente. L'egiziano non parla. Di fronte alla sua spocchia, gli dico che, se vuole, posso anche parlargli in italiano, se l'arabo lo ha proprio dimenticato. Comunque, non gli stavo chiedendo soldi o chissà che cosa: solo una stupida informazione. L'egiziano assume un'espressione vagamente offesa, dice: « Vai a via del Carmine. Lì troverai da mangiare e tutto ». Mi allontano, mandandolo a quel paese" (102-103).

fun at the absurdity of the vendor's feigned amnesia and reverses the dynamics of power by unveiling the vendor's dishonesty.

Moreover, the collective quest motif does not necessarily mean that the Tunisian diaspora is unconditionally united, let alone that all the migrants are bound by secure communal ties and solidarities. In this regard, when he reaches Florence, Salah discovers a critical aspect of the diasporic condition:

Naser ... tells of an Egyptian who has a sandwich shop and who does not allow entrance into his shop to the Arabs. "He is a racist," says Naser, "and one day we got ourselves organized: each one of us gave a packet of heroin and we threw fifteen of them behind the counter. Then we dialled 911. They found the heroin and closed the shop, but only for one month. (76-77)³²⁴

Naser directs Salah to the extreme exclusionary practices put in place by some migrants in their commercial activities, as to suggest that for a handful of migrants entrepreneurial and financial success takes absolute precedence over co-ethnic solidarity. These restrictive arrangements of exclusion suggest that some migrants encourage racial segregation. In line with Naser's view, the policing mechanism is performed on the basis of a racial hierarchy: as if for the shop owner economic prosperity and co-ethnic presence were incompatible. However, instead of interpreting the protective measure taken by the Egyptian manager as a hostile yet predictable reaction to potential rivals, Naser hints towards a form of ethnic self-hatred³²⁵ and to the Mafia-like reaction of the Arab community in disciplining the recalcitrant member of the community. The mechanism of revenge is magnified by the fact that a large number of undocumented persons planned the first part of the punitive action, and that the second part of the punishment was carried out ironically by law enforcement agencies. Therefore, during his journey Salah discovers the weakness of diasporic ties and the fragility of communal networks. The later discussion Salah initiates with a Moroccan street vendor in Milan provides more details in relation to the fragmentation of migrant communities:

³²⁴ "Naser ... racconta di un egiziano che ha una paninoteca in via Palazzuolo e che, nel suo locale, non fa entrare gli arabi. « È un razzista », dice Naser, « e una volta ci siamo organizzati: ognuno di noi ha dato una busta e gliene abbiamo (sic) buttate quindici dietro al bancone. Poi abbiamo chiamato il 113. Quelli hanno trovato l'eroina e hanno chiuso il locale, ma solo per un mese »" (76-77).

³²⁵ On self-hatred, see Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*; Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*; and Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*.

I exchange a few words with a street vendor, a Moroccan who, oblivious to the cold, is motionless in front of his goods: sunglasses, watches, lighters. He explains that in Milan the two most powerful communities are the Senegalese and his compatriots. For the most part, Moroccans appear to undertake self-employed jobs: small businesses, of course, illegal too. But there is already – how can I say it – a small bourgeoisie of immigrants who, in one way or another, made a fortune and now runs some bar, some African food restaurant. Often, my interlocutor says, the owners of these shops are more racist than the Milanese themselves who are primarily mad at the Southerners. (112)³²⁶

Milan is described as a multi-ethnic city where the complex system of power relations allows two African diasporas to occupy positions of superiority over other diasporic groups. And if the conversation does not delve into the reasons of such ascendancy, the birth of a middle class among the immigrants is characterized by a certain ambivalence. The text carries the signs of Salah's hesitation in finding a name for this new category of individuals, and the details of their success remain unclear. An incongruous contradiction can be found between the higher status achieved by the Senegalese and Moroccan communities and the unlawfulness under which they operate. Additionally, Salah is not surprised by such inconsistency and appears to be resigned to the idea of migrants living outside Italian law.

The focus on the question of class inside ethnic enclaves exposes the mechanisms of exclusion put in place by those who manage to climb the socio-economic ladder. The discriminating attitude towards African migrants on the part of the migrant elite can be read as an imitation of the Milanese stance towards the domestic migrants coming from the Southern regions highly affected by unemployment. Yet, in drawing such a parallel the Moroccan vendor refers indirectly to the ideology of the Lega Nord³²⁷. In other words, the

³²⁶ “Scambio due parole con un venditore ambulante, marocchino, che, incurante del freddo, è immobile davanti alla propria merce: occhiali da sole, orologi, accendini. Lui mi spiega che, a Milano, le due comunità più potenti sono quella dei senegalesi e quella dei suoi connazionali. Per lo più, par che i marocchini svolgano lavori autonomi: piccoli commerci, anche illeciti naturalmente. Ma c'è già, come dire?, una piccola borghesia di immigrati che, in modo o nell'altro, ha fatto fortuna e ora gestisce qualche bar, qualche ristorante di cibi africani. Spesso, dice il mio interlocutore, i proprietari di questi locali sono più razzisti degli stessi milanesi, i quali, più che altro, ce l'hanno con i meridionali” (112).

³²⁷ According to Cento Bull and Gilbert: “The Lega's first manifesto called ... for public examinations to be held on an 'ethno-regional' basis, for public housing to be reserved for Lombards, for Lombards to be given preference in private-sector jobs, and for the defence of the 'cultural and linguistic patrimony' of Lombardy in the schools ... called for the 'reaffirmation' of Lombard culture, history and language, and of the territory's 'values and morals.' The appeal for preferences in healthcare, housing, education and jobs was made even more explicit ... The movement declared itself to be against 'any assault on Lombard national identity' and declared

proverbial enmity between Lega Nord sympathizers³²⁸ and Southern migrants is well below the hostility of migrant “nouveaux riches” towards poorer migrants.

Finally, the examination of the elements of space, nostalgia and genealogical accounting highlights the presence of subtle expressions of levity and confirms the diasporic dimension of the text, yet, *Immigrato* offers another level of interpretation.

2.2.3 Travel Writing and Grand Tour

In her study of the first seven texts written by African immigrant writers in Italian between 1990 and 1995 Jennifer Burns writes,

Methnani’s journey is a parody of the traditional world tour of the educated, European, young man, intended to bring maturity and self-knowledge through interaction with foreign cultures ... Rather than being ‘character-building,’ the trip charts the gradual disintegration of the character’s integrity as an educated, cultured, literature graduate into a faceless immigrant whose existence is either denied, or considered excessive. (1998, 224)

As such, Burns identifies one of the possible sources and models for Methnani and Fortunato’s text, and uses the main character as a central argument for her assertion.³²⁹ Yet, the parodic contrast between *Immigrato* and the tradition of the Grand tour suggests further levels of interpretation in accordance with Linda Hutcheon’s concept of parody: “a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity ... [where, of course] an appreciation or even an understanding of parody obviously depends upon an acquaintance with the parodied text” (2000, xii).

that the Lombard national flag (a red cross on a white background, like the flag of Saint George) should fly alongside the Italian tricolour on all public buildings” (10).

³²⁸ On Umberto Bossi, the founder of the Lega Nord, David Willey writes: “One of his famous phrases was “Roma ladrona” meaning “Thieving Romans!” ... The League mocks the accents and the origins of Southerners whom they derisively call “terroni”. I suppose “ignorant peasant” would be the nearest English translation.”

³²⁹ While a comparative study of *Immigrato* and the major literary representations of the Grand Tour unfolds new levels of interpretation, one can also argue that the linking of Methnani’s autobiography with texts from the Arabo-Islamic tradition could disclose some interesting parallels. In this regard, Daniel Newman’s study on “Arabic Travel Writing” is of particular interest as it indicates that, “The growing body of travel literature produced by those (he means the Arabs) settled in the West addresses the highly complex issues of identity, as well as the politics of displacement, exile, alienation, belonging, and exclusion. The most interesting aspect of these works is the fragmentation of ‘the Other,’ as authors negotiate the Western and multifarious immigration spaces. This genre often sits comfortably on the cusp of autobiography and fiction” (156). Additionally, the trip to Europe has received significant attention in 20th century Tunisian literature as is the case with Ali Douagi’s *Périple à travers les bars méditerranéens* (1979), and Habib Selmi’s *Antres tièdes* (1999).

One could argue that an additional level of reading is introduced, and further parodic repetitions can be found in the text when considering Carl Thompson's view on the 'Grand Tour':

This was a rite of passage for many young male aristocrats ... As well as acquiring foreign languages, the young traveller was supposed to gather useful information, in the empirical spirit of the New Science. He was also meant to visit the many remains of Roman antiquity, so as to complete his training in the classics, which in this era were seen as a key benchmark of taste and cultivation. Or at least, this was the agenda that a young tourist was *supposed* to follow. In practice, many devoted themselves to more frivolous or dissolute pursuits. (47)

Although the initiation journey in *Immigrato* is undertaken by a 27-year-old well-educated graduate student from the University of Tunis, the central character does not appear to belong to the highest strata of the Tunisian society. In contrast with members of the European privileged ruling class, Salah belongs to the lower end of the Tunisian middle-class: his parents are divorced (9), his father is a surveyor (10), his sister works in a supermarket (13) and Salah lives alone with his mother and has only little savings when he decides to leave Tunisia (14) in search of better career prospects and freedom (14). Salah is a polyglot who has studied English and Russian (11), he is a native speaker of Arabic (58) and speaks French too (93). He reaches Italy having a discrete knowledge of the Italian language (58) gained as a child while watching Italian TV programs and further reinforced at university where he meets Ketti from Bari (11).

Instead of providing an opportunity to elevate his social status, in an ironic reversal Salah's knowledge of Italian is a significant handicap (58) and it is by using a lower register of broken Italian that he gains access to hostels and soup kitchens for immigrants. While it's undeniable that during his journey of discovery Salah gains new knowledge, it is mainly underground information that aims to provide him with the basic means of survival. When he reaches the capital city, rather than visiting the remains of ancient Rome Salah wanders around and imitates the migrants who head towards the Termini train station: "Then, like all the other immigrants in the capital, I wander aimlessly around the Termini railway station. Giolitti street, Marsala street, Cernaia street: in the end, you recognize every stone" (52).³³⁰ If

³³⁰ "Poi, come tutti gli altri immigrati della capitale, me ne vado a zonzo nei pressi della stazione Termini. Via Giolitti, via Marsala, via Cernaia: alla fine, riconosci ogni sasso" (52).

the “Colosseum ... Navona Square ... Spanish Steps ... Sistine Chapel ... Vatican Museums ... Roman Forum” (52)³³¹ are aligned with high culture, their grandiosity is deflated by the monotony that stems from the repetition and the sense of uniformity and uselessness with which the streets surrounding the train station are characterized.

In addition, if *Immigrato* can be read as a portrait of Salah’s moral decay, and may be regarded as an elaboration on the triviality of moral corruption among immigrants, triviality itself is practically almost excluded from the Roman visit; and as well as being the longest chapter, the particularity of the episode in Rome lies in the attention it gives to the dislocation of Salah’s identity, “a second identity, more ambiguous, oblique” (68).³³²

It should also be added that in *The Legacy of the Grand Tour* Lisa Colletta writes, “The letters and memoirs from the Grand Tourists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries positively luxuriate in complaint. The journey was difficult, innkeepers and postillions charged extravagant prices for bad food, filthy lodgings, and tired out horses, and the scenery was often a disappointment” (xii). The journey through Italy is a disorienting experience for Salah and the migrants he meets along the way, and in his quest for survival, moments of delight are rare. Whereas the text insists more on the dislocating effect of migration on Salah’s sense of being, *Immigrato* does bear a certain resemblance with the literary depictions of the Grand Tour by giving room to expressions of nostalgia, lament and agony loaded with parodic undertones.

The text abounds in financial considerations that relate to the cost of food often considered too expensive or tasteless, and the little tricks to access free meals. Salah explores the structures put in place by charity organizations for the reception of migrants and he satirizes the authorities for their failure to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. As parodic echo of the Grand Tour, the issue of filth is a recurring theme in *Immigrato* in which dirt and low standards of hygiene also receive a notable attention. Moreover, the search for a decent albeit temporary accommodation is a major source of concern for both Salah and the many migrants scattered throughout the peninsula. In fact, while the Italian scenery from Sicily to Turin is uniformly inhospitable, *Immigrato* operates a reworking and a transformation of certain conventions of the Grand Tour, and beyond the imitation of the elite

³³¹ “Colosseo ... Piazza Navona ... scalinata di Trinità dei Monti ... Cappella Sistina ... musei Vaticani ... Fori Imperiali” (52).

³³² “[U]na seconda identità molto piu sfuggente, obliqua” (68).

practice, one can read the ironic distance between the Grand Tourist for whom the tour of Italy is a temporary parenthesis and the migrant never-ending journey into misery.

Elaborating further on the compositional elements of the Grand Tour, Colletta writes,

[T]ravel has also always been a form of consumption in way (*sic*) or another, and even the voyages in the heyday of the Grand Tour involved a rather organized itinerary, with must-see sights, must-read books, and more often than not the purchase of works of art to take back as proof of the learning and sophistication that was acquired on the Continent. (xiii)

In an ironic reworking of the Grand Tour *Immigrato* changes the focus of attention from the well thought-out and tailored route of the prosperous tourist to Salah's disorganized exploration of Italian towns and major cities. The consumption patterns indicate that Salah and the migrants survive by maintaining a subsistence economy that leaves little room for aesthetic pleasure. The drastic adjustment to a different socio-economic and political context is accompanied by a deterioration of Salah's class position. While the competition varies in its forms and intensities, the category of the migrants is not a homogeneous one; in fact, legal and illegal or undocumented migrants diverge in the way they enter the Italian labour market. Moreover, the low-wage migrants do not only compete among themselves for menial jobs, they also enter in competition with Italian native workers. Therefore, *Immigrato* offers a critique of the Italian market system that fails to accommodate Salah as a highly skilled migrant and turns him instead into either a low-wage worker or a penniless wanderer at the margin of society struggling to secure basic means of subsistence. Interestingly, despite such difficulties, dire economic conditions do not prevent him from purchasing gifts before visiting his father in Kairouan as a way to signal a "modest economic prosperity" (126)³³³ rather than intellectual growth and refinement. All in all, he buys "a blue tie, a dark leather wallet, two stripped shirts" (126).³³⁴

Furthermore, the final chapter can be read as a further variation on the Grand Tour in that the conversation is presented as a "disordered and confused story" (124)³³⁵ that does not really seem to arouse the father's interest and curiosity. The irony of Salah's failure to trigger

³³³ "Discreta agiatezza economica" (126).

³³⁴ "[U]na cravatta blu, un portafogli di cuoio scuro, due camicie a righe" (126).

³³⁵ "[R]acconto disordinato e confuso" (124).

his father's interest lies in the contrast between the length of the "many hours" (123)³³⁶ conversation and the mutism of the father, which can be read as an indicator of Italy's loss of attractiveness. However, in parodying the return of the prodigal son, the final scene carries aspects of self-deprecation. In blaming his own story-telling skills Salah takes full responsibility for his father's lack of interest; and this stance can also be read as an indirect critique of the visit to Italy that does not carry the promise of intellectual development for the migrant.

Thus, in reason of the parodic echoes that can be found in the text *Immigrato* introduces a new perspective on travel writing in the Italian context, and through critical distance it establishes a continuity with the literary tradition of the Grand Tour. And if it is agreed that the process of social ascension occupies a central position in the touring of Europe by wealthy aristocrats, the interplay between ascending and descending trajectories in *Immigrato* and the recurring motif of descent require further attention.

2.2.4 Salah's descent

As he travels across disparate geographies and social structures, Salah undergoes a lengthy transformation. Over the course of several months his trajectory towards achieving legal status in Italy is characterized by uncertain wanderings and psychological distress; and from this standpoint, the episode in Mazara del Vallo, his first stop on Italian soil, is particularly relevant as Salah becomes aware of his increased vulnerability and social downgrading: "suddenly, I discover that I am in every way a North African immigrant, without a job, without a house, an illegal immigrant. A twenty-seven-year-old individual who came here looking for something vague: the myth of the West, of well-being, of a kind of freedom. All words that are already starting to fall apart in my head" (25-26).³³⁷ As Salah shifts to a lower status and enters into an illegal one, the adjustment to a new environment raises questions about self-identity, and in igniting a negative self-perception the arrival in Sicily conveys a sense of falling for the forced underground Tunisian migrant.

The dehumanizing effects of migration are introduced early in the journey, as symptoms indicating identity disorder, and single out Salah's venturing deeper into an

³³⁶ "[M]olte ore" (123).

³³⁷ "[D]i colpo, mi scopro a essere in tutto e per tutto un immigrato nordafricano, senza lavoro, senza casa, clandestino. Un individuo di ventisette anni venuto qui alla ricerca di qualcosa di confuso: il mito dell'Occidente, del benessere, di una specie di libertà. Tutte parole che già stanno cominciando a sfaldarsi nella mia testa" (25-26).

inhospitable underworld. The first two stops on Salah's descent lead him to the Sicilian and Neapolitan underworlds, and the concerns he expresses in Naples over mental and physical health issues point to the difficult adjustment process for the illegal immigrant in a new environment: "I threw up for a long time, with relief. I seemed to liberate myself from an infinity of bad food and bad thoughts. In the end, with lucidity, I thought that climbing up Italy corresponded in my personal geography to a descent into my own south" (42).³³⁸ For Salah, the upward geographical discovery of Italy coincides ironically with a downward exploration of Salah's sense of being, suggesting that the journey up is also an inward journey, and that outward and inward explorations are intimately linked.

