EDITED BY VALERIA CAMMARATA, FEDERICA MAZZARA AND SAMIRA MECHRI

MIGRATIONS:
SOCIO-CULTURAL
CONTEXTS AND
CONSTITUTION

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

DRIFTING MAPS

n. 2

Series editor: Serena Marcenò (University of Palermo)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is conceived in the context of a much bigger academic Eramus+ Capacity Building MIGRANT Project that was initiated by an idea shared between Serena Marceno, Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Palermo, and Samira Mechri, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Tunis El Manar. The endeavour follows a bottom-up approach and stems from a common interest in the issue of migration since 2015 when the two Universities started a staff and students exchange programme in the context of a double diploma between the Master's Degree in Cooperation and Development, now the Master's Degree in Cooperation, Development, and Migrations at the University of Palermo and the Master's Degree in English and International Relations at the University of Tunis El Manar. The Project was officially launched in November 2019.[1]

The MIGRANTS Project is a consortium of academic partners and NGOs. It consists of the University of Tunis El Manar, the University of Tunis, the University of Manouba, the University of Westminster, the University of Granada, and the University of Palermo as a leader of the Project. The network was selected on the basis of consolidated cooperation and the guarantee of a broader spectrum based on interdisciplinarity and expertise in the field of

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1   Within this project, another volume is about to be published, edited by Serena Marcenò and Giulia Sajeva, *Migrations: Governance, Policies and Rights*. The goal of this volume is precisely to show the limits and inadequacy of current interventions, and to identify, as in the case of the Global Compact (signed in Morocco in December 2018), inclusive strategies respecting human rights and international law, and safeguarding global security.

migration. Taking into consideration the international dimension of the Project and the global spectrum of the issue of migration, a whole network of associations, NGOs, and international agencies and stakeholders involved with migrants or dealing with migration issues has been involved in the Project. COSPE, UNIMED, and CLEDU are the non-academic partners who have supported their academic partners within the Project by providing expertise and practical know-how.

The main objective of MIGRANTS Project, which will conclude in September 2023, is to integrate the teaching of migration studies and improve the quality of Tunisian higher education and enhance its relevance for the labour market and society in order to support its capacities in local, international cooperation, and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration. MIGRANTS Project's specific objective was to design a Master's Degree in Migration Studies: Governance, Policies, and Cultures in Tunis.

In this degree, students obtain a range of high-level competencies that revolve around multi-dimensional analyses of migration and integration in a wide range of contexts, including the competence to understand the causes, patterns, and effects of international migration, to use both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as cultural analysis, conflict analysis, management, and administration. It is an interdisciplinary programme, offering students, and researchers, the opportunity to combine study and analysis of critical perspectives on migration studies with practical experience and fieldwork thanks to the network of partners such as international agencies, NGOs, and associations committed to migrants, displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees.

Part of the MIGRANTS Project, the Capacity Building and the preparations for the Master's Degree is the selection of six PhD students who work on migration studies to enroll in the partner universities: the Universities of Palermo, Westminister and Granada. The seventeen weeks of training offered by European Professors and experts from September 2020 to May 2021 and devoted to the twenty Tunisian professors, from different disciplines, involved in designing and teaching the Master's Degree in Migration Studies are one of the biggest achievements/challenges of the programme, especially that most of the training was done online due to the

pandemic. Three Summer Schools have also been organized in the context of MIGRANTS: the first one, titled "Connecting coasts, crossing borders: Current trends in migration research and methodological challenges" took place at the University of Granada from 16 to 30 July 2022; the second was held at the University of Westminster from 05 to 13 September 2022, it was a unique opportunity to share ideas and perspectives on issues related to migration, its management and representation; the third one, titled "After the last frontiers", was held in Palermo from 09 to 20 July 2023. The summer schools offer a very significant practical side through the job shadowing activities: Professors and PhD students visit NGOs who work very closely with migrants and refugees. In this way and away from books and academia, they can see with their own eyes how migrants experience reality. One of the main objectives of the Project has been to address the issue of migration outside the logic of emergency and improve cooperation to face the challenges of international migration.

All these experiences have raised many reflections, discussions and research practices that now converge in this volume. The themes that are central to migration studies and cultural studies are presented starting again from a bottom-up approach. In fact, through observations made both in fieldwork, literary criticism, visual culture and cinema studies, the contributions collected here analyse issues such as representation and self-representation, the agency of the storytelling, the victimization and criminalization of migrants, border crossing and the porosity of borders, the cultural practices of meeting and sharing traditions, nationalities, identities. The main intention is to lead the discussion to a shared debate that brings together in this volume the studies of expert researchers with the work of young and promising scholars in the field.

1. *A theoretical framework*

Migration has generally been a concern for disciplines that study the causes and the impact of human movement mainly in economic, political, and ultimately social spheres. It might then come as a surprise that in recent years there has been an increasing

interest in the topic from the cultural studies perspective, where a fascination for the correlation between migration, politics, and culture has been developed, leading to truly interdisciplinary outcomes.

Rather than a historicist approach interested in the origins and development of certain social and cultural expressions, cultural studies are engaged with the analysis of specific sociocultural contexts and their constitution, as well as with a critical sensitivity to what is 'conjunctural' and contextual – especially regarding tensions, contradictions, and crises. Within this framework, migration studies – with their interest in forms of regulation and management, control, and resistance practices – have become an essential platform to update the conceptual categories but also to highlight the "contested terrain" of contemporary cultural studies. As a field of study interested in "how power operates through the pores of everyday life" (McRobbie, 2020), cultural studies pose fundamental questions in relation to the "ordinary" (Williams, 1958) experience of people on the move, valuing the importance of representing this ordinariness as part of a larger discussion preoccupied with the management, regulation, economic and political implications of their movement.

The use of language, discourse, and the production of collective meaning has also been crucial to the debate over migration studies that intersects with cultural and post-colonial studies. Here we can include two examples: the first is in connection with the media's production of negative images of migrants fluctuating between race and security, thus engendering moral panic. The second is related to the politics and policies of exclusion and containment in media and political discourses through the categorisations of 'migrants' and 'refugees' which "fail to capture these complex and messy social realities" (Crawley, Skleparis 2018, 50), and this is what may happen to the migrants throughout the migration process.

Various publications in the last two decades have engaged with aspects of cultural, artistic, and mediatic implications that relate to the phenomenon of migration. A common denominator of these contributions has been the concern to confront the structural and regimented narratives and gazes around migration, mainly those

performed by governmental and mass-mediatic discourses, through the analysis of practices that aim at reversing the strategies of visibilities/invisibilities, especially at the level of representation.

These practices have been produced through various media including art, social networks, film, literature, and other platforms digging into aspects of the social dimension as these were not deemed able to carry the moral weight of the canon before the establishment of cultural studies (McRobie, 2020).

Applied to contexts of migration, cultural studies have therefore offered an alternative gaze that implies a different look at migratory movements and conflicts in terms that prioritise the subjective practices, desires, expectations, and behaviors of migrants themselves. One important aspect of this new approach to the study of human movement has been the valuing of representations that are not necessarily filtered or adapted by and for a European and more generally 'Western' public but rather those that reflect first-hand understandings of the complicated web of securitisation of borders and violation of human rights. This unfiltered gaze comes with a production of discourses aiming at resisting, subverting, and reframing old colonialist patterns that relegate the people on the move to the margins of categories of vulnerability and immobility. The self-determination of migrants, their choice to often breach borders for the sake of affirming their individuality, has been defined by many migration studies scholars as "autonomy of migration" (Mezzadra, 2011; Papadopolous et.al. 2013). This approach sees migration as a creative force and recognises that migrants are individualscapable of resisting control, exerting agency and playing a central role in making borders more and more porous. These counter-narratives have found in cultural expressions their ideal platforms. This idea has been recently confirmed by Marco Martiniello: "The lens of arts and culture acknowledges migrants' agency. In other words, it helps to "rehumanize" migrants, who are too often "dehumanized" and reduced to statistics in current debates and policies" (Martiniello 2022, 10).

Issues of race, gender, class, space, community, language, memory, and identity are at the centre of this new preoccupation with migration. This volume intends to contribute to and expand this current debate by subverting the logic of representation and

advancing a knowledge of migration that goes beyond the mere management of a crisis. What counts in this act of reframing is all those aspects that constitute culture and the ability to assert acts of citizenship, that put the migrant struggles under a magnifying glass:

> We define acts of citizenship as those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through creating new sites and scales of struggles. (Isin 2008, 39)

Publications resulting from this "alternative" gaze include the collection of essays, *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art- Making* (2007) that investigate the impact of migration on artistic production through the concept of 'migratory aesthetics'. Coined by Mieke Bal, this concept points to the urgency of initiating a conversation about the aesthetic potential of the migratory experience to inform future contributions on the topic. The study of the correlation between aesthetics and politics had already been at the centre of a series of works by French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2009, 2010), where he argues that the role of politics should be to reconfigure the distribution and redistribution of places and identities, spaces and times, visibility and invisibility. Rancière defines this as a 'distribution of the sensible' that challenges the a priori laws which condition what is possible to see and hear, to say and think, to do and make. The distribution of the sensible is literally the condition that opens up the possibility for perception, thought, and activity, all that is possible to apprehend by the senses. In this context, art is seen by Rancière as an effective way to change existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation, and to build new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective.

Earlier on Edward Said drew on the connection between migratory movements, be it exile, migration, or expatriation, and the constitution of Western cultures. The culture of Western metropoles has been made of the works of exile, émigrés, and expatriates. For Said, exile is not "a condition of terminal loss,"

but rather a "potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture" (Said 2000, 174).

More recent contributions to this debate include *The Culture of Migration: Politics, Aesthetics and Histories*, published in 2015. The book looks at the politicised dimensions of migration and the power of the arts to provide spaces in which identities and meanings can merge and be understood across differences; *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections* (2017) and the more recent *Border Images, Border Narratives* (2022), take as their starting point the interdisciplinary field of border studies to provide a theoretical grounding for an aesthetic and cultural understanding of borders, while *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion* (2019) explores how activist and art forms have become a platform for subverting the dominant narrative of migration, generating a vital form of political dissent, by revealing the contradictions and paradoxes of the securitarian regime that regulates immigration into Europe. This list of contributions is by no means comprehensive and is growing by the hour. Edited volumes, monographs, special issues, journal articles, and less traditional publications on the interconnectedness between migration studies and cultural studies are strengthening the idea that these two fields of studies have much to offer to promote the idea that cultural expressions by and for the people on the move are producing knowledge and understanding that are otherwise lost between and hidden among trivial accounts of crises fuelled by ideas of sovereignty and internal order.