In bringing together food poisoning and mental pollution, Salah uncovers the all-encompassing toxicity of the descent into a dangerous environment. Yet, the presence of multiple diasporas complicates the geography of *Immigrato*'s underworld, for instance in the scene in which Salah reaches the capital city:

Rome has an alternative map to the one you find attached to the Yellow Pages. For example, anyone wants to know where the Libyans meet up? Simple: at a bar in via Gioberti, a bar that sits on a corner. The Senegalese instead prefer to meet in the gardens of Colle Oppio, and the Filipinos in piazza Risorgimento, near the tram stop. For all Arabs, a point of reference is represented by the Islamic Centre in piazza Ungheria, very busy especially on Fridays. Whereas we, Tunisians move between the bars of Piazza Esedra and those of Piazza dei Cinquecento. This one is an authentic second level topography, a sort of underground circuit in broad daylight, with its rules, and its well-defined boundaries. In the sense that, if you are North African, and you start hanging out in a place designated for the Nigerians, you are also running some risk: racism, unfortunately, has many faces. (57-58)³³⁹

³³⁸ "Ho vomitato a lungo, con sollievo. Mi pareva di liberarmi di un'infinità di cibo cattivo e di cattivi pensieri. Alla fine, con lucidità, ho pensato che risalire l'Italia corrispondeva, nella mia personale geografia, a una discesa nel Sud di me stesso" (42).

³³⁹ "Roma ha una mappa alternativa a quella che trovi allegata alle Pagine gialle. Per esempio, uno vuol sapere dove si incontrano i libici? Semplice: in un bar di via Gioberti, un bar che fa angolo. I senegalesi invece preferiscono incontrarsi nei giardini di Colle Oppio, e i filippini in piazza Risorgimento, vicino alla fermata del tram. Per tutti gli arabi, un richiamo è rappresentato dal Centro islamico di piazza Ungheria, popolarissimo soprattutto al venerdì. Mentre noi tunisini ci muoviamo fra i bar di piazza Esedra e quelli di piazza dei Cinquecento. È un'autentica topografia di secondo livello, questa, una sorta di circuito underground alla luce del sole, con le sue regole, e i suoi confini ben definiti. Nel senso che, se sei nordafricano e ti metti a bazzicare un luogo deputato ai nigeriani, corri anche qualche pericolo: il razzismo, purtroppo, ha molte facce" (57-58).

Therefore, the Roman underworld is populated by diverse diasporic groups and if the spaces for social interaction are established along ethnic lines, the dynamics of inter-ethnic contact are influenced by practices of exclusion, suggesting that the general atmosphere is charged with rivalry and hostility.

Bars³⁴⁰ are portrayed as enclaves that carve out spaces and produce boundaries, suggesting that, in spite of their spatial proximity, the diasporic groups living in Rome do maintain social distances and, furthermore, the café space provides little opportunities to encounter local populations. Most of the bars Salah steps into assume the role of social spaces of interaction and mutual support as is the case in Tunisia. Yet, the episode of the first visit to a bar in Italy is marked by severe hostility, for that matter the bar in Via Bagno is the site of a rather unpleasant encounter with Jabari, a Moroccan migrant fallen into criminality. And if Jabari is depicted as a bitter and grotesque bird of ill omen of the perilous journey ahead, those who frequent the café spaces do not all have a negative attitude towards Salah. In fact, in the Via Mancini bar Murad shares his migration story and helps Salah find a temporary accommodation at the hotel Maddalena (41). In the Villa Literno bar Hammadi tells Salah of the extremely strained employment situation of migrants in search of farm work (45). In Rome, at the bar Nuri frequented by North Africans Salah learns of alternative sleeping spots, and he meets Massimiliano at the Caffè della Pace who provides him with employment (60) and introduces him to Emilio (67) who will give him some work too. In Florence, Salah learns from Naser and Ahmed that the Cigno Bianco bar in Viale Strozzi is the centre of a drug dealing network run by Tunisians (76). And even if all these migrants do not exactly fit the portrait of interpreting angels³⁴¹ they still serve as guides through the meanders of Italy's gloomy underworld. Thus, because it diverges from the way in which the drinking places are presented in the text, the episode of the Paduan bar leaves open several possible interpretations:

³⁴⁰ In *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behaviour* Sherri Cavan identifies four general types of public drinking places: "The first is the official or manifest use: the public drinking place as a setting to obtain a drink as a setting that may be used as a kind of social convenience. The second is that of amusement; public drinking places may be used primarily as a setting for entertainment. They may also be used though they were private places similar to one's residence or club, and in this way one can speak of the "home territory" use of the setting. Finally, public drinking places may be used for the exchange of various types of commodities, as if they were a kind of marketplace" (15).

³⁴¹ On the role of the *angelus interpres*, see Jan N. Bremmer "Descents to Hell and Ascents to Heaven in Apocalyptic Literature"

In the bar run by the Sicilian and his daughter, people gather as if in front of a fireplace. We represent a kind of improbable family that for a few hours, in the evening, regains its unity. Everyone is telling their story, but in Italian, as if to practice between us too. That's when, at times, I laugh as I give improvised lessons of diction, while I hear stories of a Moroccan who has been living here for a long time and trades in false residence permits ... Apparently, at the police station they know about the traffic, but the officers turn blind eyes. (92)³⁴²

In Padua the bar becomes a temporary shelter where emotional ties are rearranged, and the sharing of information is facilitated by an unusual sense of proximity and comfort. Coincidentally, the temporary refuge offered to Salah is provided by Sicilians who also share a common history of migration to Northern Italy; in other words, the gatherings at the Paduan bar allow for a temporary interruption of the descent, and outweighs the darkness of the journey by providing the conditions for relieving laughter and amusement. The bar becomes a school classroom where hierarchies are reordered and the laughter that accompanies Salah's carnivalesque transformation into a teacher that corrects the migrants' pronunciation adds to the incongruity of the scene. The vitality with which Salah carries his improvised teaching service contrasts with the inertia of official authorities in enforcing migration policies³⁴³, and from this standpoint, Salah's laughter can be read as response to the bureaucratic incompetence of the government administration. As such, the irony of the grotesque Italian class delivered in the Paduan bar lies in the absurdities that it reveals. And if Salah's laughter from the underworld alludes to a sense of community, proximity and closeness in a homely atmosphere, it also serves a satirical purpose in playfully teasing law enforcement officials. Yet, because of his failed attempts to find work Salah's degree of integration into Italian society remains poor and the way he perceives himself is therefore affected.

³⁴² “Nel bar del siciliano e di sua figlia, ci si raccoglie come davanti a un camino. Rappresentiamo una specie di improbabile famiglia che per qualche ora, la sera, ritrova la propria unità. Tutti raccontano le loro storie, ma in italiano, come a esercitarsi anche fra noi. A me, certe volte, viene da ridere a dare improvvisate lezioni di dizione, mentre sento raccontare di un marocchino che vive qui da parecchio e che commercia in falsi permessi di soggiorno ... Pare che, in questura, si sappia del traffico, ma gli agenti chiudono tutti e due gli occhi” (92).

³⁴³ In “Strangers in Paradise: Foreigners and Shadows in Italian Literature” Graziella Parati writes: “In the new multicultural Italy, the minister Claudio Martelli proposed the creation of immigration laws that became later known as *sanatoria*. Martelli's proposal was opposed by two right-wing parties: the Partito Repubblicano and the Movimento Sociale Italiano. However, it was later approved. *Sanatoria* is a revealing term; it implies the need to *sanare* (to heal), to restore the health of the diseased body of a country exposed to foreign entities that become the illness to be fought. This terminology borrowed from the rhetoric of illness and adopted in the discussion on the *emergenza immigrazione* (immigration emergency) is based on the assumption that becoming a country of immigration involves the contamination of its (almost) monocultural past and present. The *sanatoria* is intended as a remedy that can neutralize the contamination. It is a word that lends itself to a wide range of racist discourses on ‘foreigners,’ the *extracomunitari*, and the ‘other’” (170).

In the capital city, the experience of perceived non-acceptance leads Salah to reconsider his self-image: “I cannot find a smidgen of work. I’m dragging myself through the streets like a *zombie*” (58).³⁴⁴ It is worth noting that Salah’s feeling of disorientation is a consequence of the violence with which the tight local job market keeps out newcomers and outsiders. The challenges of resettlement have a marked impact on Salah’s self-identification, the introspection is brief and the life-changing potential of migration is a degrading mechanism that leads to a monstrous metamorphosis. If Salah occupies a position of marginality and experiences loneliness and despair in the multi-ethnic capital city, the period of prolonged unemployment plays a significant role in his dehumanizing journey.

The downward direction in which he appears to be heading coincides in Florence with a sense of aimlessness and reinforces the pointlessness of his voyage: “I am basically getting used to wandering around the city without a goal ... I slide down a road that leads nowhere, but it doesn’t matter. All that matters is to keep going, to open the eyes in the morning and close them late at night” (74).³⁴⁵ From a Roman zombie, Salah turns into another hybrid life form whose body parts react mechanically, almost independently, and his transformation into an automata illustrates the objectification process to which he is subjected. However, it can be argued that the metamorphosis into a senseless machine can have a certain relevance as a means of distancing from his absurd condition.

His downward and aimless strolling continues when he later reaches Turin: “Sometimes I think that this strange wandering of mine through Italy has no other meaning than going, going and not looking back ... The exhaustion from this dragging through the streets has become my second nature” (108).³⁴⁶ Having lost track of the reasons behind his constant mobility, Salah acknowledges the awkwardness of his condition, and the fact remains that Turin is an additional temporary halt as he proceeds downwards on his journey. In his understanding, the descent requires that backward glance be banned, and such compositional element can be read as a reworking of Orpheus’ descent into the underworld. In fact, the echo of Hades’ command can be read as a parodic allusion to Orpheus’ legendary love for Eurydice. The parodic appropriation is particularly striking given that Salah arrives

³⁴⁴ “Non riesco a trovare uno straccio di occupazione. Mi trascino per le strade come uno *zombie*” (58).

³⁴⁵ “Mi abituo praticamente subito a vagare per la città senza una meta ... Scivolo lungo una strada che non conduce da nessuna parte, ma non importa. Importa solo andare avanti, aprire gli occhi la mattina e chiuderli a notte inoltrata” (74).

³⁴⁶ “Certe volte penso che questo mio strano peregrinare per l’Italia non abbia altro senso che andare, andare e non guardarsi indietro ... La stanchezza di questo trascinarsi per le strade è divenuta la mia seconda natura” (108).

in Turin right after a romantic break-up with Giovanna. While the descents undertaken by Orpheus and Salah are similar in the amount of effort they require, Giovanna's attitude towards Salah is diametrically contrary to Eurydice's. In Padua, Salah's passion for Giovanna is unrequited. After she tells him that her boyfriend will be visiting shortly, she tells of her imminent return to Calabria with her parents. Heartbroken, Salah decides to leave the Paduan underworld and reaches Turin, then Milan.

It is interesting to note that his epic journey from South to North is marked by innumerable meanderings (74) in the surroundings of train stations, which serve as privileged meeting points for illegal immigrants, as is the case in Milan: "I take a short stroll around the Central station. It's the usual landscape: next to an escalator, groups of North Africans lying down or sitting on the ground. They look like a caravan of nomads gathered around a palm tree: there they are, at rest, waiting to head again towards nowhere" (111).³⁴⁷ The moving stairway makes reference again to the interplay between the downhill and uphill directions of the North African migrants' itinerary. Salah's attention is caught by the contrast between the fixity of the migrants and the centrality of the electric staircase, but the ironic comparison made by Salah can be interpreted as a critique against modern conditions of migration. And in bringing up the absence of direction, Salah indicates the absurdity of contemporary North African migration to Italy, a sort of limbo where migrants live in constant fear of deportation³⁴⁸ (27, 43, 46) and police brutality (73, 121).

From this perspective, the various inhospitable spaces occupied albeit temporarily by migrants across the Italian peninsula converge in depicting Italy's underworld as a hellscape. In this regard, dirt and smell play a significant part in the characterization of the various locations visited by Salah throughout the Italian territory. The episode in which Salah finds employment in a Sicilian pigsty³⁴⁹ illustrates his perseverance and determination but also the scarcity of work opportunities; yet, in ironizing his filthy working conditions, Salah's self-

³⁴⁷ "Faccio un breve giro per la stazione Centrale. È il solito paesaggio: accanto a una scala mobile, gruppi di nordafricani sdraiati o seduti in terra. Sembrano una carovana di nomadi raccolti intorno a un palmizio: se ne stanno lì, in sosta, in attesa di ripartire per nessun luogo" (111).

³⁴⁸ In "The Legal Side of Culture" Graziella Parati writes: "In immigrants' autobiographies, the Martelli's *permessi di soggiorno* [residence permits] signify the turning point in their identity construction as alien residents in Italy who obtain a partial right to visibility. These early autobiographies describe the use of "fogli di via," annulled by the Martelli law. "Fogli di via" were deportation orders that the police used to hand immigrants, and which contained their immediate expulsion from Italy" (299).

³⁴⁹ It can be argued that the cleaning of the Sicilian pigsty bears parodic resemblance to the cleaning of King Augeas' filthy stables by Hercules.

disparagement is attenuated by the fact that he takes advantage³⁵⁰ of the situation: “I want to throw up. I’m thinking: ‘I am a Muslim. I cannot eat pork meat, but I can clean its shit’” (33).³⁵¹ However, Salah’s travel conditions have negative repercussions on his personal hygiene and reveal much about the difficult access to sanitation, as is the case in Turin where the impact of filthiness on self-esteem is made explicit: “I am dressed badly. I am dirty. I am ashamed” (102).³⁵² Furthermore, the attention Salah pays to dirt is also due to his repeated close proximity to wastes as happens in Milan with “improvised shacks and caravans and piles of garbage” (113),³⁵³ and “piled up trash” (114).³⁵⁴

As Salah experiences frequent bouts of nausea (25, 34, 84) the main feature of the olfactory landscape of Italian cities is the foul smell: the Mediterranean sea in Mazara del Vallo is singled out as sending “a strange smell of rot” (20),³⁵⁵ and at the food kiosk in Rome “there’s an unbearable smell” (59).³⁵⁶ And if he finds delight in smelling “the scent of floor detergents” (92)³⁵⁷ in the houses he visits as a door-to-door salesperson in Padua, the “smell of medicine” (104)³⁵⁸ at the hospital in Turin illustrates the pervasive presence of stench in Salah’s descent as exposed in the Turinese episode of the homeless shelter in Via Ormea: “To take a shower in the morning, you have to line up, so it often turns out that I give up. The stench in the room is bestial. After the first day, I don’t notice it anymore. I am myself an integral part of the bad smell” (108).³⁵⁹ The reference to animal odours adds variety to the literary smellscape, underlines the social position of the migrants, and underscores the dehumanizing process through which migrants are gradually losing their human touch.

The episodes of the peeling and deveining of shrimps in the Sicilian port (22), and the washing of the car in Palermo by two North Africans emphasize the relevance of cleanliness in the narrative. Yet, in addition to the lack of access to sanitation facilities (30), the narrative

³⁵⁰ Salah uses the assailing function of irony in commenting on Ridha’s work in Palermo as “schiavitù part-time” (32) [part-time slavery], and self-disparagement in calling himself a “domatore di leoni” (114) [lion-tamer] while working as a street-vendor in Milan.

³⁵¹ “Mi viene da vomitare. Penso: « Sono un musulmano. Non posso mangiare la carne del maiale, ma posso pulire la sua merda »” (33).

³⁵² “Sono vestito male. Sono sporco. Mi vergogno” (102).

³⁵³ “[I]mprovvisate baracche e roulotte e cumuli di rifiuti” (113).

³⁵⁴ “[I]mmondizia ammuchiata” (114).

³⁵⁵ “[U]no strano odore di marcio” (20).

³⁵⁶ “[C]’è un puzzo intollerabile” (59).

³⁵⁷ “[I] profumo dei detersivi per i pavimenti” (92).

³⁵⁸ “[O]dore dei farmaci” (104).

³⁵⁹ “Per fare la doccia, al mattino, ci si deve mettere in fila, così spesso finisco col rinunciarci. Il puzzo, nella stanza, è bestiale. Dopo il primo giorno, non ci faccio più caso. Io stesso sono parte integrante del cattivo odore” (108).

underscores the multifunctional properties of the toilets and showers for Salah and other migrants. Naser follows a drug dealer into the toilets of a Florentine bar where he has to “stick the stuff up in the ass” (77);³⁶⁰ and bursting into the bathroom where Salah is having a shower Emilio takes that opportunity to caress him on the back (66) in an intrusive manner. Therefore, beyond the depiction of bathing and showering habits,³⁶¹ *Immigrato*’s focus on what happens behind the bathroom door informs about the treatment of migrants’ bodies and their precarious state of privacy and personal space.

It is also worth noting that during his descent into marginality Salah observes the state of misery in which migrants live, and the significant role played by alcohol consumption. Salah is the powerless witness of the alcohol propelled conversation between Majid and Mohamed in Mazara del Vallo (24) that turns into a cockfight in which the two inebriated wrestling friends engage in a parodic variation on gladiator fights.³⁶² In Milan he also bumps into inebriated Majid (118) who, in spite of having found employment at a local flower shop, does not find entertainment after completing his shift other than binge-drinking (118). The lightness with which scenes of alcohol consumption are depicted in Tunisia contrasts sharply with the pathetic episodes of public drinking, misconduct and intoxication in Italy.

Moreover, because of Salah’s status as an illegal immigrant, a particular focus is put on the survival strategies deployed by migrants, and drug smuggling activities³⁶³ provide several migrants with sources of income as is the case with Samir (43), Moncef (73), Naser and Ahmed (74), Majid (104), Rachid (113) and Murad (121). A shift also occurs such that Salah begins to experiment with heroin in Florence (78), yet if the Italian underworld is ravaged by drug trafficking, drug abuse is also widespread well beyond the boundaries of North African migrant communities (76, 96, 99).

Sex work also provides a source of income for several characters, and prostitution is at the centre of many conversations. In Tunis, the “Café de Paris” and the bar of the “hotel

³⁶⁰ “[I]nfilare la roba nel culo” (77).

³⁶¹ In *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience. The Social Organization of Normality* Elizabeth Shove writes: “bathing is usefully understood as an expression and realization of symbolic and structural concerns regarding the positioning of self in society, the conceptualization of body and nature, and the relation between pleasure and duty” (94).

³⁶² The reason for bringing the reference to the gladiator stems from my interpretation of “Horror on the Grand Tour” in which Chloe Chard writes: “The traveller’s visit to the Coliseum, for example, is regularly adopted as an occasion for reflection on the gladiatorial combats and other public spectacles held there by the ancient Romans” (4).

³⁶³ There are only a few Arabic terms in the text, yet, in using the disparaging Arabic term “kherba” to indicate the house where the heroin is cut, Salah describes the narcotics smuggling point as a ruin.

Capitol” are described as meeting places for “Western homosexuals” (12)³⁶⁴ and Tunisian youth, and if Salah insists on the easy way through which Tunisians can earn “ten dinars” (12)³⁶⁵ by simply taking a “little stroll together” (12),³⁶⁶ references to male sex work remain vague while remarks concerning same sex relationship are tainted with a sense of mockery. It is in Tunis that Salah learns of a Tunisian who migrated to Italy, and settled down with a generous priest who bought him a pizzeria after a short career in drug dealing: “many guys were saying, before going to Italy: “If everything goes wrong, I’ll get a priest”, and everyone was laughing. But I think they were thinking about it seriously” (13).³⁶⁷ The incongruity of the clergyman’s presence produces a comic effect and one of the features of the laughter is that it binds the Tunisians together in their attitude of mockery towards the priest’s benevolence, and constructs a myth around the generosity and naivety of clergymen and Italian gay men (31).

Yet, same sex relationships are presented in a much less humorous light by Salah after he reaches Italy. On the one hand, several Tunisian men are described as objects of attraction and sexual desire, and on the other many Italian men are depicted as buyers of sexual services. In Rome, Samir recounts his dealings with a “faggot” (55),³⁶⁸ and his turn to drug trafficking after feeling like a “puppet” (55)³⁶⁹ in the eyes of the “voyeur” (55).³⁷⁰ Therefore, in Samir’s eyes involvement in illegal drug operations is seen as a less degrading activity than selling sex. Besides, Wahid, a graduate student from Morocco, is offered translation work by a subcontractor of the Italian Senate under the condition that he have sex with men, pose “for a photo op” (62)³⁷¹ and be taped in “some erotic home movies” (62).³⁷² While Wahid’s anecdote is tainted with “sadness” (62),³⁷³ Kamel’s involvement in Piedmontese prostitution is an “inventory of horrors, and misery” (105).³⁷⁴

In contrast with the fact that same-sex male relationships between Italians and Maghrebis are often staged against the background of prostitution, the episode of Salah’s

³⁶⁴ “[O]mosessuali occidentali” (12).

³⁶⁵ “[D]ieci dinari” (12).

³⁶⁶ “[G]iretto insieme” (12).

³⁶⁷ “[M]olti ragazzi dicevano, prima di partire per l’Italia: “Se tutto va male, mi faccio un prete”, e tutti ridevano. Ma, io credo, ci pensavano davvero” (13).

³⁶⁸ “[F]rocio” (55).

³⁶⁹ “[P]upazzo” (55).

³⁷⁰ “[G]uardone” (55).

³⁷¹ “[P]er delle foto” (62).

³⁷² “[Q]ualche filmino erotico” (62).

³⁷³ “[T]ristezza” (62).

³⁷⁴ “[R]epertorio di orrore, di miseria”(105).

sexual experiment in sadomasochistic practices with Emilio is not tied to an explicit financial incentive. Yet, the slapping, insulting and spitting at the face of his employer during the moment of intimacy gives Salah a temporary superiority over Emilio (67). However, Salah is still following the orders of Emilio during the homosexual episode and the consensual act also leads the Tunisian migrant to wander about his “second identity” (68).³⁷⁵

Except in Emilio’s case, when an Italian man engages in a same-sex sexual activity with a Maghrebi it is always within the context of prostitution (36). On the other hand, at times male same-sex sexuality is brushed with a touch of levity as is the case when Salah thinks about the circumstances that led to Taufik’s failure to satisfy Piero’s urine-drinking fetish: “It’s one of those stories you don’t know whether they are comical or tragic. It makes me laugh a bit” (107).³⁷⁶

Maghrebi women are also involved in sex work, and Salah recognizes in Rome a prostitute from Tunis who is now “only dressed a bit better” (54).³⁷⁷ In Napoli, Salah bumps into 25-year-old Tunisian-born Salwa and her Italian boyfriend; he’s a drug addict and HIV positive, and her work as a prostitute provides money for his drugs. She also has a son “who lives at Caritas with relatives” (44).³⁷⁸ Near the Fortress of Saint John the Baptist in Florence Salah comes across an Italian transvestite and three North African prostitutes standing by a petrol station. During that scene, Hamida leaves the group just to sit on a bench nearby with a middle-aged Italian man, and Salah’s desire crashes against the price charged by Saida and Sihem’s refusal to have sex with Arabs. Yet, the manner in which Maghrebi female prostitution is presented is not as sinister as the male one: in fact, Salwa is “quite happy,”³⁷⁹ while Saida “lives in a nice hotel in the centre,”³⁸⁰ and for Sihem “living like this doesn’t matter for now” (81).³⁸¹ However, beyond their apparent well-being, the Maghrebi prostitutes are objects of derision as they gather at the gas station in a parodic echo of the oriental harem, and struggle to earn a living out of their sexual services. And if they appear less tormented than their male counterparts, Saida’s family breakdown and Sihem’s past experience of domestic violence need to be taken into consideration as they contribute to the darkening of the Italian underworld visited by Salah.

³⁷⁵ “[S]econda identità” (68).

³⁷⁶ “La storia è una di quelle che non sai se siano comiche o tragiche. Un po’, mi viene da ridere” (107).

³⁷⁷ “[S]olo vestita un po’ meglio” (54).

³⁷⁸ “[C]he vive alla Caritas con dei parenti”(44).

³⁷⁹ “[A]bbastanza felice” (44).

³⁸⁰ “[A]bita in un bell’albergo del centro” (81).

³⁸¹ “[V]ivere così non le dispiace, per ora” (81).

All in all, from Salah's perspective, migration is a double descent into hell: a symbolic one into the self, and a literal one into the physical underworld. The downward movement combines moments of introspection and the exploration of an inhospitable environment. Despite the various instances of levity found in the lower spheres of Italian society, Salah's sense of dislocation deepens as he climbs towards the North, and most indicative of the pervading sense of isolation, migrants do not exert any influence over the Martelli law. They are not involved in the way they are governed; their consent is not sought, and their voices are not heard neither. If Salah's tour of the Italian underworld reveals the role played by migrants in the illegal economy of drugs and prostitution, at the same time, it underscores their position outside the national civic society. In showing that migrants fail to organize themselves as a group, Salah indicates that they do not have a political voice. And because they cannot claim the status of a political class, migrants and Maghrebis in Italy constitute a subaltern group.

2.3 Methnani and Fortunato on *Immigrato*

2.3.1 Methnani's 1992 Talk in Ravenna

In a talk given in 1992 in Ravenna, Methnani recounted the reasons for leaving Tunisia in October 1987, and how he reached Italy. There he talked about the widespread "Western fever"³⁸² that was gripping his generation at home, and insisted on the fact that "this disease"³⁸³ spread to a group of "fellow Muslims"³⁸⁴ who were simultaneously "Western in their thinking" (par. 1),³⁸⁵ thereby pointing to the ambivalent space occupied by the Tunisian youth. After calling the Western fever an "illness,"³⁸⁶ a "Western influenza,"³⁸⁷ Methnani chooses the expression "psychological degradation of the soul" (par. 1)³⁸⁸ to describe his arrival in Italy. Methnani does not believe that the words "to immigrate"³⁸⁹ and "exile"³⁹⁰ can be applied to his story, and he turns to an Arabic term as he believes that it provides a better understanding of his condition of migrant in Italy; he asserts that "Ghurba" is "a situation of absence and separation from the land of origin" (par. 3).³⁹¹ Insisting on the

³⁸² "[F]ebbre dell'occidente" (par. 1).

³⁸³ "[Q]uesto male" (par. 1).

³⁸⁴ "[M]usulmani di appartenenza" (par. 1).

³⁸⁵ "[O]ccidentali di pensiero" (par. 1).

³⁸⁶ "[M]alattia" (par. 1).

³⁸⁷ "[I]nfluenza occidentale" (par. 1).

³⁸⁸ "[D]egrado psicologico dell'anima" (par. 1).

³⁸⁹ "[I]mmigrare" (par. 3).

³⁹⁰ "[E]silio" (par. 3).

³⁹¹ "[U]na situazione di assenza e di separazione dalla terra di origine" (par. 3).

psychological damages produced by the “bitter separation”³⁹² associated with the process of migration, Methnani compares Ghurba to a “shroud of silence” (par. 6).³⁹³ Yet, Methnani brings into the conversation the names of several Maghrebi intellectuals (Chraïbi, Khaireddine, Khatibi, Serhane, Ben Jelloun, Djebbar, Choukri, Boudjedra) and underscores their contribution to a “downright criticism of these intolerable situations of physical and psychological degradation” (par. 7).³⁹⁴

During the talk, Methnani puts *Immigrato* in the category of “journals-diaries,”³⁹⁵ along with *Io venditore di elefanti*, *Chiamatemi Alì*, *La promessa di Hamadi*, and *Pantanella. Canto lungo la strada*, which he believes “tried in turn to speak out but remain, in the current state of things, overtaken by and unrelated to a future literature of exile in Italian of a certain quality” (par. 9).³⁹⁶ Therefore, Methnani acknowledges the lack of literary value in the first texts written by African writers in Italian, and warns against the confusion between this literature and “what could be in the future a young literature produced by immigrants living in Italy” (par. 9).³⁹⁷

In his concluding remarks, Methnani draws a parallel between the contemporary condition of migrants in Italy and Dante Alighieri’s sense of exile from Florence as expressed in *Paradiso*: “You will experience how salty tastes the bread of another, and what a hard path it is to descend and mount by another’s stairs.”³⁹⁸ In fact, *Immigrato* depicts an experience of migration that is tinged with bitterness and in which homesickness and humiliation occupy a key role along the recurring motifs of descent and ascent in Salah’ journey through Italy. Methnani’s direct reference to the Italian poet is of particular interest, not only because it reminds the audience that “The Supreme Poet” was persecuted and died in exile, but also because of the contrast it displays between medieval Ravenna’s hospitality towards foreigners, and Italy’s contemporary hostility towards migrants.

³⁹² “[A]mara separazione” (par. 6).

³⁹³ “[S]udario di silenzio” (par. 6).

³⁹⁴ “[D]enuncia vera e propria di queste insostenibili situazioni, di degrado fisico e psicologico” (par. 7).

³⁹⁵ “[G]iornali-diari” (par. 9).

³⁹⁶ “[H]anno cercato a loro volta di prendere la parola ma che rimangono, nello stato attuale delle cose, superati ed estranei ad un’aspirante futura letteratura dell’esilio di lingua italiana di una certa qualità” (par. 9).

³⁹⁷ “[Q]uella che potrebbe essere nell’avvenire una giovane letteratura prodotta da immigrati che vivono in Italia” (par. 9).

³⁹⁸ “Tu proverai sì come sa di sale lo pane altrui e come è duro calle lo scendere e il salir per l’altrui scale” (XVII, 58).

2.3.2 Methnani's 1999 Interview

In a 1999 interview, Benedetta Malavolti asked Methnani about his family, education, language skills and migration to Italy. Ten years after *Immigrato*, Salah Methnani works as a journalist and when he is asked about his main interest he answers: “immigration, seen as a somewhat painful experience, an experience full of suffering, of loneliness” (par. 8).³⁹⁹ Therefore, Methnani hints at the distress associated with the process of migration and the general issue of alienation that is experienced by migrants. He also criticizes “above all, the inertia, the indifference of the institutions,”⁴⁰⁰ and he expresses his interest in “how one could transform all these worries, all these concerns”⁴⁰¹ into what he calls “an artistic product,”⁴⁰² giving the example of “a book, a song, a poem, a documentary, a film” (par. 8).⁴⁰³

While Methnani uses the term “labour” (par. 8)⁴⁰⁴ to describe the artistic process, he rejects the term “integration”⁴⁰⁵ and prefers the term “togetherness” (par. 9).⁴⁰⁶ He is also critical towards the “caricatural way”⁴⁰⁷ in which the “Arabo-Muslim world and Tunisia” (par. 10)⁴⁰⁸ are portrayed by the mass media. He mentions that he is working on a novel titled “Vomito” and talks about Italy’s tendency to “ignore anything that is produced by a foreigner, whoever it is” (par. 15).⁴⁰⁹ Among his sources of inspiration, he mentions Paul Bowles, Elio Vittorini, Italo Svevo and Luigi Pirandello, along with Tayeb Salih, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Tawfiq al-Hakim. On migrant literature in Italian he believes that “there will be a real literature of migration, in thirty years, when the children of immigrants and the children born of intermarriages will be adults” (par. 21).⁴¹⁰ And unsurprisingly, he discourages his fellow-countrymen from migrating to Italy: “For those few who perhaps keep dreaming of a rich West, I say: No, look, stay where you are, you are better off” (par. 22).⁴¹¹ Furthermore, Methnani elaborates on the notion of belonging by insisting on the role played by “a society

³⁹⁹ “[L]’immigrazione, visto come un vissuto un po’ penoso, vissuto pieno di sofferenze, di solitudine” (par. 8).

⁴⁰⁰ “[L]’inerzia, l’indifferenza soprattutto delle istituzioni” (par. 8).

⁴⁰¹ “[C]ome uno potrebbe trasformare tutte queste preoccupazioni, questi pensieri” (par. 8).

⁴⁰² “[U]n prodotto artistico” (par. 8).

⁴⁰³ “[U]n libro, una canzone, una poesia, un documentario, un film” (par. 8).

⁴⁰⁴ “[T]ravaglio” (par. 8).

⁴⁰⁵ “[I]ntegrazione” (par. 9).

⁴⁰⁶ “[C]onvivenza” (par. 9).

⁴⁰⁷ “[M]odo caricaturale” (par. 10).

⁴⁰⁸ “[M]ondo arabo-islamico e della Tunisia” (par. 10).

⁴⁰⁹ “[I]gnorare tutto ciò che viene prodotto dallo straniero, chiunque esso sia” (par. 15).

⁴¹⁰ “[C]i sarà una vera letteratura della migrazione, tra 30 anni, quando i figli degli immigrati e i figli nati da matrimoni misti saranno adulti” (par. 21).

⁴¹¹ “Per quei pochi che magari continuano a sognare un Occidente ricco, io dico: No, guardate, rimanete là dove siete che state meglio” (par. 22).

... a community ... a country ... a land ... a piece of land” (par. 26).⁴¹² He downplays the role of Tunisia by adding: “it could have been any other place, but without that I do not exist. I can’t be one who does not belong to anything, I would be invisible” (par. 26).⁴¹³

On the main characteristics of the Maghrebi intellectuals, he asserts that they share a colonial experience and that the figure of the woman occupies a singular position in Maghrebi literary production: “when one thinks of Choukri ... Ben Jelloun ... Abdellak Serhane ... Boudjedra ... there is always the figure of the woman, sex, prostitutes” (par. 28).⁴¹⁴ From that perspective, the Maghrebi intellectual “speaks willingly about taboos”⁴¹⁵ and “brings out a very corrupt society, twisted” (par. 28).⁴¹⁶ Unclear as to whether he will establish himself in Italy or return to Tunisia in the future, Methnani explains that he has built a symbolic “bridge”⁴¹⁷ between Rome and Tunis, on which he travels “back and forth”⁴¹⁸ in an attempt to “support the exchange of intellectuals on one side and on the other” (par. 33).⁴¹⁹ And if he calls the Italian political system “a farce” (par. 34),⁴²⁰ he concludes the interview with a few comments on the role of the European Union in the “redistribution of wealth,”⁴²¹ and insists on the need for “the laws of the various countries”⁴²² to be “more or less compatible” (par. 35)⁴²³ as to allow foreign qualifications to be recognized in Italy.

2.3.3 Fortunato’s 2006 Introduction

In the second edition of *Immigrato*, published in 2006, Mario Fortunato writes an introduction in which the collaborative process is explained; yet, Salah Methnani does not appear to have contributed to this introduction. According to Fortunato, the creative process of the original text consisted in two phases and in the first one: “we met almost every evening at my house, in Via Collalto Sabino, and we chatted freely. He talked, I asked questions.

⁴¹² “[S]toria ... vissuto ... ricordi ... infanzia” (“history ... experience ... memories ... childhood”) and “una società ... un paese ... una terra ... un pezzo di terra” (par. 26).

⁴¹³ “[P]oteva essere qualsiasi altro posto, pero senza quello io non esisto. Non posso essere uno che non appartiene a nulla, sarei invisibile” (par. 26).

⁴¹⁴ “[Q]uando si pensa a Choukri ... Ben Jelloun ... Abdellak Serhane ... Boudjedra ... c’è sempre la figura della donna, del sesso, delle puttane” (par. 28).

⁴¹⁵ “[P]arla volentieri di tabù” (par. 28).

⁴¹⁶ “[F]a emergere una società molto corrotta, contorta” (par. 28).

⁴¹⁷ “[P]onte” (par. 33).

⁴¹⁸ “[A]vanti e indietro”(par. 33).

⁴¹⁹ “[F]avorire lo scambio da una parte e dall’altra di intelletuali”(par. 33).

⁴²⁰ “[U]na farsa” (par. 34).

⁴²¹ “[D]istribuzione delle ricchezze” (par. 35).

⁴²² “[L]e leggi dei vari paesi”(par. 35).

⁴²³ “[P]iù o meno compatibili” (par. 35).

Sometimes I took notes. We almost never used the tape recorder” (v).⁴²⁴ The focus is on the frequency of Fortunato and Methnani’s exchange of information and beyond the rather informal nature of their conversations, the encounters are structured around the curiosity of Fortunato who leads the discussions.