The goal of this volume is precisely to explore the intersections between these two fields of study, opening more cracks and proposing new ideas, themes, and approaches that speak to the varied field of migration studies, starting from the approach of cultural studies and post-colonial studies. By doing so, we will contribute to opening up visibilities and trajectories invisible in other discourses and narratives. The contributions collected here assume, in fact, different points of view not only concerning the disciplines involved and the methodologies adopted but also the addressed spatial and temporal contexts that have much to offer.

2. *Structure and Contributions*

The volume opens with a chapter by Valeria Cammarata, *Narrating Palestinian Lives Through Phototexts. The Case of Edward W. Said*. It is dedicated to the concept of "narration" and (self-)representation of the Palestinian question proposed by Edward W. Said in the phototext *After the Last Sky* (1986) edited together with photographer Jean Mohr. Even before this endeavour, the writer and the photographer had dedicated other works to issues related to migration, exile, the diaspora, and their forms of political and cultural representation. Their encounter and the phototextual genre they have chosen allow them to achieve a triple objective. First of all their work demonstrates how experiences of diaspora, forced migration, and resettlement in a land that is both native and foreign, impact people's everyday life and cultural identity. Secondly, it demonstrates how the Palestinian cause can act as a "laboratory" in which issues such as those linked to citizenship, border crossing, belonging, and return are questioned and re-interpreted in a different paradigm. Finally, they show how the genre of phototext is not only valid as a literary and cultural form but as a real "structural homology" in which form and substance are closely connected and mutually influencing.

Along the path proposed by Said, the second chapter by Hend ben Mansour, *Humanitarian Orientalism and Photography of Migrant Women,* mediates between the cultural studies and the visual culture disciplines, applying the concept of "Orientalism" and the critical approaches to the photographic representations of migrant subjects. In particular, ben Mansour makes a comparison between an "orientalistic" and a "humanitarian" approach to photographic representation. Concerning the first approach, the case of the colonialist postcards representing "odalisques" has been studied, raising questions such as scopophilic pleasure, ethnographic intentionality, otherness, and submissiveness. As far as "humanitarian photography" is concerned, the case of the representation of the Yemeni migrants, situation done by IOM's Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa on its website on the occasions of some "successful" humanitarian aid projects in the region has been analysed. The photographs used by IOM,

taken by the female photographer Elham Al-Oqabi, demonstrate how an Orientalistic and colonialistic point of view is still adopted, articulating a visual regime of victimisation and feminisation.

The chapter *"Imagined Camps and Constructed Migrants": Biopolitics and Unauthorised Migration in Ivor Rawlinson's Tunisian Dreams*, by Samira Mechri, applies a cultural studies approach to an examination of Rawlinson's novel *Tunisian Dreams* (2012). The novel, referable to the genre of nightmare realism, stages the representation of unauthorised migration in Tunisia during Ben Ali's totalitarian regime from a diplomat's perspective. Even in this case the "literary pretext" let emerge many of the theoretical questions which "traditionally" occupy migration studies: the camp as a metaphor of sovereignty and violence but also as a heterotopia; the permeability of borders; solidarity and victimisation; unauthorised migration and forced migration. Representation and the denial/right/need to narrate is once again a main concern as far as the migrants remain speechless also because of that kind of humanitarianism that forces them in a protection regime and reduces their political agency.

This also applies to *'Symbolic Im-mobility', 'Semantic Dis-placements' and the Politics of unauthorised migration representation in Moroccan and Algerian mainstream Media* by Khaoula Zitouni. Here the issue of mainstream media representation of unauthorised migration in Morocco and Algeria is studied by means of the discourse and narrative analysis tools, especially in statements by public authorities and media agencies. It is not only a matter involving these two countries' security concerns but also the much-discussed issue of the EU externalisation of migration control. This chapter particularly addresses the constructions of unauthorised migrants' immobility, clandestinity and dehumanisation, but also the use of different tropes such as the *harga* (border runners/burners).

Monia Channoufi's *National Roots and Transnational Routes: A Case Study of the Tunisian Diaspora in Britain* deals with the concepts of communities, homeland, and belonging in diasporic identities. In recent studies these concepts have been challenged by a multiculturalist approach that highlights the negotiation among different affiliations. Participants in the field work, which is at the

base of this chapter, "maintain cultural repertoires and selectively deploy them while they skip from one sphere of belonging to another" (infra, p. 131).

In the final chapter, Rached Khalifa focuses on Tunisian migration film and fiction and the encounters between host and migrant subjectivities. He draws attention to the tensions of these encounters as manifested in images of sexual and gastronomic encounters. Contemporary Tunisian migration cinema and fiction are well aware of the allegorical significations of such issues as food and sex as political and cultural markers of identity and nationality. In his endeavour, Khalifa examines two Tunisian major works: Abdellatif Kechiche's film, *La Graine et le Mulet* (*The Secret of the Grain*) (2007) and Habib Selmi's novel *Al-Ishtiyaq ila al-Jarah* (*Longing for the Woman Next Door*) (2021). In *La Graine et le Mulet*, Kechiche subverts the clichéd image of the Maghrebian migrant and goes beyond the binaries of the self and the other, the "us" and the "them" and the French and the North Africans. In *Al-Ishtiyaq ila Al-Jarah,* the erotics of food and sex in a Maghrebian migrant context is centered on the metaphor of "couscous", a Tunisian traditional dish that has also become a symbol of transnationalism.

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VALERIA CAMMARATA[1]

NARRATING PALESTINIAN LIVES THROUGH PHOTOTEXTS
The Case of Edward W. Said

One of the main concerns of the interconnectedness between migration and cultural studies is the representation of the subjects involved in traumatic experiences such as forced migrations, diasporas, wars, climatic disasters. A particular focus is that on the agency of this representation, namely who tells the stories, to whom, on whose behalf? This is not a new question, but one that every critical approach to culture has always raised, from literary critics to media studies, from political philosophy to visual culture.

Starting with the intersection between literature and visual culture, this chapter addresses the representation of the Palestinian people's cultural identity through a specific genre in-between literature and photography: the phototext. In what follows *After the Last Sky. Palestinian Lives*, by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr (1986), will be analyzed as a case study that still has an impact on the critical discourse around cultural identity. Through the phototextual representation, Said and Mohr demonstrate the way in which dispossessions, resettlements and exile impact on the everyday life and the cultural identity of people. More importantly, this endeavor will also focus on the necessity for Palestinians of telling their own story, and of making that story heard. All these issues involve, though in different and specific ways, not only Palestinian lives, but those of all people suffering from the same processes.

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1. *Something that has not been said. Narration through phototexts*

The narrative genre of phototext, in which image and word divide or contend[2] the page, is one of those fields in which individual or epochal stories find free expression, because on these pages there are no rigorous distinctions between verbal and visual realms, between that of literature and that of photographic representation. In this condition of co-presence, neither of the two signs must necessarily prevail. Indeed, within the same narrative attempt, one finds in the other an opportunity to overcome one's own limits or even a complete canonization of these same limits. Photography can (sometimes) say what literature fails to show; literature can (sometimes) imagine what photography fails to trace. But it is precisely in the white space – which neither of the two kin arts manages to fill – that the most significant discourses of the phototext take place.

A little bit more than a hundred years of phototexts have taught us that these discourses fill quite the same gaps, those of memory or rather memories: lost memories, often never possessed memories, which cannot be found, only re-constructed through a narration that hand and eye make from their own exclusive point of view. It is not by chance that the classics of the phototextual genre arise from the failure of photo-journalistic projects: where objective and detached reportage has been found inadequate, artistic narration has taken space creating atlases, emblems or illustrations.[3]

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2   In his study of the photographic essay, W.J.T. Mitchell shows how the relationship between photograph and language can be shown as an invasion of the latter onto the former, a sort of absorption in actual usage. In fact, "this invasion might well provoke a resistance or […] there might be some value at stake in such a resistance, some real motive for a defence of the non linguistic character of the photograph" (Mitchell 1994, 283). As we shall see further, the issue of the invasion, the resistance, the border-crossing is particularly significant for *After the Last Sky*, both regarding form and content.

3   The atlas-form, the emblem-form and the illustration-form are the three modalities of the phototext, according to Michele Cometa: the atlas-form (in which reception prevails on the other aspects) is characterized by a widespread and multidirectional signification, it is typical, for example, of albums; the emblem-form (the most enigmatic) is that

Wright Morris, the inventor of the term phototext[4], starts from documentary photography in the years of the Great Depression that represented a great push and at the same time a great challenge to the photographic medium and to literary expression. But in his research both the literary word and the photographic image seem to lack the ability to convey the whole truth. Hence the need to conquer a new frontier of representation that combines the two media, seeking meanings that go beyond the visible surface, beyond memory itself. It is no longer a question of giving a credible trace of reality, or even of transmitting it to memory, but of creating new memories not through what belongs to us, rather through what does not belong to us. For Morris himself, on the other hand, photography is an image of that which no longer belongs to us, of that which we try to record at the very moment in which it is vanishing, an instant before it is lost (Morris, 1982). And literature is just another medium that mixes real and unreal memories, saving them from oblivion. Through the mind's eye, different but allied to that of the camera, images are no less significant but certainly less documentary. Between photography and literature, the phototext is a third hybrid, an unusual point of view, which interrupts everyday life, the "ordinary" through which we are used to experiencing the world. If commonly we look at photographs fleetingly, seeing only what we already know, literature imposes a contemplative pause on them by pointing out a detail in an object, a shadow in a landscape, a sign on a face, details that change the meaning of

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which, as in the iconotextual tradition, constructs the signification through an articulation in three parts (*inscriptio*, *pictura*, *subscriptio*); the illustration-form is in some way the opposite, the visualization of a text rather than the narrativization of an image. As Cometa points out, the three forms are almost never presented in pure form, on the contrary they are always combined in new ways within each new phototext. See M. Cometa, *Forme e retoriche del fototesto letterario*, in M. Cometa, R. Coglitore (a cura di), *Fototesti. Letteratura e cultura visuale*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2016, pp. 69-115.