For Fortunato the story told by Methnani had “primarily a novelistic, narrative value” (v)⁴²⁵ and on the story’s rapport with reality he adds: “For me, it was a novel whose content had really occurred. For that reason, I wanted to know the background, the particulars, every single detail” (vi).⁴²⁶ However, if the concern with accuracy plays a prominent part in Fortunato’s work, he also talks about the moments of distraction during the collaborative enterprise: “But since we were also of the same age, many times we ended up chatting about the events of the day, or our sentimental adventures, and we were laughing and joking” (vi).⁴²⁷ The scarcity of instances of levity in *Immigrato* stands in sharp contrast to the frequency with which laughter interrupts the collaborative process and diverts Methnani and Fortunato from their literary project. However, Fortunato does not elaborate further on the role of laughter and comic relief in the collaborative process—and in their friendship.

The second phase of the collaboration begins after “two three months of daily encounters with Salah” (vi),⁴²⁸ when Mario Fortunato leaves Rome, goes to Calabria and writes the text in four weeks at his parents’ house: “I had written it as if it were entirely my own story. The climate, the landscape, the atmosphere of Calabria had enhanced the identification. With sincere, I would even say a little mediumistic bond, I was showing Salah’s story as if it were my own story” (vi).⁴²⁹ While Fortunato’s identification with Methnani raises the issue of appropriation, and refers to the question of usurpation as a strategy that silences the migrant voice and causes his disappearance, inversely, one can argue that through the intermediary of Fortunato, Methnani appropriates the dominant language and reaches a wider audience. In fact, upon returning to Rome, Fortunato gives the

⁴²⁴ “[C]i incontravamo quasi tutte le sere a casa mia, in via Collalto Sabino, e chiacchieravamo a ruota libera. Lui raccontava, io facevo domande. Qualche volta prendevo appunti. Quasi mai abbiamo usato il registratore” (v).

⁴²⁵ “[U]n valore innanzitutto romanzesco, narrativo” (v).

⁴²⁶ “Per me si trattava di un romanzo il cui contenuto aveva realmente avuto luogo. Perciò volevo conoscere l’antefatto, i particolari, ogni minimo dettaglio” (vi).

⁴²⁷ “Ma poiché eravamo anche due coetani, molte volte finivamo col chiacchierare dei fatti del giorno, o delle nostre avventure sentimentali, e si rideva e scherzava” (vi).

⁴²⁸ “[D]ue tre mesi di incontri quotidiani con Salah” (vi).

⁴²⁹ “Lo avevo scritto come si trattasse di una storia interamente mia. Il clima, il paesaggio, l’atmosfera della Calabria avevano potenziato l’immedesimazione. Con sincera, direi perfino un po’ medianica adesione, sciorinavo la storia di Salah come fosse la mia propria storia” (vi).

typescript to Salah “for him to read it and, if necessary, amend it” (vi).⁴³⁰ Methnani is in full agreement with the content and his finishing touches consist only in correcting “a few words here and there, in particular the transliteration of Arabic terms” (vi).⁴³¹

According to Fortunato, “The book came out and had good success” (vi),⁴³² and on the quality of the text he writes, “It has not exhausted its own modernity, I believe, because it uses the instruments of literature to try to explain and understand something about our world and our time without claiming to explain or understand” (vii).⁴³³ From that standpoint, Fortunato’s intentions in writing *Immigrato* gain clarity; he rejects didacticism and defends the literary validity of *Immigrato*, and he implies that in prioritizing a pedagogical position, the aesthetic value of the text would have been affected as much as the message being conveyed.

In the final remarks, Fortunato expresses a form of scepticism towards the conclusion to be drawn from Salah’s story; he writes twice, “I couldn’t tell whether Salah’s case may constitute a good example of integration” (viii-ix).⁴³⁴ Yet, the second time his stance is more nuanced, and he adds, “But I am sure that his story, after so many years and beyond its reasonably positive epilogue, constitutes a mirror to look inside our Italianness” (ix).⁴³⁵ Fortunato turns his focus from Salah Methnani, who had by then gained Italian citizenship, to the xenophobia and racism still rampant in Italy, and to the reply that literature offers to those who continue to “look down on the world of immigration” (ix).⁴³⁶ Accordingly, *Immigrato*’s peculiar function lies in the role it still plays in stimulating a necessary nation-wide re-assessment 16 years after its first publication.

2.3.4 Methnani’s 2006 Interview

In 2006, the publication of the second edition of *Immigrato* gave Raffaele Taddeo the opportunity to interview Salah Methnani who explains how he learned Italian watching TV in Tunisia and his propensity towards languages: French, Arabic, Russian and Italian. On the

⁴³⁰ “[P]erché lo leggesse e, se del caso, lo emendasse” (vi).

⁴³¹ “[P]oche parole qui e là, in particolare la trascrizione di qualche termine arabo” (vi).

⁴³² “Il libro uscì ed ebbe un buon successo” (vi).

⁴³³ “[N]on ha esaurito la propria attualità, io credo, perché usa gli strumenti della letteratura per provare a spiegare e capire qualcosa del nostro mondo e del nostro tempo, non pretendendo dunque di spiegare né di capire” (vii).

⁴³⁴ “Non saprei dire se il caso di Salah possa rappresentare un buon esempio di integrazione” (viii-ix).

⁴³⁵ “[M]a sono certo che la sua storia, a distanza di tanti anni e al di là del suo epilogo ragionevolmente positivo, rappresenta uno specchio per guardare dentro alla nostra italianità” (ix).

⁴³⁶ “[G]uardare il mondo dell’immigrazione con discendenza” (ix).

evolution of his pioneering role in migrant literature in Italy he says, “I have never defined myself as a writer even in the wake of *Immigrato*’s publication” (par. 2).⁴³⁷ He justifies his answer by explaining that he conceives of writing as “an ethical and moral commitment ... and a luxury,”⁴³⁸ and he insists on the amount of time required by the act of writing, along with “a lot of mental serenity” (par. 2).⁴³⁹ Furthermore, the Italian publishing industry is the subject of Methnani’s criticism: “The book was also one (*sic*) editorial and financial operation for the Theoria publishing house, which began at the time to take steps in the ferocious, cutthroat and at times burlesque world of Italian publishing” (par. 3).⁴⁴⁰ From the standpoint of migrant literature, his attack is even more pronounced: “the interest in the literature of migration on the part of decision makers and the book industry is non-existent. There is a sporadic interest, every now and then, sometimes the setting up competitions or the invitation of the on-call immigrant to talk about the magical concept of integration” (par. 3).⁴⁴¹ Methnani ironizes the superficiality with which the Italian publishing industry deals with the issue of migration, and mocks simultaneously the servility of the complicit migrants who take part in this masquerade, and the manipulative use of portmanteau words devoid of meaning.

He explains that he had no say in the new edition of *Immigrato* with a bigger publishing company and that the reprinting was linked to Fortunato’s transfer from the Rizzoli to the Bompiani publishing house. He concludes the conversation on a bitter note, asserting that *Immigrato* “represents in some ways the total failure of this country and of its legislators ... The issue of the (*sic*) immigration has been raised since the publication of *Immigrato* until today as if it were an emergency. And *Immigrato* is back in the bookstores as a reminder that in this country they only make promises (*sic*) and nothing else” (par. 8).⁴⁴² Sixteen years after the first publication of *Immigrato* Methnani still holds the political elite responsible for the inadequate management of migration in Italy, and mocks the immobilism

⁴³⁷ “Non mi sono mai definito uno scrittore anche all’indomani della pubblicazione di *Immigrato*” (par. 2).

⁴³⁸ “[U]n impegno etico e morale ... e un lusso” (par. 2).

⁴³⁹ “[T]anta serenità mentale” (par. 2).

⁴⁴⁰ “Il libro fu anche una (*sic*) operazione editoriale e commerciale per l’allora casa editrice Theoria che cominciava a fare i suoi primi passi nel mondo feroce, spietato e a tratti burlesco dell’editoria italiana” (par. 3).

⁴⁴¹ “[L]’interesse per la letteratura della migrazione da parte dei deciders e dell’industria del libro è inesistente. Ci si interessa in modo sporadico, di tanto in tanto, istituendo magari dei concorsi oppure invitando l’immigrato di turno per parlare del magico concetto della (*sic*) integrazione” (par. 3).

⁴⁴² “[R]appresenta per alcuni versi il totale fallimento di questo paese e dei suoi legislatori ... La questione della (*sic*) immigrazione è stata affrontata dalla pubblicazione di *Immigrato* ad oggi come se fosse una emergenza. E *Immigrato* è di nuovo nelle librerie per ricordare che in questo paese si fanno solo promessi (*sic*) e basta” (par. 8).

of the ruling classes, incapable of turning words into action; and in stressing the extended duration of Italy's political inertia with regards to the reception of migrants, Methnani's criticism does not only apply to the way in which Tunisian or Maghrebi migration is handled by governmental institutions and agencies, but it extends to the Italian political leaders who ignore their responsibility towards all kinds of migrants.

2.3.5 Methnani's 2010 Interview

On the twentieth anniversary of *Immigrato*'s publication, Raffaele Taddeo interviews Salah Methnani again. Methnani's view on the first two decades of migrant literature is that, overall, the balance is rather "modest" (par. 1),⁴⁴³ and it is a field that catches the interest of only a nucleus of experts and students. The sphere of migrant literature is victim of "editorial policies"⁴⁴⁴ that give priority to "gossip ... sensationalisms ... marketing operations to show how good Italy is towards its immigrants" (par. 1).⁴⁴⁵ However, Methnani believes in the potential of "new Italians" (par. 4)⁴⁴⁶ to fundamentally break with the editorial strategies of the mainstream publishing industry, and open new publishing houses.

When asked about his view on the reason for the abundant presence of women among migrant writers in Italy, he replies with a rhetorical question: "Why is there a tendency to divide the literary production of migration, won't it be Western habit?" (par. 9)⁴⁴⁷ Methnani rejects the notion of division and implies that the partitioning of migrant literature along gender lines harks back to a traditional Western calling into question of non-Western literary movements. He adds,

In the name of equality between men and women things always have to be seen either in the masculine or in the feminine!!! I believe that you produce a literary work, regardless of sex and gender, only when you are culturally and linguistically well-prepared. The inspiration is indispensable, but it is not enough. If a woman is good,

⁴⁴³ "[M]agro" (par. 1).

⁴⁴⁴ "[P]olitiche editoriali" (par. 1).

⁴⁴⁵ "[C]ronaca ... sensazionalismi ... operazioni di marketing ... per dimostrare quanto l'Italia sia buona nei confronti dei suoi immigrati" (par. 1).

⁴⁴⁶ "[N]uovi italiani" (par. 4).

⁴⁴⁷ "Perché si tende a frazionare la produzione letteraria della migrazione, non sarà un vizio forse occidentale?" (par. 9).

then she will be able to produce literary texts, if she is not, she should do something else. The same goes for the male gender. (par. 9)⁴⁴⁸

Therefore, precedence is given to the migrants' mastery of Italian language and culture over their creative spark, and Methnani dismisses the bias produced by a reading of migrant literature through a gendered lens.

2.3.6 Methnani's 2011 Interview

In an interview given in 2011 to Michela Meschini and Carla Carotenuto, Salah Methnani reflects on his writing experience in translating from Arabic into Italian Mohamed Choukri's collection of short stories, titled *Majnun al-ward (Madman of the Roses)*. He also elaborates on the genesis of *Immigrato*:

The investigation into illegal immigration in Italy which was entrusted to me in the second half of 1989 by the weekly "L'Espresso" gave me the opportunity to try my hand at a real writing experience. The most beautiful thing I remember of that experience is not the publication at the end of a text titled *Immigrato*, published by Theoria and co-written with Mario Fortunato, a journalist of "L'Espresso," but the "during" of that intense experience. (77)⁴⁴⁹

Of particular interest here is Methnani's choice of the term "text" to refer to the result of his collaboration with Fortunato, and in avoiding further elaboration on the genre to which *Immigrato* can be integrated, he keeps a certain distance, and this neutrality allows in turn for multiple readings possibilities. Additionally, at the time of *Immigrato*'s publication Mario Fortunato had already published *La casa del corpo* with the Shakespeare and Company publishing house in 1986 and *Luoghi naturali* with the Einaudi Publishing House in 1988, and it seems quite curious that Methnani chooses to refer to him as a journalist and not a writer. Yet, Methnani's greatest source of satisfaction lies in being able to extract well-kept and almost inaccessible information: "I could encounter very dangerous situations at times,

⁴⁴⁸ "Nel nome dell'uguaglianza tra uomo e donna bisogna sempre vedere le cose o al maschile o al femminile!!! Credo che una produzione letteraria, indipendentemente dal sesso e dal genere, si fa solo quando si ha una buona preparazione culturale e linguistica. L'estro è indispensabile ma non basta. Se una donna è brava allora potrà produrre testi letterari, se non lo è dovrebbe fare altro. Idem per il genere maschile" (par. 9).

⁴⁴⁹ "L'inchiesta sull'immigrazione clandestina in Italia che mi fu affidata nella seconda metà del 1989 dal settimanale "L'espresso" mi diede l'opportunità di cimentarmi in una vera e propria esperienza di scrittura. La cosa più bella che ricordo di quella esperienza non era la pubblicazione alla fine di un testo intitolato *Immigrato*, edito da Theoria e scritto a quattro mani con Mario Fortunato, un giornalista de "L'espresso", ma il "durante" di quella intensa esperienza" (77).

and I was able to put them on a piece of paper with clarity, successfully getting out of myself and the people met during my long pilgrimage throughout the peninsula what everyone thought quietly but that nobody wanted to entrust to others” (77).⁴⁵⁰ If Salah’s wanderings throughout Italy take the form of a long trip that resembles a spiritual journey to a holy place, it is interesting to observe that he talks about his writing experience as bringing together two different processes: on the one hand, the act of collecting migrants’ voices, and on the other, Salah’s self-discovery through writing in a generalized atmosphere of mistrust and self-imposed silence.

One thing is clear for Methnani, Italy has made little progress when it comes to the reception of displaced populations: “if Italy has been and continues to be a country unprepared to manage migratory flows from the south of the world, it is obvious that it is still far behind as regards expressing greater attention towards the culture of the other” (77).⁴⁵¹ Insisting on the state of backwardness in which Italy appears to be locked Methnani denounces the ongoing lack of interest in issues of immigration, and in deploring Italians’ widespread indifference towards diversity, he points to the dismissive attitude with which the presence but also the cultural contribution of foreigners are regarded. And this interview gives Methnani the opportunity to issue a warning about the consequences of such failure: “What so many people like me are chasing when they leave their country of origin is so precious and vital that when it is missing in the host country, the trauma becomes so great that it risks crushing us all” (79).⁴⁵² In a pedagogical manner, Methnani dwells on the collateral damage caused by a neglected management of immigration on both the host nation and the individual migrant, as to suggest that the migrants’ acculturative stress caused by the discrepancy between expectations of the post-migration life and the expectations of the Italian society is harmful to all. Methnani continues,

And I am not talking here about stealing work from Italians, raping women or building dormant cells, but of sacrosanct principles such as Democracy, Equality and

⁴⁵⁰ “Riuscivo a vivere delle situazioni molto pericolose a volte ed ero in grado di fissarle su un pezzo di carta con chiarezza, riuscendo a tirar fuori da me stesso e dalle persone incontrate durante il mio lungo pellegrinaggio per tutta la penisola quello che tutti pensavano a bassa voce ma che nessuno voleva affidare agli altri” (77).

⁴⁵¹ “[S]e l’Italia è stata e continua ad essere un paese impreparato a gestire i flussi migratori in provenienza dal sud del mondo è ovvio che è ancora molto indietro per quanto riguarda la manifestazione di maggiore attenzione nei confronti della cultura dell’altro” (77).

⁴⁵² “Quello che tanta gente come me va inseguendo quando lascia il paese di origine è talmente prezioso e vitale che quando viene a mancare nel paese di accoglienza il trauma diventa così grande che rischia di travolgerci tutti quanti” (79).

Freedom that the West has always flaunted in our face as pillars of its superior and civil being, we citizens of the South of the world. But that today in a country like Italy, which is part of the West, have become utopias that should perhaps be pursued on another planet. (79)⁴⁵³

In comparing three stereotypes attached to migrants in Italy with what he considers to be three elements of Western creed, Methnani mocks the superficial and patronizing attitude with which the Occident categorizes migrants and derides Western high self-belief that he regards as a proselytizing false religion based on a pseudo-Trinity. The scenario sketched out by Methnani puts forward the idea of a polarized world where migrants' expectations are not being met, and western host nations fail in their receiving role but the attention is also directed to the unrealistic nature of the ideological beliefs propagated by Western nations.

The corrosive dimension of his suggestion to travel to outer space points to the assailing function of Methnani's invective; and beyond the ludic function of irony, Methnani expresses strong criticism towards the migrants' absurd adherence to what is understood as a set of artificial Western values. While this destructive attack disqualifies and excludes Western leaders and their sympathisers, it can also be interpreted as a step towards the production of an aggregative effect, and a signal of Methnani's intention to use irony for its community-enhancing function.

In summary, during the interviews and drawing on his personal experience as a migrant Methnani often talks about the various stages of migration, insisting on the deleterious effects on migrants' mental health. Methnani and Fortunato converge in their dissatisfaction with the Italian publishing industry and adopt a rather humble stance when commenting on the literary value of *Immigrato*. Methnani and Fortunato minimize their own artistic abilities, but in providing two different accounts⁴⁵⁴ of their collaboration the genesis

⁴⁵³ "E non parlo qui di rubare il lavoro agli italiani, stuprare le donne o costituire cellule dormienti, ma di sacrosanti principi come Democrazia, Uguaglianza e Libertà che l'Occidente ci ha sempre sbandierato in faccia come pilastri del suo essere superiore e civile, a noi cittadini del Sud del mondo. Ma che oggi in un paese come l'Italia, che fa parte dell'Occidente, sono diventati utopie che andrebbero inseguite forse su un altro pianeta" (79).

⁴⁵⁴ In "Exile Within Italy: Interactions Between Past and Present "Homes" in Texts in Italian by Migrant Writers" Jennifer Burns writes: "In separate conversations with Fortunato and Methnani in March and November 2001 respectively, I was told by the former that he discussed Methnani's experience in Italy with him regularly and at length, and then he (Fortunato) went away to the south of Italy and wrote the novel; by Methnani that he wrote diaries of his experiences as he moved around Italy, and then handed over the diaries to Fortunato, who structured them to make the novel, and corrected the Italian prose. The publishers' account is that the text was written by Methnani and "rivisto dopo" [later revised] by Fortunato" (372).

of *Immigrato* and the authenticity of the text are further obscured. Yet, another point of convergence between them is their condemnation of the governmental failure to implement appropriate measures and address the migrant issue. The gravity of the interviews reflects the general feeling of heaviness that dominates the text, and the attention to the Maghrebi diaspora is overtaken by a larger concern with broader experiences of migration from the global South to Western nations.

Chapter Three - Convergences and Divergences

3.1 On Comparison

The first two parts of this study looked at *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s critical reception and examined their contribution to a diasporic imaginary while elaborating on the critics' insistence on the classification and gravity of the two texts. The focus now shifts to a reflection on the notion of comparison in connection with the examination of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts. In "Comparability" Jonathan Culler writes:

The meaning of a text depends on its relations to others within a cultural space, such as that of Western European culture ... The more sophisticated one's understanding of discourse, the harder it is to compare Western and non-Western texts, for each depends for its meaning and identity on its place within a discursive system – disparate systems that seem to make the putative comparability of texts either illusory or, at the very least, misleading. (270)

As evidenced by the study of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s reception, the two texts have been put almost unanimously into the category of non-Western texts. Moreover, the critics adopted differing approaches in the sense that, on the one hand, the reaction to *Les Boucs* was highly polarized, on the other, they did not show any sign of hesitation or uncertainty in expressing their understanding of the meaning of Methnani's text, yet little attention was given to comparing *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* with Western texts, let alone with each other. In response to Culler's scepticism, Susan Stanford Friedman's "World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity" contains a further elaboration on comparative strategies for reading modernism on a global scale. She writes,

In theorizing comparison for a modernist studies planetary in scope, I want to swing the pendulum between sameness and difference back to a dynamic, interstitial space between, a space in which comparison is centrally defined by the dialogic push/pull between commensurability and incommensurability: sameness and difference need to be maintained in tension ... The geohistorical in/commensurabilities – both spatial and temporal – must be held in play. (507)

Notwithstanding the fact that Friedman's suggestion is directly concerned with modernist studies, rather than the field of postcolonial studies with which Chraïbi and Methnani have

been associated, the maintaining of the tension between commensurability and incommensurability is particularly relevant in dealing with the comparison of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. Following Stanford Friedman's line of argument, the validity of a comparison depends on a two-fold process. First, in rejecting the notion of static sameness and fixed difference, Friedman puts into question the idea of equivalency as could be expected in the case of a comparison between *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* that would use their common ground in the Maghreb as a standard of measure. It is therefore the interplay between *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s commensurabilities and incommensurabilities that offers a starting ground for comparison. In this regard Ming Xie asserts that "[t]he idea of commensuration as implied in comparativity may create relations between objects or entities that are otherwise not obviously or directly connected" (677), and in accordance with Friedman's view, the dialogic tension between similarities and differences proposes an alternative to understandings of comparison.

Second, Stanford Friedman's insistence on the role of historical moments and spatial locations provides an opportunity to reassess the role played by temporality and spatiality in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. Whether it is in reason of the depiction of Algerian migration to France in the 1950s or Tunisian migration to Italy in the 1990s, the different structuration of time and space in Chraïbi and Methnani's texts provide a privileged mode of access to the potentialities of comparison. Accordingly, a comparative approach of Chraïbi and Methnani's interest in spatial and temporal contexts, as evidenced by their contributions to a Maghrebi diasporic imaginary, allows for an exploration and recognition of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s dynamic "push/pull" (Stanford Friedman, 507), and distinctiveness.

In considering Re-Vision, Recovery, Circulation, and Collage as potential comparative strategies, Stanford Friedman indicates that "they are not mutually exclusive; in critical practice they are often interwoven. None is sufficient for the field in and of itself, but each produces a particular form of comparative insight" (507). "As a reading practice for global modernisms," Stanford Friedman further elaborates,

collage stages nonhierarchical encounters between works from different parts of the world that are not conventionally read or viewed together to see what insights such juxtapositions might produce ... Such paratactic collages bypass the familiar categories of belonging – whether geographical, historical, national, ethnic, racial, religious, gendered, etc. – and instead create conjunctures across lines of difference.

This reading practice allows for the distinctive geohistorical specificity of each text – its difference, in other words – at the same time that it can reveal parallels that allow for a more general theory of which each text constitutes a particular variation. (516)

This is to suggest that the bringing together of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* through the reading strategy of collage ensures a certain degree of equivalency between the two texts in spite of the different locations from which they originate. Accordingly, collaging *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* disrupts the French, Italian, Maghrebi and other contexts in which Chraïbi and Methnani's texts are read.

Building upon the juxtapositional methodologies of collision (Layoun 2009) and defamiliarization (Radhakrishnan 2009), Stanford Friedman expands upon “cultural parataxis” or “cultural collage” as a comparative method, yet she warns “all methods of comparison can fail. The danger of juxtapositional comparison is the license it might provide to juxtapose willy-nilly, for the sake of conjunction without assurance of productive comparison. (Sometimes, juxtaposition is just juxtaposition, not comparison)” (758). However, the usefulness of collage as a strategy for comparison is evidenced by the reception of the two texts, in fact the “radical juxtaposition” of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s critical reception “produces insights about each” while it produces also a “basis of new beginnings” (759). Consequently, the paratactic collages of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* result in disrupting the limitations imposed by the critics' classifications and detaches the two texts from traditional strategies of comparison.

In bringing to light similarities and differences, the collaging mode of comparative thought contributes to an enhanced understanding of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. Moreover, as Stanford Friedman explains:

each text in the collage can appear in full geohistorical and biographical specificity ... while at the same time can produce new insights by being read together comparatively. The absolute difference – incommensurability – of texts in the collage remains while the proposed similarity – commensurability – exists at the level of theory produced in the act of comparative reading. Such theory ... can in turn change the reading of each text in its other contexts. This form of comparison produces a kind of “vertical” reading between the particular and the general, the local and the global. (517)

Whilst taking into account distinctive contexts, the reading of a text written in French by a Moroccan author and in Italian by a Tunisian one also “generates a perception of similarity” (517). Thus, one could argue from the collaging of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, first, that the new insights provided do reveal the diasporic dimension of both texts through their joint emphasis on a diasporic imaginary. Second, if the critics have insisted on the issue of classification, the defamiliarizing juxtaposition of Chraïbi’s Künstlerroman and Methnani’s testimonio broadens the debate over their generic affiliations. Following Chraïbi’s emphasis on the dislocating effects of migration for Algerian who migrated to France after World War II, a reading of Methnani’s text that would explore the forms of physical, social, and individual dislocation among migrants to Italy in the 1990s would uncover absolute differences as evidenced by the variations in the recourse to a religious imagery which is widespread in Chraïbi whereas Methnani resorts to spiritual allusions in a more discreet manner.

Accordingly, the reading side by side of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* in the way of a “dynamic aller/retour” (517) between the two texts allows for an identification of further parallels and contrasts such as suggested by the reading of *Immigrato* in relation to the travel writing tradition. As a travelogue *Immigrato* parodically alludes to the tradition of the Grand Tour, and one could surmise that the exploration of “parody as a form of repetition with a critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity” (Hutcheon 2000, xii) in *Les Boucs* would equally offer a valuable ground for comparison and alternatives for interpretation. The depiction of the downward movement of Salah’s wanderings throughout Italy is not devoid of levity, and, likewise, a scrutiny of ascending and descending movements in *Les Boucs* in comparison with *Immigrato* also offers a point of reference for the identification of levity in Chraïbi’s depiction of Yalaan’s geographical and psychological journey. Undoubtedly, then, the new insights produced by the juxtaposition of Chraïbi’s depiction of migrants’ mental health through religious imagery in *Les Boucs* as Künstlerroman, and Methnani’s parodic Grand Tour in *Immigrato* as testimonio, along with their contributions to a diasporic imaginary bring to the fore the dialogic interplay of commensurabilites and incommensurabilites, and highlights some of the intricacies of a comparative reading experience.

In echoing Natalie Melas’ earlier rejection of the “invisible binary bind in which comparison must end either by accentuating differences or by subsuming them under some

overarching unity” (275), Friedman’s reliance on collage as a reading strategy offers an alternative to hierarchical modes of comparison, and unsettles the theory of centre and periphery through the juxtaposition of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*’s differences and similarities. In reason of its inclusiveness, collage recognizes the dynamic in/commensurabilites of Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts and allows for the staging of a nonhierarchical encounter. According to Stanford Friedman, collage disrupts the positioning of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* on a hierarchical scale, and following this line of argument, in dismissing essentialist readings the identification of patterns of similarity and difference also generates “new generalities based on what texts share” (759).

According to Melas, contemporary comparison “involves a particular form of incommensurability: space offers a ground for comparison, but no given basis of equivalence” (192), moreover “in the postcolonial condition, incommensurability is the necessary premise for a world in relation” (192); and commenting on Clifford’s “Traveling Cultures” in “Comparison and Postcoloniality,” she writes,

when Clifford does compare cultures in motion or travel, the comparison is of the classic taxonomic variety, in which a type or category is reinforced rather than dispersed or diversified. For example ... his inclusion in the cultural category “Haitian” both those Haitians residing in Haiti and those living in New York as a kind of comparative or traveling culture ... can easily essentialize the cultural identity and preclude analysis of the multiple relation into which Haitianness enters in New York, Haiti, or point in-between. (200)

This remark is of particular relevance as it points out the pitfalls one is likely to encounter in grouping *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* into an ossified category of Maghrebi texts that would not take into consideration the multiplicity of ways in which Maghrebinness pervades Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts, and for which the diasporic imaginary constitutes a valuable entry point. Accordingly, the consequence of this approach is that Yalaan and Salah’s cultural identities would be put into a relation of equivalence.

As he elaborates on the notion of “methodological cosmopolitanism” (282) Sheldon Pollock echoes Natalie Melas’ concern with the “almost inevitable totalization or essentialization of one’s object of comparison” (283). In “Conundrums of Comparison” Sheldon Pollock encourages a move “beyond comparison to comparativism, beyond simply

juxtaposing two cases to figuring out precisely what one is doing in juxtaposing them, how, and why” (279). Pollock points to the inadequacy of juxtaposition as a method for comparison and presents an outline of the three-step process involved in a cosmopolitan comparison. He states that “[d]ethroning the sovereignty of the standard, our certitude that it is the defining instance of a given thing like the epic, is important but not the most essential of lessons that non-Western comparison teaches for doing comparison as such” (282-283). Therefore, by denying the primacy of comparing Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts to a specific standard such as genre, it follows that the value of a reading of *Les Boucs* in relation with the *Künstlerroman*, and *Immigrato* with the *testimonio* is called into question.

Pollock’s second remark that “in cosmopolitan comparison the *difference* in our objects of study ceases at once to be seen as deviation or deficiency in respect to some standard” (283) can be related to the way in which critics have measured *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* against Western standards. Thus, the overthrowing of the standards’ authority, such as the ones upon which the critics have based their reviews (e.g. genre, themes, stylistic choices), points to the establishment of a non-hierarchical mode of comparison too. Pollock goes further by acknowledging that,

Just as our cosmopolitan form of comparison rejects a sort of methodological nationalism ... so it refutes *methodological individualism*. It does so by impressing upon us the inevitability for analysis of larger social, political, and cultural collectivities – “China,” “India” – even while we strive to be sensitive to the very real reduction of complexity that these terms harbor. (284)

Without a doubt, *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* constitute an entry point into the literature of the Maghrebi diaspora, yet the drawing of conclusions or the establishment of principles on the sole basis of these two texts does not meet with Pollock’s approval who insists instead on the need for multiple perspectives. The process of cosmopolitan comparison that he applies to vast spatial scales prevents the domination of one analytical approach. One may argue that Chraïbi and Methnani converge in their concern with the fate of Maghrebi migrants in Europe, and that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* provide a significant, albeit fragmentary, perspective on the social, political, cultural, and economic context of Algeria, Tunisia, France and Italy; however, in calling for a multifocal approach of these large ensembles which serve

as site of diasporic interolarity⁴⁵⁵ a cosmopolitan comparison of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* allows maintaining a certain degree of awareness and sensitivity towards the use of reductive terms and methods.

For Pollock, the essential question that arises is that of the “kinds of new knowledge” (285) produced by comparison. He discusses three domains of knowledge in “Conundrum of Comparison” and further develops his argument a year later in his introduction with Benjamin Elman to *What China and India Once Were* in which he writes,

The goals of standard comparative research are generally held to be fourfold: heuristic, descriptive, analytical, and (let us call it) estranging. Heuristic comparison aims toward generating new questions and problems: we ask whether something that occurred in case A might also have occurred in case B. With descriptive comparison, we aim to clarify case A by contrasting it with case B, something that alone enables us to identify case A’s particularity. In this sense, as Kant and Hegel saw, comparison is a basic part of thinking. With analytical comparison, we seek to answer causal questions, to discover robust tendencies, to test hypotheses. The fourth aim is to introduce a certain distance from the paradigmatic nature of the comparatum (for example, the Homeric epic, which for Hegel was the standard of comparison for all epics everywhere), unsettling its self-evident nature, so that it becomes just one case among other possibilities, and hence “estranged.” (13-14)

In line with this theoretical stance, the validity of a direct comparison of Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts with each other is reinforced while the centrality of Western forms of comparatum is being challenged. Pollock and Elman add,

Not only does our sort of cosmopolitan comparison require that we actively try to bracket the Western objects – paintings, poems, power formations, whatever – that have functioned as the standards, in order to gain as undistorted a view as possible of the non-Western objects of comparison. But it also leaves us with objects that wind up estranging – sometimes profoundly estranging – each other. (14)

⁴⁵⁵ In “Unravelling the Conceptual Link between Transnationalism and Diaspora” Thomas Lacroix writes, “[B]eyond dispersion, interolarity, that is to say, the relations maintained between the different places of settlement, is a defining feature of diasporas” (174).

A comparative reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* stresses the significant prominence of distortion in relation to Chraïbi and Methnani's texts. Chraïbi and Methnani's adherence to or distance from Western genres has been scrutinized by critics and used as a criterion for evaluation, and this insistence illustrates the important role played by resemblance and affiliation with French and Italian canonical works in the reception of Maghrebi diasporic texts. On the basis of this insight, it appears that neither Chraïbi's ironic distortions nor Methnani's parodic ones have received favourable reviews. Yet, a cosmopolitan comparison underscores the variety of functions attributed to distortion by Chraïbi and Methnani. Whether it is through Chraïbi's particular use of ironic exaggerations, self-deprecation, and nostalgia, or through Methnani's recourse to figures of aggrandisement and demeaning, the contributions to a diasporic imaginary converge in delineating a satirical dimension, yet, they also point to the plurality of effects that ironic and parodic distortions make possible.

An off-centre or south-south comparison, Pollock and Elman continue, "unencumbered by misapprehensions about the essential nature of things – what a poem or a painting or a power formation like empire really, invariantly, is – allows us to better capture the specificity of a given case, which can be seen only against the backdrop of a comparative partner" (17). In that sense, instead of comparing *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* with a normative comparatum emanating from France or Italy, through a cosmopolitan approach the marginalization of the "European standard" (12) reduces the degree of importance given to generic distinctions and features, and lessens the concern with gravity with which critics of Chraïbi and Methnani have been occupied. Therefore, rather than searching for a Methnianian version of Chraïbi's recourse to grotesque forms of representation, or a Chraïbian rendition of Methnani's mobilization of the descent motif, the cosmopolitan comparison acknowledges the mutual estrangement of the two texts.

Additionally, if Chraïbi and Methnani insert into their texts incongruous elements and numerous manifestations of laughter that would indicate the presence of patterns of similarities, the withdrawal of "default standards" of comparison supports the claim according to which ultimately, the estranging function of comparing Chraïbi and Methnani's literary project lies in its contribution to the "production of difference" (14). However, while Pollock and Elman's elaboration on the cosmopolitan comparison provides a valuable insight into the complexity of a comparison between *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, the exclusion of Western norms and standards from the present comparative project is called into question by

the diasporic dimension of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts. As such, *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* do problematize the very idea of a south-south comparison given the inaccuracy of locating the texts in a single site (Algeria, France, Tunisia, Italy); and in reading *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* solely with regard to their anchoring in the Maghreb, one would be overlooking the ubiquity of the texts, and perform a reductionist reading.

What emerges from a review of Stanford Friedman and Pollock's strategies of comparison is that their positions provide a variety of insights into the singularity of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. On the one hand, Pollock and Elman's idea of "mutual illumination of objects of analysis" (17) through cosmopolitan comparison allows *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* to be "equally different: neither deficient nor deviant in the light of some standard regarded as perfect, and often radically different from one another," (17) on the other, the "often bizarre or uncanny" effect of Stanford Friedman's collage, "defamiliarizes and recontextualizes" (516) what seems familiar in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* through a non-hierarchical comparative reading.

As Pollock sets up a three-step methodological cosmopolitanism, he also argues that "Perhaps there is no new surplus thing called "comparative knowledge," nothing beyond ever-deeper understanding of the things themselves" (2017, 290). However, later he specifies with Elman that "the production of *difference*" is the "outcome of the estrangement" (14). That is to say that in estranging each other, further differences are produced between *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*; if so, cosmopolitan comparison applied to the so-called "littérature maghrébine d'expression française" and "letteratura della migrazione" provides a significant alternative to previous reductionist approaches.

3.2 On Reception

The discussion on the reception of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* brings to light a series of similarities and differences. It is undeniable that at the time of their publication both texts did not go unnoticed, and that since then they have been the object of a multitude of interpretations. Both texts have generated considerable debate and disagreement over the role of the author, the literary value of the text, and the question of verisimilitude in relation to the historical context of Maghrebi immigration to France and Italy. With equal insistence the critics have placed their focus on the tragic dimension of the texts, whereas a closer attention to the instances of levity in the texts calls into question the generic categorization of *Les*

Boucs and *Immigrato*, and offers a more nuanced reading. Undoubtedly, the narratives of Yalaan Waldik and Salah insist on the depiction of migrants' suffering, and one may argue that the prevalent tragic solemnity with which the texts evoke fear and pity has led critics to read *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* through the lens of the tragic genre. Yet, the critics have also overlooked the presence of irony, parody, and other numerous instances of levity that can be found in the texts, and by so doing neglected their transgressive, provocative, and subversive potentialities.