4   "Phototext" is not to be taken as a unique and definitive term for the genre. Many others have been used, each highlighting a particular characteristic of this hybrid form: photographic novel (Jan Baetens); photo lyric (Paul Strand and Nancy Newhall); photo-essay (W.J.T. Mitchell).

the image. If while reading we "normally" let ourselves be carried away by the flow of the imagination, photography imposes a materializing pause on it, anchoring it for an instant in reality, breaking the surface of the page to demonstrate that what is said has existed, at least for someone, somewhere, somehow.

In this regard Mitchell underlines the character of incompleteness that both the photograph and the text assume in their meeting:

> Photographs […] seem necessarily incomplete in their imposition of a frame that can never include everything that was there to be, as we say, 'taken'. The generic incompleteness of the informal literary essay becomes an especially crucial feature of the photographic essay's relations of image and text. The text of the photo-essay typically discloses a certain reserve or modesty in its claims to 'speak for' or interpret the images; like the photograph, it admits its inability to appropriate everything that was there to be taken and tries to let the photographs speak for themselves or 'look back' at the viewer. (Mitchell 1994, 289)

As can be easily guessed, the history of phototext closely follows that of photography.[5] From the beginning of the twentieth century on, both media have witnessed the deepest traumas of the world (especially the western one) that have marked our way of looking at reality, life, history, the need and condemnation of memory. The phototext can be considered the offspring of the crisis of representation that ensued from it, as a staging of the unspeakable and unimaginable, or of their obliteration. The Great Depression, the two World Wars, Nazism and the Shoah, the different forms of twentieth-century terrorism, 9/11, the new forms of terrorism: these are the images that fill the pages of the phototexts, connected to each other in a sort of uninterrupted narrative, linking the private trauma to the collective one, demonstrating how it is repeated and re-enacted in each new chapter. Despite an irreducible diversity, each of these phototexts can be considered a collection of images (and words). If there is a common form in phototexts, this is in fact

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5   The first phototext can be considered the work of Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892).

that of the collection, or of the atlas: a non-linear, hypertextual narrative form in which the ordering eye is that of the reader-observer, in which the order of the discourse, built on nodes of meaning, can always be reviewed, reversed, reinvented. Here the certainties of chronology are broken and history is staged in its stratifications, the reference to other texts, to other media, to other images is continuous, paratext, appendices, technology take part in the narration. As a collection, the phototext is a personal, partial, subjective selection of significant elements, at least for the collector, that builds a personal universe of meaning, not necessarily in an immediate and referential relationship with the world from which, indeed, they try to separate.

The loss of referentiality is another fundamental characteristic of twentieth-century phototext: when history itself becomes incommunicable, unpronounceable, unacceptable, incomprehensible, the representation (whether verbal or visual) can no longer adhere to any referent and becomes elusive without giving up its narrative and memorial function. Stories, as well as memories, can no longer be objective or partial, they can no longer aspire to the document of truth. History can still be told, but now the details prevail over the general schemes, the small interstices over the large drawings, the personal memories, distorted by time or point of view, over "official accounts".

All these characteristics of the phototext convinced Said that this could be the form of narration for the Palestinian question, a form that he had been looking for throughout his life, throughout his work. Where the documentary reports, the journalistic accounts, the autobiographical narratives had failed to propose the Palestinian point of view in all its complexity, the phototext double vision could perhaps win the challenge of saying what no one had yet managed to show and tell:

> Let us use photographs and a text, we said to each other, to say something that hasn't been said about Palestinians. Yet the problem of writing about and representing – in all senses of the word – Palestinians in some fresh way is part of a much larger problem. For it is not as if no one speaks about or portrays the Palestinians […] We have all been there before, whether by reading about it, experiencing its millennial presence and power, or actually living there for periods

of time. It is a terribly crowded place, almost too crowded for what it is asked to bear by way of history or interpretation of history. (Said, Mohr 1985, 4)

As we shall see later in *After the Last Sky. Palestinian Lives*, Said and Mohr explore the plight of exiled Palestinians and try to provide a voice to those who have been deprived of their land and identity. The question of Palestine has been a subject of debate and controversy for decades, with thousands of people (Said among them) forced into exile due to political conflicts and social inequalities in the region. This phototext combines photography, text and socio-political analysis, documenting the daily life of Palestinians in exile, through the pictures taken by Mohr and the texts written by Said. It is a new way of reflecting on the question of Palestinian identity and on the complex dynamics of belonging and roots. Said and Mohr illustrate how the identity of exiled Palestinians is shaped by their forced migration status and subsequent experiences of exile. But this phototextual analysis is above all interested in the question of the representation of Palestinian lives, an issue that is still difficult to address today. No better way to narrate this story than the words of Mahmoud Darwish:

> Where should we go after the last frontiers?
> Where should the birds fly after the last sky?
> Where should the plants sleep after the last breath of air?
> We will write our names with scarlet steam.
> We will cut off the hand of the song to be finished by our flesh.
> We will die here, here in the last passage.
> Here and here our blood will plant its olive tree.

2. *Palestinian Lives Nowadays*

The reports from the Israeli-Palestinian battlefronts in the Gaza Strip during 2023 tell of increasingly intense fights that appear to be the worst since 2014. At the basis of the "new" conflict is an episode that has a fundamental rhetorical importance for both sides: the intervention of the Israeli police in the Al Aqsa mosque,

a place located on the esplanade of mosques which is considered of enormous religious (and identitarian) importance. The episode was nothing new: in fact, on May 6, 2021, Palestinian riots had already occurred in the same place against the decision of the Supreme Court of Israel to evict some Palestinian residents from Sheikh Jarrah,[6] a neighborhood in East Jerusalem. Following the riots and various international and supranational interventions (which allegedly led to the ceasefire), the Supreme Court of Israel decided to postpone the evictions.

Beyond the most recent developments the question of resettlements and dispossessions of Palestinian properties have been recurring themes in this conflict. Not only the evictions but also the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, considered illegal under international law, have continued to expand involving the appropriation of Palestinian lands and resources (Marcenò, 2005), leading to the displacement of Palestinian communities, but also the destruction of their homes particularly in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. From 1948 on – when more than 700,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes, expelled from their homeland or relocated to the territories of the new state of Israel, during the event known as the Nakba–[7] hundreds of villages have been destroyed and others have been subjected to acts of ethnic violence or of demographic engineering.

Some recent contributions in the field of migration studies[8]

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6   The Sheikh Jarrah area can be considered a microcosm of the Israeli-Palestinian disputes over the ownership of the territories and the right to inhabit them as residents, dating back to 1948. According to Ottoman records, the disputed land in Sheikh Jarrah was purchased by Jewish trustees in 1870. In 1956, the Jordanian government, in cooperation with UNRWA, housed 28 Palestinian refugee families with tenancy rights. After the Six Day War, the area became part of Israel's occupation. In 1972, the Israeli Depository General registered the properties under the aforementioned Jewish trustees, who demanded that the tenants pay rents (A. Qabaha, B. Hamamra 2001).

7   For a recent and interdisciplinary account of the Nakba "as a process and not as an event", see N. Abdo, N- Masalha, *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*, London, Zed Books, 2019.

8   For a general overview see at least: Amit, 2009; Amoruso, F., Pappé, I., Richter-Devroe, S. (2019); Avraham, E., Ketter, E. 2015; Mesch, G. S.

have moved from a post-colonial approach, still Euro-centric and normalizing, to one enriched by neoliberal critique, which has sought to understand the specificity of the Israeli-Palestinian question. Topics such as the incorporation of new Jewish immigrants, immigration and spatial/urban transformation, intra-community racialisation have been addressed. This new approach makes it possible to relate the issues of Palestinian displacement to the settler-colonial logic more specifically seen as a demographic engineering technique that has led to the exclusion of Palestinians from traditionally Arab places and the inclusion of "new Jewish integration". [9] An important indicator of this process is the impact that the Palestinian emigration and Jewish immigration have produced at the cities level, both from an architectural point of view and from the point of view of urban and tourism development policies. While some see these phenomena as a push toward multiculturalization and territorial improvement, some others see them as a source of economic discrimination, racial segregation and displacement (Blatman, Sabbagh-Khoury 2022).

These complex processes have produced what has eventually become constitutive of Palestinian identities the "two-sided" of Palestinian diaspora. In fact we have to distinguish between those dispersed abroad – especially in neighboring Arab countries, in Europe and North America, mostly belonging to a cultural and entrepreneurial elite (such as E. W. Said or the Shuman family, founder of the Arab bank) – and those resettled within the homeland but also in territories that have become Israeli – in some

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2002.

9   This double process of inclusion and exclusion moves within a double legislative provision, so to speak: the Law of Return (1950), which guarantees the right to receive Israeli citizenship and to settle in the territories that are under Israeli jurisdiction (including the territories of the West Bank) to those born to an Israeli mother or to those converted to Judaism; the Nationality Law or Citizenship Law (1952) which automatically attributes Israeli citizenship to those born in Israel to at least one Israeli parent, to naturalized non-Jews who have lived in Israel for at least three years and have renounced their previous nationality, to Jewish immigrants from other nationality (who do not need to renounce their previous nationality). At the same time, this law denies citizenship and the right of residence to Palestinians expelled after 1948.

way supported both economically, politically, and culturally by the Palestinians of the "external diaspora" (Qabaha, Hamamra 2001; Doraï 2002).

Not only expropriations and expulsions, but also control of resources, institutionalization of Israeli military control, facilitation of Jewish immigration (as we have already seen), the construction of the Separation Wall in West Bank[10] and, finally, the predominance of the pro-Israel narrative have led to a process of "othering" on the one hand and of dehumanization on the other. The process of "othering" has been expressed by Said in his fundamental essay on orientalism, within the concept of identity, a concept that is defined both by negation and by assertion:

> The construction of identity—for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction in my opinion—involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. Each age and society re-creates its 'Others'. (Said 1978, 332)

The process of dehumanization is the result of all those practices that deny the right to a Palestinian identity. It is as if, in the words of Noura Erakat, "[Israel] wants the land without the people and seeks to remain the sole source of authority from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea" (2021).[11] The concept of dehumanization has

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10   The West Bank Separation Wall, like all separation walls, is a form of segregation and apartheid. However this wall in particular does not only involve a restriction of movement, but also a displacement of the population and an annexation of territories that are still officially Palestinian, since the people living near the wall is threatened of being displaced for security reasons. In this regard Derek Gregory speaks of a "landscape of colonial modernity" which also manifests itself with the recent construction of roads and highways which would be configured as a de facto annexation of the territories reached. See Gregory Derek (2004), *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*, Maddem, MA*, Blackwell.*

11   N. Erakat,. 2021, *Beyond Discrimination: Apartheid is a Colonial Project and Zionism is a Form of Racism*, EJIL, 5 July 2021. https://www.ejiltalk.org/beyond- discrimination-apartheid-is-a-colonial-project-and-zionism-

now become a trope used not only in academic studies but also in "everyday" narratives and in Palestinian literature from Mahmoud Darwish to Raja Shehadeh. In *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* (1978), Darwish faithfully expresses the feeling of a Palestinian man, returning to his home village that he left in 1948, to find out that it is no longer his home and that there he is a "presence/absence"[12] (another trope now typical of Palestinian identity). His whole identity is called into question, so much that he wonders who he really is, if he really exists:

> You find out you're not a resident of Israel because you have no certificate of residence. You think it's a joke and rush to tell it to your lawyer friend: 'Here I'm not a citizen, and I'm not a resident. Then where and who am I?' You're surprised to find the law is on their side, and you must prove you exist. You ask the Ministry of the Interior, 'Am I here, or am I absent? Give me an expert in philosophy, so that I can prove to him I exist.' Then you realize that philosophically you exist but legally you do not. (Darwish 1973, 95)

3. *Competing Narratives*

There is no need to point out how contradictory and complex the matter is, which raises not only questions of territorial disputes and conflicting national aspirations, but also of deep historical grievances and, especially, competing narratives. It may be necessary and even useful to note how in recent years, albeit in different ways and degrees, even the staunchest supporters of Israeli policy have begun to detect an imbalance at least in the narration of the stories of the people who seem to have been

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is-a-form-of-racism/(date of last consultation May 2023).

12 The concept of presence/absence is fundamental to the complex and multifaceted identity of the Palestinian people. On the one hand it defines the absence of Palestinians forced into exile and diaspora (but also of the constant presence of their land within them), on the other their presence in a land that seeks to make them invisible. Unfortunately we do not have the space to discuss it here, but it will suffice to quote the fundamental text again by Mahmoud Darwish, *In the Presence of the Absence*, in which the great Palestinian poet identifies the concept not only as an identity but also as an instrument of resilience and resistance.

more affected by the human and the political consequences of this conflict.

In 2021 the US NGO Human Rights Watch published the report *A Threshold Crossed* in which it traces the actions of political, demographic and land control of the occupied Palestinian territories to the crimes of discrimination, apartheid and persecution:

> For the past 54 years, Israeli authorities have facilitated the transfer of Jewish Israelis to the OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territories) and granted them a superior status under the law as compared to Palestinians living in the same territory when it comes to civil rights, access to land, and freedom to move, build, and confer residency rights to close relatives. While Palestinians have a limited degree of self-rule in parts of the OPT, Israel retains primary control over borders, airspace, the movement of people and goods, security, and the registry of the entire population, which in turn dictates such matters as legal status and eligibility to receive identity cards.[13]

In some ways it is as if 2021 truly represents the crossing of a threshold in the (also mediatic) war between Israelis and Palestinians. In fact, it is not perhaps by coincidence that in the aftermath of the events of May 2021 and the HRW report some of the most important US newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, began to change their perspective and focus on the lives and bodies of Palestinians that seem to start mattering.

Beyond the media and political narrative, in the 2000s new

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13   *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, available at https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/ threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution (accessed May 2023): "The term apartheid has increasingly been used in relation to Israel and the OPT, but usually in a descriptive or comparative, non-legal sense, and often to warn that the situation is heading in the wrong direction. In particular, Israeli, Palestinian, US, and European officials, prominent media commentators, and others have asserted that, if Israel's policies and practices towards Palestinians continued along the same trajectory, the situation, at least in the West Bank, would become tantamount to apartheid. Some have claimed that the current reality amounts to apartheid. Few, however, have conducted a detailed legal analysis based on the international crimes of apartheid or persecution."

attempts to narrate and counter-narrate such a complex and controversial topic arose. On the cinematographic and documentary side, the matter has been addressed from different points of view and in different ways. Many of these, for example choose the particular views of common people's everyday life, especially those of children and young adults, whether they are Palestinian or Israeli. It is the case of *Promises* (2001), by Carlos Bolado, Justine Shapiro and B.Z. Goldberg, a documentary that tells the stories of seven children, both Palestinian and Israeli, who have been living in the West Bank region and in the Israeli surroundings of Jerusalem over a period of five years, from 1995-2000, right up until the second Intifada. By using both of the original languages, the documentary highlights the complexity of the conflict. Similarly *Five Broken Cameras* (2011), a documentary by the Palestinian director Emad Burnat and the Israeli director Guy Davidi, embraces a Palestinian perspective on the construction of the Israeli separation. The narration follows for five years the life of Burnat himself in correspondence with the raising of the separation wall in the Palestinian city of Bil'in. *The Other Son* (2012), by the French filmmaker Lorraine Lévy, tells the dramatic story of two boys, one Israeli and one Palestinian, separated at birth, showing how the question of identity and belonging can affect individuals, families, and communities. Finally *Junction 48* (2016) by the American-Israeli director Udi Aloni, tells the love story between two young Palestinian hip-hop dancers, a boy and a girl, who use their art to fight against both the Israeli oppression and that of their own conservative community.

Other movies address specific historical moments that have been decisive within the general conflict. They go from the very popular *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) by Ari Folman – an animation movie that deals with war traumas, memory and guilt through the director's personal research into the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in 1982– to *The Wanted 18* (2014), by the Palestinian visual artist Amer Shomali and the Canadian director Paul Cowan – who through an animated documentary tell the story that really happened during the first Intifada, of a dairy farm in the Palestinian village of Beit Sahour and their 18 cows whose autonomous milk production was

declared a "threat to Israel's national security" –, or to *The Oslo Diaries* (2018) directed by Mor Loushy and Daniel Sivan – a chronicle of the secret peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1990s.[14] It is also interesting to observe the way of representation and of narration from the Israeli part, for example as in *The Gatekeepers* (2012), by Dror Moreh, that by providing a unique perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from six former heads of the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service, explores the moral dilemmas and controversies surrounding Israeli security policy;[15] or in *The Settlers* (2016) by the Israeli director Shimon Dotan, that explores the Jewish community living in the West Bank nearly fifty years after Israel's decisive victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. The storytelling is focused on the controversies of communities that, through their expansion, continue to exert a great influence on the socio-political life of the region.

In recent years, many artists have also used painting, drawing, performance or video installations to depict the suffering and struggle of Palestinian refugees, spanning from "global" to regional accounts. From the well-known Bansky – with his numerous graffiti in West Bank and Gaza or the provocative Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem or even the "tourism promotion video" *Make this the Year You Discover a new Destination* (2015), – to Taysir Batniji, that focuses on portraying the individual and collective experiences and challenges of Palestinians in works such as the different *Self-portraits* (2000), *Gaza Walls* (2001), the intimate and familiar video *Notes on Displacement* (2022), or Khaled Jarrar – who wants to highlight the issue of sovereignty,

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14   The documentary also features one of the last interviews with Simon Peres before his death.

15   The movie has aroused a wide debate in Israel both in political circles and civil society among those who represent a majority, consider it as a positive representation of Israeli democracy, and those who want to see it as a denunciation of some methods of the government. The director himself considers this a changing experience which made him more pessimistic about a solution of the conflict with the Palestinians, and believes that the rulers, both Palestinian and Israeli, lack the will to solve the problem.

border regime and anti-border condition in projects such as *Live and Work* (from 2011).

This necessarily brief account of the recent literature from various genres and different perspectives opens the way for several questions: Who should tell the story? Where to start? What tools, media and approaches should be deployed to make the narratives vivid and reliable? What about subjectivity, objectivity, neutrality, "truthtelling"? What role do images and phototexts play in these deontological contexts? And what are the right means to make the narration vivid and trusty? Is there any significant "objective" way to testify or should we better refer to subjective accounts of such a story? And further can the "political" justify the violence that images not only show but also do?

These questions recur every now and then when ethics are at stake, when there is silence and muffling of the everyday suffering of the Palestinians. Ways of telling and narrating the traumatic stories of abuse, war, migration, destitution, and crises are inevitable to expose the cruelty of the powerful, in this case the Israeli authorities. The issue of ethics and its undertaking in photography, visual culture and cultural studies has been taken on board by Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). In this fundamental text the history of photography is seen as a veritable struggle between beauty – a legacy of its origins in the fine arts – and truth – a legacy of its origins in science – as well as an ethical sense of storytelling – a legacy of nineteenth-century literature and of the latest journalism profession. Free from the slowness of the pictorial medium, the photographer can stage a new way of seeing that reconciles the desire for truth about the world with the wonder that can be found in it. But when it comes to framing war scenes, what truth, what beauty can be shown and, therefore, seen? We are used to seeing beauty in a painted war scene, but it is much more difficult to accept seeing photographs of tragedies in light of beauty. Yet, says Susan Sontag "a landscape of devastation is still a landscape. There is beauty in ruins" (Sontag 2003, p. 74). In these cases, however, it seems more appropriate to refer these photographs to the category of the surreal: "a breathless euphemism behind which the discredited idea of beauty found shelter" (Sontag 2003, ibidem). In short, although it seems

acceptable that disaster photography carries within itself the dual character of documentary and work of art, it also seems that the latter should never prevail over the former, since the purpose of this kind of images must be to push the viewer to move (or at least to think of moving) against the filmed events, and not to be enraptured by what is shown. However, if it is true that we can get used to terrifying images or we can decide to avert our gaze, it is also true that spectacular, admirably composed, beautiful images – such as those of Salgado, analysed by Susan Sontag – can push us to

> believe that the sufferings and misfortunes represented are too great, ineluctable, epic for it to be possible to think of changing their course with targeted political interventions. Faced with a subject conceived on this scale, compassion can only waver and become abstract. (Sontag 2003, p. 77)

The question cannot be resolved by a choice or a compromise between ethics and aesthetics. Instead, it implies questions concerning the possibility of contributing to the construction of memory and history starting from the point of view of the subalterns.

4. *The Right to Narrate*

How then could Palestinians reach a non-subaltern voice? How could they try to involve their own narration in a mainstream way? How can the complexity of their identities be addressed? How can all this be represented? And, mostly, who has the right to do that? These questions have been addressed several times, though different events which take part in this story, from the 1948 "green line", to the invasion of Lebanon, from the Six-Day-War to the most recent economic, political, military facts.