According to most of the critics it further appears that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* suffer from the lack of a certain literary value. However, the variety of interpretations highlights the absence of a general consensus as to a definition of aesthetic merit. For the most part, those reviewing *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* have insisted on the documentary and didactic style used by Chraïbi and Methnani, the sociological and historical value of their texts, thereby downplaying the artistic achievements of the writers. While Chraïbi and Methnani have publicly insisted on the importance of their first-hand experience of migration and their personal investigations into the Maghrebi diaspora, it emerges that the historical grounding of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* has served as the main criterion of relevance in evaluating the authors' success. The question of fidelity and nonconformity to the historical context was central in the debate surrounding the publication of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts, and if the value of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* has been largely pegged to their degree of historical accuracy, more attention has been given to Chraïbi and Methnani's didactic and moralistic tendencies than to the diasporic dimension of their texts. In both cases, the early critics were confronted with news patterns of international migration, and if the field of diaspora studies was still in its infancy when *Les Boucs* was published, those involved in reviewing and assessing *Immigrato* during what Robin Cohen calls the third phase⁴⁵⁶ of diaspora studies (2008, 1) did not bring into their analysis the innovative findings drawn from the field of diaspora studies.

In fact, Cohen has recently expressed his scepticism regarding diaspora as a theory⁴⁵⁷, yet the field of diaspora studies offers a valuable analytical framework, and valuable

⁴⁵⁶ From the mid-1990 to the turn of the century.

⁴⁵⁷ In *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*, Cohen and Fischer write: "The word has become highly fashionable and has leapt from its previously confined use – mainly concerned with the dispersion of Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Africans – to cover the cases of many other ethnic groups, nationalities and religions. But this 'horizontal' scattering of the word to cover the mobility of many groups to many destinations has been paralleled also by 'vertical' leaps, with the word 'diaspora' being deployed to cover more and more phenomena and serve more and more objectives of different actors. The word has graduated to the status of a concept, and

methodological tools. In this regard, Quayson and Daswani's contribution on the polysemy of the term is particularly relevant:

The arts of memory, the dialectics of place, the affective economies of dispersal, the ethnographies of nostalgia, the intersubjectivities of social identity, and the citational practices that ground senses of cultural particularity outside the homeland (such as in names, family photographs, special community journals, movies, etc.), along with social categories and identities (village of provenance, race, class, gender, generational differences, the dynamics of (in)habitation facilitated by the host nation, etc.) are crucial for understanding diasporas. All such features are part of the sometimes strategic/instrumental but always expressive configuration of diasporicity, the salience and intensity of whose elements is also shaped by the character of historical epochs in which they are articulated. (8)

A shared characteristic among the critics of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* is the lack of consideration for the features of diasporicity in the two texts, and if Ato Quayson's elaboration on the diasporic imaginary offers a new approach that assigns specific value to the three central elements of place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting, the suggestion is that the theoretical discussions initiated around the concept of diaspora contribute to the diversity of interpretations of texts that deal with issues of migration and displacement.

In relation to the "explosive growth of diaspora studies" (28) Khachig Tölölyan is of the view that the field is "in danger of becoming a servant to global political forces, as anthropology was once in danger of serving imperialism" (28), yet Zuzanna Olszewska puts forward what she considers to be the distinctive characteristics of diasporic literature:

the forms and themes of diasporic writing have varied more widely than is often acknowledged, according to the socio-political conditions in which they arose, the nature of the relationship between the host and diasporic communities, the cultural traditions on which they draw or seek to innovate, and the individual creative ambition of the author in question. In all these cases, however, they have proved to be potent reservoirs of cultural knowledge, trenchant critique or simply documentation of experience. Perhaps the most constant common thread that binds them is the necessity

now has an established niche in university curricula as 'diaspora studies.' Some even suggest that diaspora is 'a theory.' Despite the proliferation of uses, it is something of an exaggeration to say that 'diaspora' is, in itself, a theory." (3)

of consciously negotiating a kind of ‘plurality of vision’ that non-diasporans may not so readily possess: a contrapuntal ‘awareness of simultaneous dimensions’ that can be a source of great originality. (91)

Taking this into account, the least one can say is that the plurality of Chraïbi and Methnani’s vision through their negotiation of forms and themes was not met with unanimous approval, and that their overall contribution to a diasporic consciousness has gone unnoticed.

Considering the critics’ reviews and the interviews given by the authors, it appears that the ambitions of Chraïbi and Methnani in publishing their texts have been the object of particular scrutiny. In both cases, the exploration of the theme of migration by migrant authors was welcomed and almost long-awaited, however, their perceived degree of originality differed. On the one hand, Chraïbi’s stylistic choices were met with rejection and on the other, the thematic originality presented by Methnani in the Italian panorama was counterbalanced by a manifest and declared formal modesty in the treatment of the various themes related to Maghrebi migration and diaspora. Thus, following Olszewska’s argument, the reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* through the lens of diaspora studies enhances the interpretive process, and opens up unexplored interpretive hypotheses, yet the confidence on the potentialities of a diasporic reading does not obscure the fact that critics have also pointed to the drawbacks related to the rapid development of the diasporic field of inquiry. According to Rogers Brubaker, “As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted. This has resulted in what one might call a “diaspora” diaspora’ - a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space” (qtd. in Cohen and Fischer 4). In response to the critiques targeting the indeterminacy of the diaspora studies’ enterprise, Cohen and Fischer argue for a careful consideration of the complexities of the diasporic condition: “one of the most important shifts in diaspora studies is to de-emphasize group solidarity and cohesiveness in favour of recognizing internal complexities – including multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-lingual, multi-cohort, multi-mobile and hybrid diaspora” (5). Accordingly, a reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* that fails to take into consideration the recent shifts in diaspora studies⁴⁵⁸ does not allow for the unlocking of interpretive hypotheses which in turn hinders the conduct of interpretation.

⁴⁵⁸ In *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies* Cohen and Fischer write, “moving beyond its original inflections concerning the self-dispersion of religious communities and the forced dispersion of certain peoples, diaspora studies also now cover mobility of all sorts. Various typologies (for example, victim, imperial, labour, deterritorialized, cultural, refugee and trade diaspora) have usefully been developed, but these categories have

With regard to originality, *Bildungsromane* and autobiographies were undoubtedly an integral part of the French and Italian literary canon at the time of the publication of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts. Yet, the responses to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* mitigated the novelty brought by the Maghrebi authors; whereas Chraïbi's estrangement technique⁴⁵⁹ failed to convince the critics, it is only partially that Methnani's autobiographical narrative met the literary taste and standards of the time. This points arguably to the inefficacy of Chraïbi and Methnani's deviations from literary conventions as they were attempting to tear away the veil of familiarity that was covering the world they were describing in their texts.

Furthermore, whether one takes into consideration *Les Boucs*' handling of the conventions of the *Künstlerroman*, its insistence on depictions of mental states, and the use of a Christian religious imagery, or *Immigrato*'s dual authorship, its deviation from traditional characterizations of the Grand Tour and the motif of the descent, critics were little concerned with the role of perception in Chraïbi and Methnani's creative process. In this regard, the approach of Viktor Shklovsky and the Russian Formalists to literature is of particular interest as it widens "the concept of form to include aesthetic perception," and defines "the work of art as the sum of its 'devices,'" while directing "attention to the process of interpretation itself" (Holub 16). In *Art as Device* Shklovsky writes, "a given work depends in its artistry – in whether or not this work is poetry – on our perception. In the narrow sense, we shall designate as "work of art" only such works which have been created by special devices intended to have them perceived as artistic" (75). As such, the vitality of the work of art lies in its defamiliarizing capacities, and it is therefore to the relationship between the text and the reader that Shklovsky shifts his attention, implying that it is the identification of such devices that conditions the artistic effect. As Holub asserts, "ordinary perception, which is associated with practical language, tends to become habitual or automatic. The "algebraization" or

failed to prevent the continual invention of even newer 'adjectival' diasporas – including incipient, queer, generational, gendered, mixed, post-colonial, and many others. Typologies of all sorts can only go so far. By their very nature they fail to capture the internal diversity of diasporic populations, which has always existed but is further reinforced as human mobility turns into an increasingly multifaceted phenomenon which, in turn, prompts attention, concerns, debates and engagement with diasporic questions to an unprecedented degree" (8).
⁴⁵⁹ In the Translator's Introduction to Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*, Benjamin Sher explains his rejection of the term defamiliarization and his preference for the term enstrangement: "This semi-neologism is very seductive until you realize that it is quite wrongheaded. Shklovsky's process is in fact the reverse of that implied by this term. It is not a transition from the "familiar" to the "unknown" (implicitly). On the contrary, it proceeds from the cognitively known (the language of science), the rules and formulas that arise from a search for an economy of mental effort, to the familiarly known, that is, to real knowledge that expands and "complicates" our perceptual process in the rich use of metaphors, similes and a host of other figures of speech. "Defamiliarization is dead wrong! And so, after some reflection, I decided to coin the word "enstrange," "enstrangement," built on the same cognate root. While positive (see other en- prefix words such as "enthrall"), it is also strongly associated with the counterpointing "estrangle," "enstrangement" (xix).

“making automatic” of perception leads inevitably to a failure to “see” the object ... The function of art ... is to dehabituate our perception, to make the object come alive again” (16-17). That is to say that in Shklovsky’s view the work of art can enable an appreciation of “new dimensions of reality and aesthetic value” (Davis and Womack 41). And on close observation, it appears that the artistic potency of devices such as irony and parody in the literary representation of migration and diaspora was not considered sufficiently significant in evaluating the originality of Chraïbi and Methnani’s projects.

3.3 On the Exotic

Another similarity between the reception of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* is the critics’ widespread tendency to assign literary labels and generic categories. From this perspective the scholarly reviews written on *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* bring to light the process of control to which Chraïbi and Methnani’s text have been subjected. In the analysis and history of the institution of postcolonial studies that he presents in *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*, Graham Huggan explores the commodification of the “exoticized” margins and asserts that “the exotic is the perfect term to describe the domesticating process through which commodities are taken from the margins and reabsorbed into mainstream culture” (22). Huggan further elaborates on the value of marginality:

To keep the margins exotic – at once threateningly strange and reassuringly familiar – is the objective of the mainstream; it is an objective which it can never fail to pose, but which it can never reach. For if the metropolitan society (which ... is the primary contact-zone for exchanges between the mainstream and the margins) thrives on the commodification of marginality, it also recognises, without fully controlling, the changes taking place within its midst. (22-23)

And when considering the wide spectrum of responses to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, it appears that it is on locating the texts “between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity” (13) that most critics have insisted. Huggan’s contribution helps reveal the mechanism through which the emerging literary voices from the Maghreb have been monitored, and the role played by critics and reviewers as agents of legitimation. Yet, if Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts have been received with a varying degree of scepticism, what

they have in common is that they were also a manifestation of the changes happening in the French⁴⁶⁰ and Italian metropolitan societies.

In comparison with *Les Boucs*'s reception in France and the Maghreb, the reception of *Immigrato* in Italy and abroad was more enthusiastic, however the numerous attempts to produce and assign reductive designations form part of the process of commodification and contribute to the exoticization of both texts. Huggan's denunciation of exoticist discourse stems from the fact that it is

complicit with the essentialist labelling of marginalised racial/ethnic groups. Exoticism effectively hides the power relations behind these labels, allowing the dominant culture to attribute value to the margins while continuing to define them in its own self-privileging terms. What is more, the value it ascribes is predominantly *aesthetic*: marginality is deprived of its subversive implications by being rerouted into safe assertions of a fetishized cultural difference. Marginality is defined, that is, not only in terms of what, or who, is different but in the extent to which such difference conforms to preset cultural codes. Exoticism's 'aesthetic of diversity' ... is manipulated for the purpose of channelling difference into areas where it can be attractively packaged and, at the same time, safely contained. What is at work here is a process, commodified of course, of cultural translation through which the marginalised other can be apprehended and described in familiar terms. (24)

In this view, one can argue that the defining tags attached to Chraïbi and Methnani's texts have been subject to manipulation, whether it is with terms such as "testimony" (Chrestien qtd. in Kadra-Hadjadji 82), "tragic" (Zérafra 178-179), "hermeticism" (Ballet 58), "dark" (Malka and Sefrioui 10) for *Les Boucs*, or "anomaly ... audacious innovation" and "strange novel[s] of formation" (Cacciatori 167-168), "autobiographical narrative" (Moll 5), "picaresque" (Portelli 296), and "counter-travelogue" (Marfè 193) for *Immigrato*.

Accordingly, one may speculate that one pitfall of such multiplication of designations is that

⁴⁶⁰ In her study of contemporary French and Francophone literature titled *The Migrant Text: Making and Marketing a Global French Literature*, Subha Xavier argues that the migrant text is characterized by the tension between "the lure of, and struggle against, exoticism and otherness." This tension, Xavier contends, guarantees not only the viability of this literature, but also "the strategic creativity of its authors for the global age" (64). By examining migrant texts as "a literature of otherness that falls prey to the fear of the market," Xavier indicates that because of their capitalizing on ethnic heritage these novels saddle "writers with the expectations and hopes of their communities of origin as well as those of their new countries." This situation leads the authors to be considered as spokespeople who can be simultaneously "lauded as model citizens" and "accused of betrayal and treachery" (69).

these manoeuvres supplied the exoticist machinery operating in France and Italy and perpetuated the process of commodity fetishism⁴⁶¹ attached to the cultural and literary production of the Maghrebi diaspora. Therefore, particularly noteworthy is the absence of consensus over the emergence of Maghrebi diasporic literature in France and Italy as evidenced by the reductive categorisation of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts and the widespread concern with generic orthodoxy as a main criterion for evaluating their artistic enterprise.

Within the framework of his effort to present “the inextricable connection between the production of ‘the postcolonial’ and the globalisation of consumer society” (263) Huggan writes, “[A]s the process of commodification clearly illustrates, cultural difference also has an aesthetic value, a value often measured explicitly or implicitly in terms of the *exotic*” (13). In view of this, the contextualisation of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* in the framework of a global economy serves to point out the power-struggles behind the processes of literary value attribution, and, accordingly, those of canonical inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, while the idea of measurement implies a standard against which *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* are to be judged, the critics' extensive recourse to highly disputable labels in their evaluation of the two texts should not obscure the fact that these labels also carry an ideological weight.

The examination of the two texts' reception indicates that in both cases several critics have taken part in the deployment of an exoticizing strategy which underscores the marginalising effect of comparing *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* with other texts. As reviewers from France, Italy, the Maghreb and elsewhere appear to have played a central role in the way *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s “value is generated, negotiated and disseminated” (Huggan 28), it is of interest, at this point, to revisit the terms used by critics in reviewing the two texts. *Les Boucs* has been described as a “pathetic book” by Jean Prasteau (15), a “violent work” by Maurice Joyeux (81) who adds that “[i]t contrasts with the current North African literature,” as containing “too much artifice of style” according to Michel Zéraffa (135), as a “kind of epic, a myth” for Jean Cathelin (81); and *Immigrato* has been designated as belonging to the “group of autobiographical narratives, between investigation and fiction” and a “diary” by Remo Cacciatori (166, 171), an “autobiographical novel-diary chronicle” by Armando Gnisci (1993, 29), as going “beyond reality” for Raffaella Taddeo (113), a “four-

⁴⁶¹ According to Huggan, the “three aspects of commodity fetishism – mystification (or levelling-out) of historical experience; imagined access to the cultural other through the process of consumption; reification of people and places into exchangeable aesthetic objects – help these books and their authors acquire an almost talismanic status” (19).

handed fictional story” for Marianna Salvioli (218), or a “parody” by Jennifer Burns (1998, 224), to mention but a few examples.

The subjecting of Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts to a taxonomic operation provides an insight into the politics that hovers around the technology of labelling. Rather than focusing on the possible similarities between French or Italian domestic texts and *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, the general tendency has consisted in relegating the two texts to a peripheral position. The terminological variety can be interpreted also as a sign of defensiveness on the part of the reviewers, and an indication of the diasporic texts’ threatening vitality. It follows from this that through the conversion of individual classificatory labels into an apparatus of institutional evaluation, the terminology used to evaluate *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* turns into an intricate system of selection, inclusion and exclusion, in which the specificities of each judgement and the responsibilities of each critic are blurred. What emerges is that the critics’ evaluations of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* produce a hermetic system with a highly selective filter and, in turn, these labelling strategies can be interpreted as just as many instruments for the absorption and neutralization of what one may consider to be the subversive potential of diasporic texts. In overlooking the diasporic affiliation of the texts, most of the critics have favoured a focus on the degree of deviation from domestic definitions of literary value rather than a consideration of the way in which *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* negotiate their position in the in-between spaces they occupy.

The interventions of Chraïbi and Methnani during the interviews they have given can be interpreted also as tactics of resistance. In 1955, Chraïbi says “I did not want to do any more regionalism. I wanted to write a French writer’s novel” (Prasteau 2); in 1973 “instead of producing a well-constructed book – in the way that would have been expected of me – I just did the opposite ... it is these North Africans who are judging and trying to understand the society in which they are living” (Bafao 428); and in 1999 he tells Professor Guy Dugas “please, stop naming us, us all, labelling us” (Dugas 169). In 1992 Methnani locates *Immigrato* in the category of “journals-diaries” (Methnani 2006); in 1999 he denounces the caricatural portrayal of the “Arabo-Muslim world and Tunisia” in the media, and anticipates the birth of a “real literature of migration, in thirty years” (Methnani and Malavolti); in 2006, Fortunato calls *Immigrato* “a novel whose content had already occurred” and which “has not exhausted its own modernity” (Fortunato and Methnani vi, vii); in 2006 Methnani says “I have never defined myself as a writer” (Methnani and Taddeo par. 2); in 2010 he adds “new

Italians” (par. 4) can break with the mainstream editorial strategies, and in 2011 he talks about the genesis of *Immigrato* as “a real writing experience” (Meschini and Carotenuto 77). At times quite explicitly, these statements converge in forming a response to reductive classificatory manoeuvres. Chraïbi, Methnani and Fortunato’s interventions bring to light and undermine the process of reification still in operation several decades after the publication of their texts. Over time, the interviews given by the authors have offered a strategic space from where opposition to the continuing reductive assaults on *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* could be launched.