Edward W. Said has raised these questions in different ways: as a member of the aforementioned Palestinian diaspora – and as a consultant for UN and, equally important, as a prominent exponent of the cultural studies and a writer. One could say that all of Said's work, from *Orientalism* (1978) to *Covering Islam* (1981), from

Culture and Imperialism (1993) to his own autobiography *Out of Place* (1999), has provided a critical perspective on the issue by addressing Western and Eastern politics, colonial discourses, cultural identity and representation. However two of his writings, in particular, seem to be relevant in the context of this chapter because of the way in which he tries to make the reader aware of the complex history, culture and identity of Palestinian people, while addressing the way in which these issues are narrated by media and books.

The Question of Palestine (1979) has been written between 1977 and 1978, in the aftermath of significant events for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as the election of Menachem Begin as head of the Israeli government, the Camp David accords, the Coastal Road massacre, the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the UN resolution 425 which called for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. While all these events enter Said's essay, his main intent goes beyond the contemporary issues. As Said himself states, this is certainly a political essay for its attempt to present to the reader (mainly the American reader who is immediately questioned since the introduction) the matter (which he calls "our matter") "not as something watertight and finished, but as something to be thought through, tried out, engaged with-in short, as a subject to be dealt with politically" (Said 1979, XV). The issue is little-known and also little-appreciated, says Said, who tries to present it as broadly as possible, dealing with the uniqueness of Palestinian history. Although the history of the Palestinian people has ancient origins, it is from the early 1880s that it undergoes the first of many decisive turning points, with the first arrival of Zionist settlers on the shores of the country.[16] From this moment Said begins to tell a much larger history of weakness and failings, of a "remarkable resilience and a most remarkable national resurgence" (Said 1979, X), and of the construction of a (new) political identity, of a "Palestinian idea" uniting people who are geographically dispersed and fragmented. The point of view adopted by Said is not that of a detached observer, nor of

16   The other decisive event occurred, as we have seen, in 1948 with the Nakba.

a personal testimony or even the point of view of an expert. It is
more precisely the account of realities experienced throughout his
life, from his Palestinian childhood to his long and perilous exile,
"grounded in a sense of human rights and the contradictions of
social experience, couched as much as possible in the language of
everyday reality" (Said 1979, XV).

It is worth noting how the theme of representation is fundamental
for addressing the question of Palestine. In fact, according to
Said, liberal discourse, especially American, is characterized by a
hegemonic coalescence of the Western vision and what he defines as
Israeli-Zionist.[17] Beyond the reasons that underlie this identification,
most interesting are the results. In fact, Said demonstrates how at
least since 1967 most of the public speeches and American media
coverage have maintained a line of representation of the issue
based on two elements: on the one hand, the representation of
the Palestinian people as non-people, or even bad people (dealing
with the stereotypes of decadence and inferiority, or as terrorists,
extremists, at best refugees); and the representation of Zionism as
the triumph of reason and Western ideals. As an example of this, Said
cites the way in which the most important American newspapers,
such as the *New York Times*, have presented the Israeli occupation of
the West Bank and the Gaza strip as a model for future cooperation
between Arabs and Jews. But what is even more interesting for the
author of *Orientalism* is to see how, both in journalistic articles and
in the reports of prominent writers visiting Israel, the Palestinians
are never called to speak first person of their matter. So it happens
that during the war of 1973 the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*
holds a weekly column on the subject. But if an Israeli witness is
always called to represent the Israeli cause, for the Palestinian cause
the floor is assigned to a Western expert on "Arab issues". The
same happens in Saul Bellow's account of his trip to Jerusalem, *To
Jerusalem and Back* (1976). When Bellow expresses concern about
the fate of Palestinians living in the occupied territories and about

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17   Said points out that the term "hegemonic" is taken from Gramscian
      analysis: "in elaborating one of its meanings, Gramsci assigned the
      notion of consent to *hegemony;* in other words, there is hegemony not
      by mere domination but by consent, acquiescence" (Said 1979, 37).

the "possible" violation of human rights due to the Israeli military occupation, the reinsurance does not come from a Palestinian voice, but once again from that of a non-Palestinian "expert".[18] According to Said the same issue is typical of the phenomenon of Orientalism, when an "orientalist" expert believes he can speak on behalf of the natives and primitive societies he has studied, denoting with his presence the absence of the subjects in question, "so too the Zionists spoke to the world on behalf of the Palestinians" (Said 1979, 39).

The American media attitude to speak on behalf of someone else, on behalf of another People not only produces effects of misrepresentation and misunderstanding but also and primarily results in the exclusion of some identities in political, cultural even popular discourses. This is why, in Said's view, there will be no solution to the Palestinian question until the Palestinians themselves take the floor. But taking the floor does not only mean having representation in local or supranational institutions,[19] above all it means starting to redraw one's identity, to rewrite one's own story. This rewriting should follow a precise narrative order, with a beginning (1948, according to Said) and an end to be carefully decided, to make the Palestinian voice circulate, unclear meaning, needs rephrasing, vocabulary and structure. As Hayden White posed it in *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality* (1980): "narrative in general, from the folk tale to the novel, form

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18	However, Said also considers those (few) who speak out in defense of the Palestinian cause or who, at least, express some perplexity about the certainty of the judgment on Israel. One of these is Noam Chomsky author, among other things that we will see later, of an article in open controversy with Saul Bellow, entitled *What Every American Should Believe* (Chomsky, 1976).

19	Already at the time when Said wrote there were many investigations and resolutions by governmental and non-governmental bodies such as the UN, the Red Cross, Amnesty International, even the Israeli League for human rights, but none of these had managed to get out of the "places of power" and make inroads in the Western, especially in the American media and, therefore, in public opinion. See for example the "Profile of the Palestinian People", a document commissioned during the International Conference of the United Nations in 1983 (moved from Paris to Geneva!), engaging a group of experts which included also Said, which has never been approved.

annals to the fully realized "history", has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority" (White, 1980). In this article, that has now become a classic, White also theorizes that narrative is not just one of the many codes used by human beings to make sense of the world, but it is a real meta-code through which it is possible to transmit a transcultural message, and therefore also a memory,[20] on a shared experience. When we tell a story or a history we not only make a copy of the facts, but we also create a substitute for meaning. From this point of view, the absence of a narrative ability acquires equal importance and, even more, the refusal of a narration that ends up producing an absence or a refusal of meaning. This is why the development of the ability to narrate is closely connected with the development of a historical awareness, linked in turn to the interest in social system

> which is nothing other than a system of human relationships governed by law [which] creates the possibility of conceiving the kinds of tensions, conflicts, struggles, and their various kinds of resolutions that we are accustomed to find in any representation of reality presenting itself to us as a history. (White 1980, 17)

From these intricate connections also derive other characteristics of the historical narration such as: the purpose of moralization, i.e. the identification of reality with the social system of reference; the theme of authority, i.e. the desire to represent (both through cultural and political actions) the facts as they are "legitimately" established (the "right to narrate" derives from this); the questionability of the events, i.e. the fact that they can be told differently. Authority and questionability are, according to White, closely connected. In fact, for an event to be considered historical it must have produced at least two narratives, otherwise there would be no reason for the historian to assume the responsibility and the authority to tell "the reality of things".[21]

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20   White stresses that the reality of facts does not reside in that they happen, but in that they are remembered and ordered in a chronological sequence, or that they are recorded (White 1980, 23).

21   White's essay just quoted has not only a critical but also a "historical value". In fact, it was published in a monographic issue of Critical

It is not by coincidence that Hayden White's article, which in some way marks the transition from narratology to the narrative turn, is the basis of the other significant article by Said I have mentioned before: *The Permission to Narrate*. This article builds on Israel in Lebanon, a publication that is the result of the international commission of jurists led by Sean MacBride to investigate international law violations committed by Israel during the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Said's attention is not so much directed to the report itself, although he recognizes its documentary importance, but to the fact that it had no appreciable effect either on public discourse or on Western public opinion. At the basis of this disinterest, this hostility in Said's words, especially of the state and most of the American nation, there is the very existence of a history, an actuality and an aspiration for self-determination of the Palestinian people, who have been usually described as rejectionist and terrorists. In truth, it has not always been like this. In fact, between the 1970s and the early 1980s, a certain international consensus had been raised by the Palestinian question, and by the movement that sought to reconstruct a common narrative and a historical account on the origin and solution of the catastrophe for the Palestinian people. It was a question of resisting competing narratives that instead claimed that a Palestinian people did not historically exist, that they had no common identity and, therefore, no rights as a nation. The Palestinian national movement began to propose a different type of narrative, based on the alienation, the return and the division of the territory between the two peoples, but neither Israel nor the West have in fact ever accepted this story. As Said could note during his work as an observer at the United

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Inquiry, the University of Chicago journal directed from 1979 to 2020 by W.J.T. Mitchell, the father of visual culture. The autumn 1980 issue was titled "On Narrative" and it recorded the proceedings of an important conference held at the University of Chicago the previous year. The conference as well as the volume collects the positions and oppositions of a particularly illustrious group of philosophers, literary critics, psychologists, art historians, anthropologists and writers, gathered to discuss the narrative "under the rubric the Illusion of Sequence", as says Mitchell himself. In addition to Mitchell and White and among others, the volume hosts essays by Roy Scafer, Jaques Derrida, Frank Keriode, Nelson Goodman, Seymour Chatman, Victor Turner, Paul Ricoeur, Ursula K. Le Guin.

Nations, the existence of the Palestinian people, i.e. the narrative of
its history as White would say, poses a double problem, not only in
the well-known Israeli context but also in the Arab context. Here,
the story of the Palestinians dispersed in the Arab neighboring
countries ran the risk of questioning the Arab collective narrative
and assumed a "liberal and Western" point of view. In short, an
uncomfortable story everywhere, a people always "out of place".
Yet, Said says, these people have their own responsibility for failing
to affirm their own history or, at least, to contest that of the others,
for failing to build an archive of all the events that over a century
have built their historical identity as something more than "non-
Jewish". Not everything is lost, however, and even from the archive
of an absence, from the archive of gaps, one can still start. With this
idea in mind, Edward Said met the photographer Jean Mohr.

5. *No Captions Allowed*

It was in 1983 when Edward W. Said, then a member of the
International Conference on the Question of Palestine (ICQP),
proposed to organize a photographic exhibition in the hall of the
United Nations Office in Geneva. He eventually proposed Jean Mohr
as photographer, a militant who he had already met personally and
intellectually together with John Berger to whom he was bound by a
long artistic, political friendship and partnership. Mohr, who already
possesses a very rich archive of "Palestinian" photographs,[22] accepted

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22   Mohr travelled to the Middle East for the first time in 1949, as part of
     an activist team on behalf of Palestinian refugees, taking care of food
     distribution, setting up schools and camps, taking a census. He would then
     return to Israel and the West Bank many times until 1979, the year of his
     last visit before meeting Said. Thirty years after the first time, the month-
     long journey is probably the most traumatic: "The situation of Palestinians,
     far from improving, has deteriorated even more. In the camps, the tents
     have been replaced by huts in which the refugees freeze in winter and
     suffocate in summer. A new generation is born: but with what future, what
     hope? The Israeli are not solely to blame, we are all guilty. Myself too for
     having tried to forget the fate of the Palestinians for thirty years with the
     fallacious excuse that the outrages carried out by the most extreme among
     them were in no case justifiable" (Said, Mohr 1985, 8).

immediately and willingly, and set off on a mission sponsored by the UN. In the meantime, however, the writer's project suffered setbacks: the exhibition could obviously have been held, provided, however, that the photographs were not accompanied by words. After a series of confused official replies and difficult bureaucratic procedures, Said obtained permission to accompany the photographs just with the names of the places where they were taken. Some member states, in fact, feared that Said would have used uncomfortable words. He later discovered that the opposition had come from some Arab member states:

> Palestine to them was useful up to a point – for attacking Israel, for railing against Zionism, imperialism, and the United States, for bewailing the settlement and expropriation of Arab land in the Occupied Territories. Beyond that point, when it came to the urgent needs of Palestinians *as people*, or to the deplorable conditions in which many Palestinians live in Arab countries as well as in Israel, lines had to be drawn. (Said, Mohr 1985, 3)

The whole story convinced Said that not only the exhibition had to be done, but that an even more incisive and powerful way had to be found to tell the lives of the Palestinians as a people. As we have already seen in the previous sections, it was (and still is) not a matter of telling a story, but many complicated stories, made up of dispossession, exile, dispersion. Said needed to find a form that was unconventional, hybrid, fragmentary. Not an objective book, nor a subjective one, a book written by four hands, and with a double vision.

The term "double vision" contains a multiplicity of meanings on a multiplicity of levels. The vision of the book is double primarily because it is divided between photography and writing. However, each of them has its own "duplicity": Said's text is sometimes in a supplementary relationship to the images (in the form of commentary, mediation, reflection), other times in an independent relationship (political criticism, history of Palestine, autobiographical stories); the same thing happens with Mohr's photographs, sometimes in an "illustrative" relationship to the texts (when "showing" a concept expressed by Said's text), sometimes independent and unexplained (even with an

ironic counterpoint role). Duplicity is also between the gaze of Said, a Palestinian-American (somehow an insider), and the gaze of Mohr, a Swiss German (somehow an outsider). But then, Said's point of view is itself dual: just as the gaze of every exile, both insider and outsider, near and far, stranger and familiar. Moreover, the vision of every Palestinian is double: non-Jew in Israel; non-Arab in Arab countries; "terrorist"; refugee. This dualism cannot and must not be reduced to a unity, and it is precisely for this reason that the form of the phototext is the most congenial (Mitchell 1994, 313). More precisely, Mitchell speaks of photographic essays, that is, those "which contain strong textual elements, where the text is most definitely an "invasive" and even domineering element […] whose text is concerned, not just with the subject matter in common between the two media, but with the way in which the media address that subject matter" (Mitchell 1994, 286). Mitchell underlines that the work of Said and Mohr maintains a very particular relationship with its form,[23] because that of the phototext is a form that also becomes content as it "resists" the reduction of the question of Palestine to a political question, rather opening it to an ethical and aesthetic reflection: "the two lenses of this book are writing and photography, neither understood abstractly or generically but as constructions of specific histories, places and displacements" (Mitchell 1994 316).

Thus, moving more specifically to the form, to the "materiality" of the phototext, the work of Said and Mohr can be traced back to the atlas form, i.e. to the one which, as we have seen in the previous pages, is characterized by a widespread and multidirectional signification. The rhetoric of the layout is also very significant and seems to be a real syntax that arranges and articulates the different chapters, the different stories and consequently the different forms of interaction between word and image. Sometimes, for example, the photographs are framed and detached form the text, sometimes they are without

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23   Although there is no room here to deepen the question, it is interesting to note how this strict, significant connection between the content of the work and its form in the photographic essay could be attributed to a particular kind of relationship between image and text, that of the structural homology.

margins, as if it had crossed the borders between image and text (Mitchell, Said, 1984).[24]

The atlas-form, the fine rhetoric of the layout(s), the strict connection with the form allow Said and Mohr to raise issues that still after nearly forty years are the main concerns in migration studies, such as those of border crossing, vulnerability, criminalization.

As we have already seen, the question of the boundaries between image and text and the porosity of this boundary is fundamental in all phototexts, but in *After the Last Sky* it acquires an even deeper meaning. In fact, it allows Said and Mohr to move continuously from the rhetorical and aesthetic dimension to the political one, both at the level of the people and at the level of the person. As a first instance this issue places the two authors of the work in an unequal relationship in terms of mobility: in fact, as a member of the Palestinian National Council, Said cannot enter Israel, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. While Mohr, a Swiss citizen, has access to those places, which is why Said will not be able to accompany him on his journey. Bringing out this difference and the painful connection with the question of distance is a rhetorical device, recurring in the book. It is that of the juxtaposition of two pages in which the boundaries between text and photography are arranged in an antithetical way: on the one hand the image is closed by a black frame that excludes perspectives and hopes, on the other without a frame and even without margins, photography integrates, becomes almost liquid on the page and comes into contact with the word. The first occurence of this rhetorical device is in the first chapter, titled *States*.

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24 For an account of the genesis see W.J.T. Mitchell, E.W.Said, *The Panic of the Visual: A Conversation With Edward W. Said*, Boundary 2, 1998, 25 (2), 11-33.
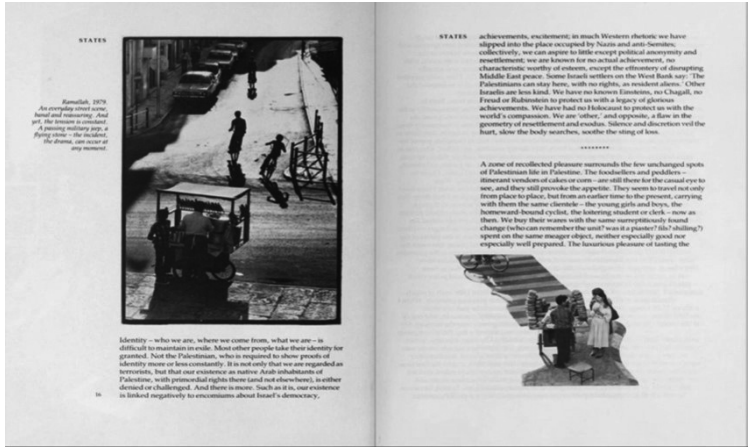
Fig. 1. Gaza/Tel Sheva, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr.

On the left page a scene of everyday life is represented, framed, accompanied with a caption by Mohr: "*Ramallah, 1979. An everyday street scene, banal and reassuring. And yet, the tension is constant. A passing military jeep, a flying stone – the incident, the drama, can occur at any moment*" (16). People on the street are quite all represented from behind, and they are shadows with their own shadows against a hard sunlight, the cart of a food seller in the foreground, some guys are riding bicycles: we can recognize not even a face. On the left page another photo is displayed, with a similar subject but different in light and layout. It has no captions, no frame, no margins. It seems to have been cut along the lines of the road and (perhaps) of a sidewalk: once again a food seller on the foreground, there is only one bicycle left in the background, of which we only see the wheels. This time two women stop to buy something, one of them holds the newly purchased goods in her hand, she has a light suit, like the sunlight more illuminating and sweeter than the previous photo, she shows us her face, the other woman is hidden behind her. The text following the first photo does not seem to have a referential link with it: it concerns the question of identity and how difficult it is to keep it in exile,

i.e. once one has been forced to cross the borders, and then they were closed behind. Even for those who remained, for example in the occupied territories, the situation is not simpler, they can only be "resident aliens". The second photo, on the other hand, is immersed in a text which, while remaining melancholic, let spaces of resilience and resistance emerge in Palestinian lives:

> The foodsellers and peddlers – itinerant vendors of cakes or corn – are still there for the casual eye to see, and they still provoke the appetite. They seem to travel not only from place to place, but from an earlier time to the present, carrying with them the same clientele – the young girls and boys, the homeward-bound cyclist, the loitering student or clerk – now and then […] The luxurious pleasure of tasting […] surpasses the mere act of eating and opens before us the […] taste of food not connected with meals, with nourishment, with routine. But what a distance now actually separates me from the concreteness of that life. How easily traveled the photographs make it seem, and how possible to suspend the barriers keeping me from the scene they portray. (17/18)

While on the one hand the borders created by other states force the Palestinians into displacement, the absence of their own borders, of their own nation, exposes the Palestinians to a constant vulnerability, which is particularly striking when speaking of children. This consideration, however, does not lead to any "humanitarian approach". The same rhetorical device brings out this other aspect of the same question.

Fig. 2. Ramallah, 1979, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr.