3.4 On Value

The reception of Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts is loaded with the weight of generic categorization, and in comparing the critical reception of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* the question of value arises, for

Comparison as it has come down to us from the “comparative method” developed across so many emergent fields in the nineteenth century is a highly normative procedure. An ideal or type is posited a priori or derived empirically from the similarities between various elements; this type in turn becomes the standard or criterion according to which judgements of value, of deviation, of inclusion or exclusion are proposed. (Melas 275)

Here, it should be said that the objective of a comparative reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*’s critical reception is not to identify similarities in order to produce an archetypal model of Maghrebi diasporic text. Taking into consideration Radhakrishnan’s assertion that “[t]here can be no serious multicultural experience or multicultural perception of value without a responsible theory of comparison” (2003, 75), a focus on critical reception leads potentially to a better appreciation of the correlation between value and comparison, and a greater acknowledgment of the complexity of concepts such as literary value and evaluation of artistic production in a diasporic context.

According to Radhakrishnan, “in a world structured in dominance, comparisons are initiated in the name of those values, standard, and criteria that are dominant. Once the comparison is articulated and validated, the values that underwrote the comparison receive instant axiomatization as universal values” (74). That is to say that a better appreciation of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*’s evaluative criticism can be obtained by taking into consideration

the process through which prevalent values, standard and criteria are turned into universal principles of selection. And if the principles which govern comparative evaluation mirror the hierarchical structure of society, one may argue that some the benefits of a comparison of the critical reception of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts consist in the potential to provide a better understanding of their literary evaluation, identify the dominant and universal values, and establish how *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* relate to them. Yet, Radhakrishnan makes an insightful remark: "behind the will to comparison lies the will to judge and evaluate; unfortunately, the judgements and evaluations, so long as they fall prey to dominant norms and expectations, do not enjoy multilateral legitimacy" (75). It is therefore not surprising that the debates sparked by the publication of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* led to an apparent quantity of evaluations, however, it is quite clear that over time, and in parallel with a steady interest in Chraïbi and Methnani's texts, a strong consensus has formed around the texts' deficiencies.

As stated by Karolina Watroba:

It has become commonplace by now that judgments about aesthetic value are considered prone to various biases and distortions, and the pendulum of scholarly consensus seems to have moved away from Harold Bloom's insistence that "the aesthetic is ... an individual rather than a societal concern" to an agreement that it is in fact a mixture of the two and that focusing on one's own individual reading experience tends to obscure the extent to which political and social factors influence the attribution of literary value and, by extension, the construction of the literary canon. (66)

In accordance with this position, the classifying operations to which *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* have been subjected appear to be incompatible with claims or convictions of objectivity. And if the current agreement on aesthetic values favours the combination of the personal and the communal as a basis for the determining of aesthetic and nonaesthetic value, the varied contexts in which critiques and reviews of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* emerged partake in the process of value ascription and provide a layer of complication to the practice of exclusion or inclusion regarding canon formation. Therefore, following Watroba's line of argument, to downplay the sociopolitical conditions under which Chraïbi and Methnani's texts have been critically read, or to give precedence to the individual reading experiences of

the critics, is to run the risk of following a misleading mode of literary evaluation, and a misunderstanding of the principles at stake in the process of canonical selection.

On the subject of value judgment Barbara Herrnstein Smith writes,

what we may be doing – and, I think, often are doing – when we make an explicit value judgment of a literary work is (a) articulating an estimate of how well that work will serve certain implicitly defined functions (b) for a specific implicitly defined audience, (c) who are conceived of as experiencing the work under certain implicitly defined conditions. (13)

From this standpoint, the exploration of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s reception brings into play the texts' ability to stimulate a certain degree of responsiveness from the part of the critics whose participation in the literary evaluation opens numerous fields of investigation. Along the lines of Herrnstein Smith's argument, the value judgments of Chraïbi and Methnani's literary works reveal the centrality of the interplay between functions, audience and circumstances. Yet, two tendencies can be discerned: on the one hand, innovative contributions emerge as parts of the evaluative diversity, and on the other, the concern with generic classification appears repeatedly and insistently. Parallel to the evaluative divergences about *Les Boucs* evidenced by the explicit judgments formulated over the span of four decades by André Rousseaux up to Jean Déjeux in France, Maurice Monnoyer and Ahmed Séfrioui in the Maghreb, or Chraïbi in his interviews and memoirs, a recurring preoccupation with generic categorization develops as part of the evaluative discourses. A similar pattern prevails in the critical reception of *Immigrato*: from Remo Cacciatori to Marianna Salvioli in Italy, Graziella Parati to Comberiati and Van Camp outside Italy, and in Methnani's interviews, for two and a half decades the critics have attempted to establish *Immigrato*'s value through the exploration of its functions, audience and conditions while exhibiting a concern for generic designations.

While the critical response to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* sheds light on the evaluators' implicit contribution to the construction of a literary canon along national and generic lines, the emergence of a Maghrebi diasporic literature in France and Italy calls into question not only the role of valuing communities but also the relevance of individual acts of evaluation. In this regard Herrnstein Smith writes,

Any evaluation, then, no matter what its manifest syntactic form, ostensible “validity claim,” and putative propositional status, may have social value in the sense of being appropriable by other people. The actual value of a particular evaluation, however, will itself be highly contingent, depending on such variables as the specific social and institutional context in which it is produced, the specific social and institutional relation between the speaker and his listener(s), the specific structure of interests that motivates and constrains the entire social/verbal transaction in which the evaluation figures, a vast and not ultimately numerable or listable set of variables relating to, among other things, the social, cultural, and verbal histories of those involved, and of course the particular perspective from which that value is being figured. (97)

These remarks call for an utmost caution when dealing with value judgments as to encourage the reader to adopt a sceptical approach towards the evaluators of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, and consequently to maintain a certain distance with their truth-claims, if not to outrightly dismiss them.

In arguing for the transhistorical function of literary value, Antony Easthope writes, “[a] text of literary value can be distinguished from one with merely historical interest by the degree to which its signifiers have actively engaged with new contexts, contexts different ideologically but also different in the protocols of literary reading in which the text is construed” (56). Following the binary classification brought forward here, one may argue that both *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* have been assessed almost without exception on the grounds of their historical dimension while their aesthetic polarity has been overlooked. While some of the contributions have underlined the texts’ ability to engage with a variety of situations and circumstances, most of the assessments have followed one another and contributed also to the fixity of the two texts. And if he emphasizes the importance of literary reading in the process of value ascription, Easthope points also to the value that stems from the variety of readings. He adds,

Literary value is a function of the reader/text relation, and cannot be defined outside the history in which texts – some more than others demonstrably have functioned intertextually to give a plurality of different readings transhistorically: the greater the text, the more we are compelled to read it through a palimpsest of other interpretations. (56-57)

Applied to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, this line of thought serves as an indication that instead of being concerned with the independence of the texts, literary value stems from “the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed into one another” (Cuddon 367). Still, it can be argued that a transhistorical reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* calls also for a consideration of the diasporic dimension of the texts as a valid criterion in the production of value judgments. In other words, because of their rootedness in the tension between the Maghreb and France/Italy, one can put forward the idea that the literary evaluation and interpretive enterprise of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* should also take into consideration the variety of transgeographical readings. Far from suggesting the superiority of such an approach, but in agreement with Easthope’s view on the relevance of transgressing historical boundaries, it can nevertheless be speculated that the omission of the geographical dispersion in which *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* originate may hinder rather than help interpreting the texts.

3.5 On Genre

According to Svend Erik Larsen, “reading requires a particular definition of the boundaries across which comparisons have to be made in order to produce an adequate comprehension of the text, be it boundaries of circulation, of travel, of characters, of genres, of metaphors, of languages or of cultural values” (334). In keeping with this insight, it is therefore the juxtaposition of various grounds of comparison that determines the comprehension of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. Whereas the predominant concern of the critics was with the classification of Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts along generic lines, it should be pointed out that questions of circulation, characters, metaphors, languages and cultural values, played a role of minor importance in the attribution of literary value. In the words of Bawarshi and Reiff,

On the one hand, *genre* can be traced, through its related word *gender*, to the Latin word *genus*, which refers to “kind” or “a class of things.” On the other hand, *genre*, again through its related word *gender*, can be traced to the Latin cognate *gener*, meaning to generate. The range of ways *genre* has been defined and used throughout its history reflects its etymology. At various times and in various areas of study, *genre* has been defined and used mainly as a classificatory tool, a way of sorting and organizing kinds of texts and other cultural objects. But more recently and, again, across various areas of study, *genre* has come to be defined less as a means of organizing kinds of texts and more as a powerful, ideologically active, and historically

changing shaper of texts, meanings, and social actions. From this perspective, genres are understood as forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations. This view recognizes genres as both organizing *and* generating kinds of texts and social actions, in complex, dynamic relation to one another. (4)

Thus, it can be inferred that what is at stake in the critics' attribution of certain generic features to *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* is the imposition of as many reading grids upon the texts. Yet, as John Frow explains:

Genre is not a *property* of a text but is a function of reading. Genre is a category that we *impute* to texts, and under different circumstances this imputation may change ... Genre is neither a property of (and located 'in') texts, nor a projection of (and located 'in') readers, and it has a systemic existence. It is a shared convention with a social force. The imputations or guesses that we make about the appropriate and relevant conventions to apply in a particular case will structure our reading, guiding the course it will take, our expectations of what it will encounter. But they are grounded in the institutions in which genre has its social being: the institutions of classification in the broader sense. (102-103)

This is to underscore the dynamic movement in which Chraïbi, Methnani, Fortunato and their critics partake, and the impact of generic classification on the process of meaning making. The argument put forward by Frow on the volatility of generic classification offers a basis for the rejection of standard readings, while it points to the validity of deploying multiple reading strategies in order to appreciate *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s meanings. While Bawarshi and Reiff assert that "traditional literary approaches have contributed to culturally-widespread, bipolar attitudes toward genre as either an exclusively aesthetic object or as a constraint on the artistic spirit" (23), Tzvetan Todorov puts forward the idea that "each epoch has its own system of genres, which stands in some relation to the dominant ideology, and so on. Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong" (200). Hence, one may argue, in accordance with Bawarshi and Reiff, that the generic classifications of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* put forward by critics point to the way in which "genres reflect and participate in legitimizing social practices *and* recognizing how generic distinctions maintain hierarchies of power, value, and culture" (25).

On the correlation between ideology and genre Thomas Beebee's insight is particularly telling because it hints at the function of generic attributions. He writes,

Ideology itself is usually invisible; it is noticeable and perhaps existent only in its interactions with the material world (which includes thought). Ideology is the magnetic force that simultaneously holds a society together by allowing it to communicate with itself in shorthand and pushes society apart by conflicting with people's realities. It is only in the deformations and contradictions of writing and thinking that we can recognize ideology; genre is one of those observable deformations, a pattern in the iron filings of cultural products that reveals the force of ideology. In particular, what makes genre ideological is our practice of speaking of it as a "thing" rather than as the expression of a relationship between user and a text, a practice similar to that identified by Marx as "commodity fetishism." (18)

That is to say that both generic classifications of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, and uncertainties about these classifications are marked by the distorting workings of ideology and carry a reifying effect. Beebee elaborates on his view of generic instability maintaining that, "a text's generic status is rarely what it seems to be, ... it is always already unstable" (27), and he identifies three tendencies that have shaped the study of genres by adding,

The concept of generic instability mediates between previous attempts at theorizing genre, which have either looked at genre as something that *is*, which must then be classified, systematized, and renamed ... or else have attempted to prove that genre really doesn't exist, that each work is its own genre, that we must get "beyond genre" by accepting multiple criteria for generic categorization ... or that genres are critical tools for interpretation rather than static categories. (28)

One could possibly advance the hypothesis that in overlooking the generic affiliations of the texts, the majority of critics who engaged in processes of interpretation have lost an opportunity to use genre as a significant interpretive device that allows for the unveiling of ideological interests underlying the classificatory operations of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*. Beebee explains that

The theory of ideology and of its relation to genre adumbrated above can be described, metaphorically, as "refractive" or "anaclastic." The critical readings appropriate to such a theory would approach their objects from the side, as it were,

using the comparative method to bring together texts from different periods ... and from different cultures ... The refracted meanings that result from such comparisons are similar to what is “said” through metaphor – metaphor is precisely the “unsaid.” A further aspect of such refraction is that the texts are necessarily treated as decentred, torn apart by the various genres for which the most accessible record is the critical readings and listenings they have received. (28-29)

A refractive or anaclastic reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* serves as a counteraction to the rigidity of conservative and standardizing practices, and through generic comparisons various perspectives are constructed which question and undermine monolithic norms for determining meanings and the fixity of normative institutions. Then, one might go so far as to imagine that as a destabilizing and transformative practice, refractive or anaclastic readings result in unveiling the ideological component of generic classifications and offer an alternative to the deceptive tendencies of generic taxonomies.

In problematizing the correlation between genre and discourse, Beebee explains that “generic differences are grounded in the “use-value” of a discourse rather than in its content, formal feature, or its rule of production” (7). This would therefore suggest that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* are commodities, and that the use-value of the discourses they develop is at the origin of generic differences. And while Beebee points to the interrelatedness of the aesthetic and the economic, he also asserts that “the truly vital meanings of a text are often contained not in any specific generic category into which the text may be placed, but rather in the play of differences between its genres” (249-250). Following this line of thought not only are the meanings of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* located in the negotiation and confrontation of various genres, but, as Beebee goes on to argue, “to think of genre as a system of differences, we must obviously focus our attention on the borders between genres, because it is precisely here, in their differences, that genres exist” (257).

Given the shifting nature of use-value, and because the appreciation of generic categories requires that “non-literary neighbors” (251) be taken into consideration too, Beebee supports a comparative approach of genres as a privileged basis from which to access the meaning of texts, and he insists that “most works not only can but *must* be analysed in more than one generic way in order for their messages to have any effective meaning or value” (265). Adopting this point of view, there is therefore a relation of dependence between, on the one hand, the exploration of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* through multiple

generic lenses, on the other, the meaning and value of the texts. A comparative approach of the generic classifications determined by the critics of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* allows for the uncovering of attempts to exercise control and impose a restrictive framework over the texts through the application of an ossified version of generic taxonomy. In Frow's view genres are

cultural forms, dynamic and historically fluid, and guiding people's behaviour; they are learned, and they are culturally specific; they are rooted institutional infrastructures; they classify objects in ways that are sometimes precise, sometimes fuzzy, but always sharper at the core than at the edges; and they belong to a system of kinds, and are meaningful only in terms of the shifting differences between them.
(128)

Therefore, it is to be believed that diasporic texts are particularly well-suited for the analysis of generic classifications and genre criticism, in reason of their concern with processes of cultural hybridity. Furthermore, it may be argued that the taking into consideration of the dynamic and shifting effect of levity on generic classification, whether it is through a focus on the tension produced either by irony in *Les Boucs*, or parody in *Immigrato* is also of particular significance in the process of evaluation and interpretation. As Hutcheon writes,

The major players in the ironic game are indeed the interpreter and the ironist ... From the point of view of the *interpreter*, irony is an interpretive and intentional move: it is the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and the unsaid. The move is usually triggered (and then directed) by conflictual textual or contextual evidence or by markers which are socially agreed upon. However, from the point of view of what I too (with reservations) will call the *ironist*, irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented.
(1995, 11)

Hence, one may argue that in resorting to irony Chraïbi destabilizes the generic signals that can be found in *Les Boucs* and informs the interpreter of the particularly subversive value that the author attaches to generic manipulations. In this regard, what may be surprising is that the interpreters of *Les Boucs* have totally ignored the way in which Chraïbi has engaged with the stream-of-consciousness novel. Yet, the generic lens of the *Künstlerroman*, among others,

serves as a tool for the interpreter to explore Chraïbi's attitude towards the said and the unsaid, suggesting that the interplay between the generic categories and the multiple possible functions of irony generates meaning.

Parody, as Hutcheon explains, "is a complex genre, in terms of both its form and its ethos. It is one of the ways in which modern artists have managed to come to terms with the weight of the past" (2000, 29). Therefore, there is reason to believe that through their recourse to parody Methnani and Fortunato subvert the generic features that can be detected in *Immigrato* and the interpreter is made aware of the authors' transgressive stance against the weightiness of parodied sources. In Hutcheon's view

parody is a sophisticated genre in the demands it makes on its practitioners and its interpreters. The encoder, then the decoder, must effect a structural superimposition of texts that incorporates the old into the new. Parody is a bitextual synthesis ... unlike more monotextual forms like pastiche that stress similarity rather than difference. In some ways, parody might be said to resemble metaphor. Both require that the decoder construct a second meaning through inferences about surface statement and supplement the foreground with acknowledgment and knowledge with a backgrounded context. (33-34)

From that perspective, it should be emphasized that the manner in which Methnani and Fortunato have combined parody with satire⁴⁶² has been only half-heartedly acknowledged by the interpreters of *Immigrato*. Yet, the generic lens of the testimonio and the travelogue, among others, serve as a tool for the decoder to explore Methnani and Fortunato's attitude towards repetition and difference suggesting that meaning is also generated through the interplay between the generic categories and the range of tone and intent of parody.