The framed picture on the left shows "*a boy of unknown age*" in a refugee camp in Gaza, in 1979, as Mohr's caption says. No background is visible, it is impossible to see something of the context in which he lives. However, what counts is his face, that we see very well: with some scars here and there, short cropped hair an incredibly sad expression on his face, a very mature gaze in his eyes. What strikes us the most, is his t-shirt, a very popular one that carries images of John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John and the most popular films at the time. Said explained the content of the previous page: "over the missing 'something' are superimposed new realities. Plane travel and phone conversations nourish and connect the fortunate: the symbols of a universal pop culture enshroud the vulnerable" (23). On the other page, the image has been cut out, this time showing the portraits of three children. Unlike the previous one, a childish and carefree spirit characterizes this image even though the children's outfits reveal that they do not live in easy or happy conditions, and the childish carelessness is not equally distributed on their faces. Indeed, ordered according

to height (and probably according to age), the children show that they gradually lose that unmotivated happiness: if, in fact, the youngest laughs carefree, the girl in the middle rather frowns, the standing and the older one, already veiled, barely laughs. The shadow of an adult obliquely closes the image and places a boundary between the shadow and the light.[25] However, the text with which this image somehow merges, has nothing to do with carefree youth and with feelings of hope. It does not indulge in any humanitarian temptation, on the contrary it is very sharp and faces us with all the ruthless crudity of the issue of children in refugee camps, their fate and the way they are perceived:

> There can be no orderly sequence of time. You see it in our children who seem to have skipped a phase of growth, or more alarming, achieved an out-of-season maturity in one part of their body or mind while the rest remains childlike. None of us can forget the whispers and occasional proclamation that our children are 'the population factor' – to be feared, and hence to be deported – or constitute special targets for death. I heard it said in Lebanon that Palestinian children in particular should be killed because each of them is a potential terrorist. Kill them before they kill you. (25)

The last sentences lead us to the "border theme" of the criminalization of Palestinians (but more widely of all refugees and migrants). It is of course a main theme and probably that which poses the relationship between image and text in the most problematic but also (possibly) successful way to pose a counternarrative. Quite at the beginning of the book Said addresses the question of the representation of Palestinians and of the stereotypes linked to this: "say the word 'terror' and a man

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25 The caption of this photograph is worth noting: "*Tel Sheva, 1979. A group portrait, taken at the request of the children*" (25). The fact that Mohr points out that the children asked to be photographed is significant from the point of view of agency and subjectification, which we will address shortly. A particularly sensitive topic in the field of migration studies, especially in studies dealing with the "spectacularisation" of migration phenomena. See, F. Mazzara, *Reframing Migration. Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and Aesthetics of Subversion*, Oxford – New York, Peter Lang, 2019.

with a *kaffiah* and mask and carrying a *kalachnikov* immediately leaps before one's eye" (4). This statement shows how a physical image (picture) is transformed into a mental one (image) through the use of the word. This same process and the continuous reference of images and language are at the basis of the formation of stereotypes. Mitchell defines stereotypes as:

> Social screens that circulate across sensory registers from the visible to the audible and…typically conceal themselves as transparent, hyperlegible, and invisible cognitive templates of prejudice [the] stereotype is most effective […] when it remains unseen, unconscious, disavowed, a lurking suspicion always waiting to be confirmed by a fresh perception. (2005, 296)

Fig. 3. Men in kaffiyahs, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr.

The social screen of the stereotype, which works through continuous verbal and visual repetition, makes the observers see in the images what they already know, what they want to see. How to respond to this unwanted icon? One choice could be that of iconoclasm, of the rejection, the exclusion of images attributable to this icon. But Said and Mohr, as good iconophiles, choose another way, the counter-narrative, of the multiplication of images that are formally referable to the stereotype, but which display completely different meanings. This is mostly done by showing "men in kaffiyahs" without threatening aspect, although they do

not give up an identity symbol characterized by prejudices and stereotypes.

Another rhetorical and substantial way to resist prejudices, one that is probably the main aim of the book, is "simply" to show common men (mostly fathers), in common everyday life contexts, sometimes even in hostile settings:
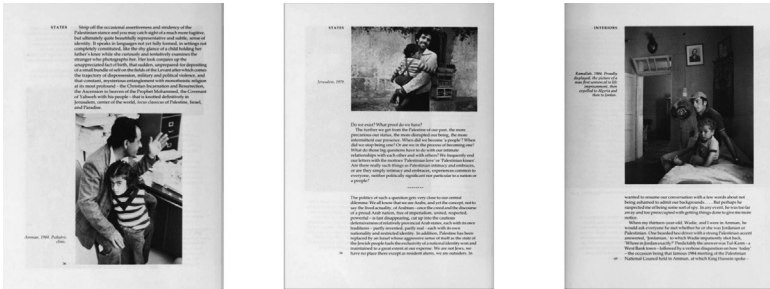
Fig. 4. Common men, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr.

Showing women is equally important. As Mitchell stresses there is also a gender issue in this book, and a very complicated one. In *After the Last Sky*, Said and Mohr attribute a central role to women: the central chapter of the book, not by chance dedicated to *Interiors*, is basically "inhabited" by women, they are the vestige of the traditional division of labor, preservers of the identity associated with home and land, keepers of Palestinian interiors everywhere in the world. As in the most prominent photographic essay, *Camera lucida* by Barthes, Said looks for his mother's lost picture all the book long. Yet "Said acknowledges a 'critical absence of women' in the representation of Palestinians. The official icon is one of 'automatic manhood', the macho terrorist who may feel himself both goaded and reproached by the 'protracted discipline' of women's work" (Mitchell 1994, 317):
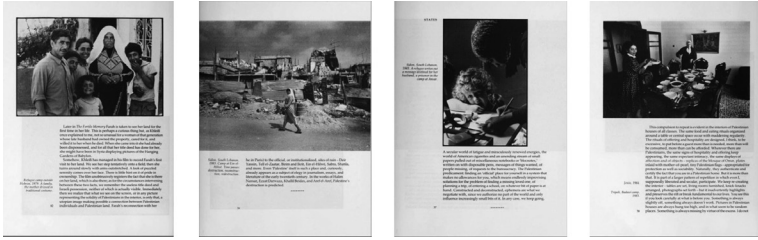
Fig. 5. Women, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr.

Many other issues arise while reading *After the Last Sky*: agency and surveillance, humanity and victimization, and on the background the main issue of exile, but also the role of Palestinian intellectuals (some in particular) and that of some "politicians" (some in particular), the role of urbanization and of settlements, the issue of labor for Palestinians. Unfortunately we have no room here to address them. However, two images of women seem to me to be particularly significant in closing our analysis.

They are at the same time very similar and very different: both of them belong to the layout choice to leave the framed photo alone on an empty place; both of them are represented in close-up and they look straight in the eye of the camera; both rest their heads on one hand, even though the second does it in a very melancholy way; they represent two women of age, but they belong to a different section of the book (*Interiors*, *Past and Future*); the expressions on their faces are very different.

The first has a particular story:

> Here is another face of a woman spun out with the familiarity of years, concealing a lifetime of episodes […] it is a face, I thought when I first saw it, of our life at home. Six months later I was showing the pictures causally to my sister: 'There's Mrs Farraj' she said. Indeed, it was. (84)

This lady was somehow connected to Said's family, but he had not seen her for thirty years, and when he recognized her, that picture became something different: a map of connections

of familiar and unfamiliar people, places, stories, even secrets to which the photograph's surface tries to give an explicitness: "She is a real person – Palestinian – with a real history at the interior of ours. But I do not know whether the photograph can, or does, say things as they really are" (ib.).
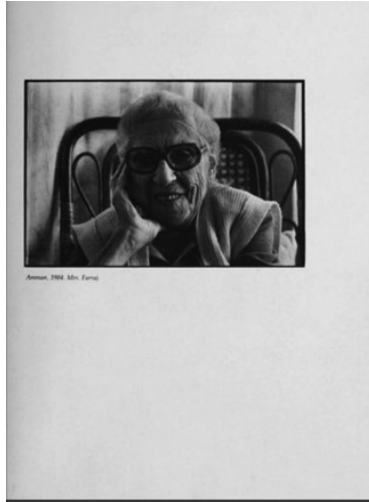
Fig. 6. Mrs Farraj, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr

The second woman has neither a story nor a name, we only know that she is "*An old woman in camp near Ramah*, *Galilee 1979*", but we can perceive in the beauty of the photo that with all those lines even her face is a map of connections of familiar and unfamiliar people, places, stories, even secrets to which the photograph's surface tries to give an explicitness, but no descriptions, no text, no words are explicitly dedicated to her, the text surrendered to the picture.

Fig. 7. Old woman, from *After the Last Sky*,
by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr.

Nobody can say what is she thinking about, maybe a question clutters her mind: "Where should we go after the last sky?".

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Hend Ben Mansour[1]

HUMANITARIAN ORIENTALISM AND PHOTOGRAPHY OF MIGRANT WOMEN

Introduction

Edward Said's *Orientalism* heralded that "[t]he Orient was almost a European invention" (2003, 1). According to Said, the 'Orient', which was, predominantly but not exclusively, "Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies", maintained with the old continent an ambivalent relationship (2003,1). On the one hand, the 'Orient' was Europe's "source" of "civilizations and languages" and the locus of "romance"; on the other, it was the continent's "cultural contestant", home to "exotic beings" and "the most recurring images of the Other" (Said 2003, 1). The 'Orient', defined as the "contrasting image" of Europe, occupied an interesting position in the European imaginary as it was, simultaneously, a place of desire and a habitat of the Other (Said 2003, 1). Therefore, inherent to the discourse of Orientalism is this manichean duality existing between 'Orient' and 'Occident' within which an asymmetric power relation is articulated (Said 2003, 5). Indeed, taking advantage of their colonial presence in vast lands extending through the majority of Africa and Asia, European powers−namely Britain and France−were able to employ their military dominance to deal with the 'Orient'. Dealing with the 'Orient', in Saidian sense, means "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over [it]" (Said 2003, 2). The "positional superiority" of the 'Occident', as colonizer, allowed it to maintain dominance and authority over the lands of the 'Other' and, at the same time, to produce and diffuse the necessary knowledge about the 'Orient's' "subject races" to

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ensure the continuity of their profitable subordination (Said 2003, 7-36). Orientalism, for Edward Said, seems then to be an on-going "dialectic of information and control" that engages an 'Occident', theorised as dominant and influential, and an 'Orient', articulated as dominated and "childlike" (Said 2003, 36-40).