A retrospective exploration of the critical reception of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* shows how a discussion over generic standards and norms can unearth further elements of interpretation and meaning, and if in this section various hypotheses have been brought forward regarding Chraïbi, Methnani and Fortunato's attitude towards conventional generic

⁴⁶² According to Hutcheon, "There are two possible directions that the overlapping of parody and satire can take, since the aim of parody is intramural and that of satire is extramural – that is, social or moral. There is, on the one hand, a type of the genre parody (in Genette (1979) terms) which is satiric, and whose target is still another form of coded discourse ... On the other hand, besides this satiric parody, there is parodic satire (a type of the genre satire) which aims at something outside the text, but which employs parody as a vehicle to achieve its satiric or corrective end" (2000, 62).

classifications, the centring of the critics on issues of texts and contexts, should not distract from exploring the question of the reader in relation to the literary evaluation of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*.

3.6 On the Reader

Hutcheon's focus on the interpreter of irony and the decoder of parody contrasts greatly with the critics' absence of concern with the relation between the literary work and the reader of the work of art. And I argue that in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* the reader is invited to play an active role in the production of the meaning of the text. According to Wolfgang Iser,

the wandering viewpoint divides the text up into interacting structures, and these give rise to a grouping activity that is fundamental to the grasping of the text. The nature of this process is shown clearly by a remark of Gombrich's: "In the reading of images, as in the hearing of speech, it is always hard to distinguish what is given to us from what we supplement in the process of projection which is triggered off by recognition ... it is the guess of the beholder that tests the medley of forms and colours for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape when a consistent interpretation has been found." Inherent in this process – which Gombrich originally derived from decoding distorted messages and then applied to the observation of pictures – is a problem which is highly relevant to the consistency-building that takes place during the reading process. The "consistent interpretation," or gestalt, is a product of the interaction between text and reader, and so cannot be exclusively traced back either to the written text or to the disposition of the reader. (119)

There is abundant evidence of ironic and parodic distortion in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*, and in connecting different perspectives, the wandering viewpoint allows the reader to be present in the text and participate in the interpretive process. For instance, in recognizing the way in which the diasporic imaginary is loaded with an ironic charge in *Les Boucs* and carries a parodic overtone in *Immigrato* the wandering viewpoint provides the reader with a solid interpretation of Chraïbi and Methnani's texts. And Iser also maintains that,

the image brings something to light which can be equated neither with a given empirical object, nor with the meaning of a represented object, as it transcends the sensory, but is not yet fully conceptualized ... The mental imagery of passive syntheses is something which accompanies our reading – and is not itself the object of our attention, even when

these images link up into a whole panorama ... The image, then, is basic to ideation. It relates to the nongiven or to the absent, endowing it with presence. It also makes conceivable innovations arising from a rejection of given knowledge or from unusual combinations of signs. (136-138)

In this vein, innovations emerge in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* from both the rejection of conventional definitions of nostalgia when it is oddly juxtaposed with irony in Chraïbi's depiction of the dispersal of the Algerian labourers, or complicated by the numerous simulacra of the homeland in Methnani's text, and also by the singular rendering of genealogical accounting with recourse to mimicry, mockery and the grotesque in the case of Yalaan Waldik, and the parodic interweaving of upward and downward movement in Salah's journey. For Iser "image-building" is the process through which the reader assembles a "sequence of images that eventually results in his constituting the meaning of the text" (141). He explains that

Blanks and negations both control the process of communication in their own different ways: the blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and so spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives – in other words, they induce the reader to perform basic operations *within* the text. The various types of negation invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is canceled, however, remains in view, and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitude toward what is familiar or determinate – in other words, he is guided to adopt a position *in relation* to the text ... The asymmetry between text and reader stimulates a constitutive activity on the part of the reader: this is given a specific structure by the blanks and negations arising out of the text, and this structure controls the process of interaction. (169-170)

One type of blanks that has led the critics to question the literary value and meaning of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* has to do with the interpretation of various chronological gaps, as is the case, for example, with Chraïbi's overlooking of Yalaan's formative years in Algeria, and Methnani's skipping over the mechanisms through which he finally achieves legal status in Italy. As for negations, it can also be argued that a tragi-comic overtone complicates the severe depiction of the migrants' experiences, as it so happens with Yalaan's recourse to self-deprecation in portraying his mental health, and Salah's satirical attacks in illustrating his symbolic and literal descent. The interplay between instances of gravity and levity has a pivotal role in positioning the reader in relation to both texts. And given that the tragicomic

dimension serves to deflate the gravity of the two migratory journeys, it also undermines the claim that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* have a single fixed meaning. “The greater the number of blanks,” Iser goes on further to state,

the greater will be the number of different images built up by the reader ... We react to an image by building another more comprehensive image. In this process lies the aesthetic relevance of the blank. By suspending *good continuation*, it plays a vital role in image-building, which derives its intensity from the fact that images are formed and must then be abandoned ... The blanks, by suspending the *good continuation*, condition the clash of images, and so help to hinder (and, at the same time, to stimulate) the process of image-building. It is this process that endows them with their aesthetic significance. (186-187)

Of particular interest here are the instances of genealogical accounting as Chraïbi and Methnani offer a fragmented overview of two journeys from the Maghreb to Europe whose aesthetic relevance stems in part from the grotesque and incongruous atmosphere of Yalaan’s geographical peregrinations and Salah’s wanderings. In their elaborations on the economics of immigration in Algeria and Tunisia Yalaan and Salah deploy ironic distance and lead the reader to explore various layers of meaning, in particular through the verbal exchanges that take place during bureaucratic conversations, as happens between Yalaan and the automated and careless Commissioner at the processing centre (77), and between Salah and the machine-like clerk at the Foreign Office (103). Therefore, the coupling of the tense confrontation between the Maghrebi migrants and the European bureaucracy with ironic critical distance contributes to generating the aesthetic value of Chraïbi and Methnani’s texts.

Moreover, Iser maintains that negation creates a major alteration in the relationship between the reader and his familiar world, and adds “The incongruity between discovery and disposition can generally only be removed through the emergence of a third dimension, which is perceived as the meaning of the text. The balance is achieved when the disposition experiences a correction, and in this correction lies the function of the discovery” (218). The critics’ reactions to Chraïbi and Methnani’s incongruous reworkings of the *Künstlerroman* and the autobiographical genre support Iser’s argument that the invalidation of the readers’ norms causes an initial lack of balance between their disposition and the discovery in the text which can only be solved through correction. In this context, the stream-of-consciousness and *mise en abîme* techniques used by Chraïbi and the authorial undecisiveness of the Methnani-Fortunato dyad, are only few of the many discoveries that can contend with the reader’s

disposition in relation to the construction of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s meaning. Yet, Iser lays emphasis also on the fact that

[i]t is possible to derive criterion for evaluating literature from this process [of negation]: wherever negations can be so motivated that their final outcome need not transcend the reader's own disposition, there will be ... little to no effect on that disposition; having to motivate negations and then finding one's disposition confirmed by the motivations constitutes the dominant strategy in certain types of fiction which we would normally classify as 'light reading.' (219)

Following this line of reasoning, the weight of a reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* depends therefore on the ability of the negations in the texts to contradict the reader's disposition. Then, it is understandable that the recurring presence, among others, of a religious motif in *Les Boucs*, with references to Islam and Christianity, and the descent motif in *Immigrato*, through references to hell, had little impact on the critics' dispositions and led them to classify the texts as light readings. However, the taking into consideration of mimicry and mockery in the transgressive approach of Chraïbi towards the Quran and Christ through irony, and Methnani's attitude towards the Italian underworld through parodic allusions to the Grand Tour, offers an alternative to the light reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s heaviness, and also provides a heavier reading of the lightness that can be found in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*.

Iser draws attention to the transcending quality of literature considering that "[i]f the reader is made to formulate the cause underlying the questioning of the world, it implies that he must transcend that world, in order to be able to observe it from outside. And herein lies the true communicatory function of literature" (230). In this light, the critical reception tends to indicate that *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* have been moderately successful in enabling the reader to interrogate the world. It might even be added that both texts have received negative reviews because they were understood as attempts to provide answers to the question of Maghrebi migration to France and Italy. Yet, the two texts' answers matter less than the questions that they ask. In fact, the degree of distortion provided by irony, parody, and the interplay between levity and gravity in the two texts questions the notion of fixity and complicates the clear-cut distinction between answers and questions.

Rather than offering a definite answer to the issues related to the dispersal of Maghrebi population in France and Italy, Chraïbi's incongruous interweaving of the motives of sacrifice, scapegoatism, and salvation in the rendering of Yalaan's odyssey, and Methnani's interest in the grotesquely hybrid and subaltern population with whom he comes into contact, did ignite the debate over immigration by asking the first questions, and enjoined the reader to participate. As such, an Iserian reading of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* brings to light Chraïbi and Methnani-Fortunato's manoeuvring of the readers into producing by themselves the meaning of the texts.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have examined the critical reception and circulation of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* and explored the interplay between gravity and levity in the two pioneering texts of the Maghrebi diaspora in France and Italy that deal with migration. I have identified the role of irony in *Les Boucs* and parody in *Immigrato* as literary techniques and notions providing access to a variety of layers of meaning. I have argued that alongside the severity of the two works instances of levity can also be found, albeit sparingly. The exploration of *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato*'s critical reception highlights the widespread concern with generic classification as the main criteria in the literary evaluation of the two texts. And if the various attempts at assigning a value to Chraïbi and Methnani's texts have focused mainly on the authors and the texts while overlooking the audience, I have contended that the reader plays an active role in the production of meaning. While Chraïbi and Methnani-Fortunato's works set the basis of a Maghrebi diasporic imaginary, the presence of a multivalent irony and parody implies that the texts carry hidden and unsaid levels of meanings. In this regard, the disruptive potentialities of irony and parody assist the detection of intended meanings in Chraïbi and Methnani's literary contributions.

Since the publication of *Les Boucs* in 1955 and *Immigrato* in 1990 the critical reception of the Maghrebi diaspora's literary production has repeatedly engaged in debates over questions of labelling and classification. Among the most frequent terms used for the Maghrebi diasporic literature in French, one can find "littérature maghrébine francophone," "littérature arabe," "littérature étrangère," "littérature beur," "littérature de banlieue;" and for the Italian side, "letteratura della migrazione," "letteratura africana," "letteratura migrante," and more recently "letteratura di seconda generazione."

One could plausibly argue that the exoticizing strategies in operation at the time of the diasporic Maghrebi literature's birth in France and Italy have not disappeared. To go a step further, one might even want to consider the way in which the politics of definition have evolved in relation to the literary works of the Maghrebi diaspora. If on the one hand the French and Italian critics of the early literary production of the Maghrebi diaspora have converged in their use of generic classifications as a fundamental criterion for their evaluations, on the other hand, the autobiographical approach to issues of immigration has received little critical approbation. In reason of the volatile marketability of Maghrebi diasporic literature in the French and Italian context, at irregular intervals a renewed interest

in Maghrebi diasporic artefacts is generated. Therefore, the option to replicate formulaic autobiographical patterns with varying levels of success is made available to the Maghrebi diaspora caught in marketing circuits. And it can be speculated that the essentialist labelling practices that have accompanied the literary production of the early Maghrebi diaspora, have not vanished.

As is made clear by the second-generation Maghrebi authors' entrapment in the "Beur literature" category and later "Banlieue literature" in France, or "letteratura della migrazione" in Italy, it is the question of the breaking into the canon of national literatures that lies beside the evaluation of the literary production of the Maghrebi diaspora. In view of this, I want to argue that "Beurification" and "Banlieuefication" in France, and "Migrazionification" in Italy would be the terms applicable to the process of caricatural homogenization that has accompanied the development of a diasporic Maghrebi literature, resulting in the proliferation of clichés, and from which a diasporic Maghrebi text seeks to stand out. Yet, Chraïbi and Methnani's pioneering position should not obfuscate the fact that their ground-breaking contribution did not ignite any specific literary movement and that since the publication of their texts the Maghrebi diaspora has not engendered a literary avant-garde. In fact, the Maghrebi diaspora operating in the French and Italian literary fields is first and foremost a matter of individualities. In this regard, as forms of criticism, irony, and parody allow the intended meaning to appear in an anamorphic form and provide the reader with a powerful instrument in determining and appreciating the singularity of each author, and each text.

Chapter one of this thesis focused on the critical reception and various aspects of irony in *Les Boucs* and proved that instances of levity can be found in Driss Chraïbi's text. While not all the ironic utterances do produce a comic effect, various functions of irony serve to deflate and trivialize the severity embedded in *Les Boucs*. One feature which would be interesting to explore is to perform a reading of irony in the literature of the Maghrebi diaspora outside the geographical areas and historical periods examined here to see whether the use, functions and interpretations of irony differ. Given the variety of communicative functions of irony it can be expected that differences would be found, and one reason is that the context has a crucial role in the interplay between the said and the unsaid.

Chapter two examined the critical reception of Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato's *Immigrato* and highlighted the significance of a reading of the text through the lens of parody. Although the parodic signals are not all comically effective, the identification of

parodic echoes contributes to the puncturing and diminishing of the text's underlying solemnity. A comparative examination of parody in Chraïbi's oeuvre or any other text written by a Maghrebi diasporic author would shed light on the forms and functions of the use of repetition with critical distance. The exploration of parody would indicate whether the text under scrutiny gives prominence to its conservative force or its transformative power, and in reason of the competence required in the encoding and decoding of parody a variation of the tone and intent of parody in Maghrebi diasporic texts could thus be anticipated.

Although the focus of my thesis was the forms and functions of levity in the pioneering texts of the Maghrebi diaspora in France and Italy, the exploration of the notions of comparison, reception and value, as discussed in chapter 3, would be most interesting in connection with other diasporic cultural artefacts taken from literary and visual arts, and enriched by an examination of the relationship between audience and meaning.

The study of levity in the artistic production of the Maghrebi diaspora in the French and Italian context requires awareness of several underlying notions.

First, to better understand what constitutes the Maghrebi diaspora, it is essential to reconstruct the trajectories which have brought emigrants from their various points of origin to their points of arrival. If on the one hand, Maghrebi diasporic artists reflect on the (in)visibility of minorities, on the other hand art constitutes a quest for recognition in the face of the failure of governments integration policies. The exploration of the artists' trajectories will contradict the all too readily accepted representation of a homogeneous and undifferentiated Maghrebi diaspora for whom artistic production works as a community-building claim of the right to exist in a society that tries, first to ignore, then to use them as scapegoats. Moreover, the migration towards France that followed the decolonization in the French North African ex-colonies is based upon a broad series of illusions that are altogether shared and maintained by all the parties involved. And while large diasporic populations have settled in urban peripheries, it is necessary to indicate that the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian diasporic populations have also established their homes far from the major cities and have opted for more rural homes. As a matter of fact, to put the "littérature de banlieue" produced by the Beurs as the only "suite logique" of the texts written by North African authors would equate to the exclusion of other Maghrebi diasporic voices and the reducing of the diasporic artistic production to urban artists. If the French authorities continue to treat the banlieue as a new Orient and an extension of the "mission civilisatrice," cultural artefacts that

deal with issues of diaspora in settings other than the housing projects require special attention too.

Second, when discussing trauma in the literary production of the decolonized North African intellectuals and the following generation, a special attention needs to be given to the variety of dissonant colonial and diasporic experiences. While it would be necessary to include in such an investigation the literary response to the trauma of dispersal, the specificity of the Franco and Italo-Maghrebi encounter cannot be limited to the trauma of the Algerian war. In fact, when trying to get to grips with the subject of trauma in North African literature, one is at risk of focusing solely on the traumatic experience of the 1954-1962 Algerian War of Independence. It is therefore essential to look at the literary texts which also reflect on different forms of trauma during and after the colonial encounter between the Maghreb and the West, whether it is through the lens of first or later generations of Maghrebi diasporic artists. Besides, as hyphenated subjects, diasporic Maghrebi populations traditionally spark the interest of researchers who focus on identity issues and the pain of adjustment. Looking at the Maghrebi diaspora's artistic expressions of in-betweenness and homing desire leads to a reflection on subalternity and violence in the French and Italian contexts. Therefore, a focus also needs to be put on the role of silence in conjunction with the Maghrebi diaspora's agony.

Third, even though humour sheds a crude light on the social, political, and historical realities of the Maghrebi migration, unexpectedly, doses of levity can be found in the artistic works produced during that period and after. Given that humour allows second generation to either internalize or reject the trauma of their parents, the artistic production of the Maghrebi diaspora is made up of tragedies and comedies where the use of the often humorous *verlan* as a mimicry of French language appears as the most obvious resistance tactics. However, the reducing of Maghrebi diasporic humour to a monolithic argot and a mere condemnation of a social context appears as an understatement. The instances of self-accusative laugh have been so-far neglected and close examinations of Maghrebi diasporic works have received little attention. Indeed, the ramifications of the postcolonial laughter of the Maghrebi diaspora are under-studied and a close scrutiny of the intersection of trauma and humour in Maghrebi diasporic works remains to be completed.

While this dissertation demonstrates that gravity and levity are interwoven in the two pioneering texts on migration to France and Italy written by Maghrebis, it also investigates and interprets the subtleties within lightness as the thesis shifts from an examination of *Les*

Boucs and *Immigrato*'s critical reception to an exploration of ironic utterances and parodic echoes. While the reader's taking into consideration of the interplay between gravity and levity can lead to different interpretations, the recognition of humorous signals gives access to several layers of meaning. The overlooking of levity and humour contributes to the distortion of the meaning of the text. In fact, parallel to the dismissing of incongruity and the grotesque in generating a comic effect in *Les Boucs* the disregarding of mimicry and mockery in engendering comical moments in *Immigrato* also obstructs the access to a range of meanings.

The effect of the insistence on the seriousness of the cultural production of the Maghrebi diaspora and the discarding of lightness lies on the censoring and silencing of the diaspora. As indicators of the authors' strategy of resistance the forms of levity deployed in *Les Boucs* and *Immigrato* actively engage in social commentary while revealing a spirit of self-criticism. As levity offers a glimpse into the importance of irony and parody in the artistic production of the Maghrebi diaspora, it also signals through satire and the recourse to self-deprecation the diaspora's engagement in self-critical questioning. And it is when the Maghrebi diaspora alleviates the bitterness of its dispersal through the channel of levity, that the enclave of helplessness falls apart and that the vulnerability of the Maghrebi diasporic artistic production, I believe, turns into a source of hope.

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