Said's theory about the Orient flourished in 1978, during a time when the Middle East, where some of Europe's ex-colonies lie, seemed to be of particular political interest especially after the Six-Day War (1967), the Arab-Israeli War (1973), and the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The relevance of *Orientalism,* was to provide some instruments by which this 'Orient', ceaselessly generating and hosting "change, struggle, controversy and, […] war", could be understood (Said 2003, xii). Readily, Saidian theory was applied to a varied body of political, scientific, and most importantly, artistic productions that sought to represent the Middle East. Indeed, "Said's analysis", argues Michelle L. Woodward, was of relevance to research conducted on the "visual representations" of the Middle East, notably in photographs (2003, 363). However, Woodward warns that despite the "trenchant critical analysis" generated by the application of Said's theory, it resulted in "obscuring nuances and inconsistencies", especially when "used too broadly" (2003, 363). As a matter of fact, the overgeneralised use of Said's Orientalism, paying little consideration to the subtle differences existing between visual artists, may render the whole practice of describing and analysing nineteenth century Middle Eastern photography as orientalist a sort of "cliché" (Woodward 2003, 363). The 'Orientalist cliché' is not only the result of hasty applications of Said's theory but is also due to the inherent shortcuts produced by that very Orientalist thinking. James Clifford argues that Edward Said's "critical manner" falls, sometimes, into the pit of the "essentializing discourse [which] it attacks" (1988, 262). By criticising the Occident's totalizing modes of representation of the Orient, Said amalgamates the West and overlooks, at times, its *multivoicedness*.

Admittedly, Said's Orientalism has its limitations. However, these limitations should not overshadow two elemental ideas that were produced by his analysis and that, this chapter argues, are still relevant. The first instrumental idea is related to the fact that

'Orientalism' still raises important questions about contemporary asymmetric power relations between the Middle East and Europe. The second key notion relates to the importance of representing the 'Other' as a "lesser" human being, a member of a "subject race", for dominance to be established and maintained (Said 2003, xvi). It is within this perspective that this chapter intends to examine some late 19th and early 20th century photographic representations of the 'Orient'−understood in the Saidian terms to mean countries of the Middle East and North Africa−and to contrast them with more contemporary photographic representations of people from the same region. This endeavour aims to highlight that, within the contemporary reality of unrest, struggle, and war ravaging through multiple political entities in the Middle East and North Africa, Orientalist discourse is still valid as a discourse of dominance and othering.

1. *Orientalist Photography*

When photography was invented in the mid-nineteenth century, it was promptly employed by professionals and amateurs to provide visual proof of the existence of a person, a place, a phenomenon or even an idea (Sontag 2005, 3). Europeans, predominantly French and British, "forever thirsty for exoticism, folklore, Orientalism", did not fall behind in the endeavour of capturing, cataloguing, and immortalizing their Orient (Alloula 1986, 3). Armed with their cameras, Orientalist photographers stormed the shores of North Africa and the Middle East looking for the 'Orient's' pleasures and treasures, striving to "visually 'rescue' the remnants of [its] antiquities" (Behdad 2016, 32).

According to Ali Behdad, the notion of "photographic preservation" and rescuing can be understood as twofold: preserving the 'Orient' as a category or a type, and preserving it in time (2016, 32). On the one hand, 'Orientalist' photography resorted to "cataloguing people according to ethnic group or occupation as well as commonalties in the use of studio backdrops, props and poses" which resulted in the production of whole monolithic categories and "types" (Woodward 2003,

364). For example, during the French colonial campaign of North Africa in the 19th century, a large body of photographs was produced and inscribed into a generic category called 'Moorish woman' and 'Arab woman'. These typical photos, introduced by brief and straightforward captions, were employed to offer a "seemingly objective mode of representation" of the region and its inhabitants, which, in its turn, produced a sort of "scientific form of Orientalism" that claimed to "offer definitive and comprehensive understanding of 'the Orient'" and its people(s) (Behdad 2016, 2). Taking advantage of the asymmetric power relations resulting from the "natural state" of colonialism as an act of violence targeting the colonized people, European photographers were able to deploy photography "in the service of empire" by producing what seemed to be "systematic knowledge" about "subject races", and to use it as a "commercialized mass medium that perpetuated the Euro-imperial desire for adventure and the exotic in the region" (Behdad 2016, 1; Fanon 1963, 61; Said 2003, 39). Thus, the "perception of the native" becomes doubly materialized as a physical form that can be captured and typified and as a photograph that can be owned (Alloula 1986, 3-5).

In the colonial pursuit of creation of an objective and systematic knowledge about the native, the latter was objectified and commoditised. Photographed 'Oriental' bodies, especially 'Oriental' female bodies, were offered not only as erotic objects for the visual pleasure of a predominantly male European spectatorship but also as material commodities to be purchased and possessed (Alloula 1986, 5). The photograph, circulating as a postcard, took the phantasm to a new level of accessibility, affordability and vulgarity. Unlike the artistic aura that once surrounded paintings of the harem and shrouded them in mysticism, the photograph, with its mechanic reproduction, made the modern odalisque an object to be acquired, consumed, and disposed of (Benjamin 1986, 221). 'Orientalist' photography, articulating itself in the language of postcards, was able to preserve, reproduce and diffuse, stereotypical fragments of a space ever-haunted with dreams and desires, ever-elusive, ever-pursued. The postcard, as Alloula (1986) states, is "the fragmentary return to the mother country" (4). It is the return of the soldier, the missionary, the ethnographer,

and the photographer not in body but in spirit and imagination. It is a fragment of the Orientalist's mind and a glimpse into his phantasms. Through it, Europeans, travelling across the lands of the vast Orient, shouted back to the centre of their native Empire reassuring their fellow citizens that the Orient is as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" as it had ever been (Said 2003, 40).

In the *Colonial Harem* (1986), Malek Alloula writes back to the colonialist postcard and confronts it with its "repressed sexual phantasm" that manifests itself through the "eroticized representations of Algerian women" (Behdad 2016, 8). In the privacy of his studio, the photographer would create a "pacified microcosm" where, at his will, Algerian women could be veiled or unveiled and their bodies could be explored and exposed to offer him, and his audience, scopophilic pleasure, a type of satisfaction derived from taking "another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (Alloula 1986, 14; Mulvey 1989, 18). However, the ethnographic intentionality of the European photographer to produce a seemingly authentic representation of Algerian women is betrayed by the excessive employment of culture markers. The photographed women appear in "full regalia" covered in ethnic North African jewellery and elaborate clothing (Alloula 1986, 17). They are often photographed in what is supposed to be their internal quarters surrounded by arabesque tables, copper platters and cups, *margoums*[1], pottery, music instruments predominantly of Arab origin, incense burners and *shishas*[2]. Alloula includes in his book numerous examples of photographs captioned as "Arab women", "Moorish woman smoking a hookah", "Moorish woman", "Woman from southern Algeria" (1986, 69-81). These labelled photographs do not only capture the image of what the photographer wishes to present to his audience as a specimen of an Arab, a Moorish or an Algerian woman, but they also, through their "excessive anchorage" make

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1   *Margoums* are ethnic North African carpets traditionally made of wool displaying symmetric geometrical patterns.
2   *Shisha*, also known as *arjileh* in the Middle East, is a waterpipe used to smoke tobacco.

the image "univocal and flat, discouraging the viewer from assuming different standpoints with respect to what is in the picture" (Behdad 2016, 31).

The excessively anchored 'Orientalist' photographs, like the ones discussed by Malek Alloula, serve an "ideological function" (Behdad 2016, 31). By giving the photograph a title, the photographer inscribes it into a category or genre. Presented with a photograph entitled "Moorish woman", for example, the European audience, would be led to adopt the label as truth and, therefore, to accept the photographed image of a woman captured as an "exotic other" as the visual equivalent of what the text stands for (Behdad 2016, 31). The image of the Algerian woman captured in a photograph and circulated as a labelled postcard is thus frozen twice, asserts Behdad, once "through an exotic staging of […] her reality" which, if not totally altered is at least flattened; "and a second time through the ideological labeling of […] her appearance in the image" which creates a line of direct correspondence between the image and the label condensing the whole reality of the "'Oriental' other" in what appears on a flat two-dimensional representation (Behdad 2016, 31). Taking advantage of "the photograph's ability to record more life-like detail", European scientists, as well as amateur and professional photographers, resorted to using it as an instrument for documenting, "accumulating visual surveys", and cataloguing the 'Orient' and its people into scenes and types (Woodward 2003, 364). Consequently, these photographs could stand as visual proof of the ordinary appearance and activities of the 'exotic other', as well as enable the preservation of this appearance and representation through time.

The photographed "reclining odalisque" figuring in Alloula's book *The Colonial Harem* stands as both a reiteration of "dominant masculine harem fantasy" that "encompasses narratives of erotic intrigue and scopic pleasures", and as visual evidence that the women of the 'Orient' did not change much with the passing of time (Alloula 1986, 82; Roberts 2002, 181). The photographed odalisque, by echoing other relatively older representations of odalisques forming a considerably impressive body of European paintings, seems to project and diffuse these images of exotic otherness and submissiveness, while giving them the authority of pseudoscientific knowledge and representation of the 'Orient'

(Behdad 2016, 9). What the photography of 'Oriental' women succeeded in doing could, thus far, be summarized in two points. First, by providing a supposedly non-artistic but a mechanical visual representation of native women, photography was able to further highlight the otherness of these women and accentuate their exotic nature and ethnic distinction. Second, this photography gave the European observer power over native women not only by being able to document, catalogue and label their existence, but also by being materially able to create and possess their images.

Today, in a more globalized world, where identities are not necessarily formulated by geographical rigidities, it would have been obsolete to invoke Orientalism as an approach to deal with the representations of people from the Middle East and North Africa. It would have made little sense to excavate notions of othering and domination when the world is increasingly celebrating diversity and equality. However, while we are striving to move beyond discourses of "victimology" and to stop "dwelling on the depredations of empire" (Said 2003, xvi), we are confronted with the discourse of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov, at the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine, saying that "[t]hese are not the refugees we are used to […] These are Europeans, intelligent, educated people, some of them are programmers". The Bulgarian Prime Minister continues, saying, "[t]his is not the usual refugee wave of people with an unclear past. None of the European countries is worried about them".[3] In the same vein, CBS News' Charlie d'Agata was caught on air, while reporting from Kyiv at the beginning of the conflict, saying that Ukraine "isn't a place […] like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European […] city, one where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it's going to happen".[4] These two

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3   The Bulgarian Prime Minister's declarations have been mentioned on the European Website on Integration that can be consulted via this link: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/bulgaria-takes-first-steps-welcome-those-fleeing-ukraine_en.

4   D'Agata's words have been reported in various European media outlets and could be consulted here: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/02/civilised-european-look-like-us-racist-coverage-ukraine.

statements serve only as examples of some of the rhetoric, political and journalistic, that followed the regretful escalation of violence that erupted in Europe a year ago. This very discourse that lamented the horrible circumstances that Ukrainian refugees found themselves in with the beginning of war, did not fail, by the same occasion, to highlight and remind the different audiences that these were "Europeans", "intelligent", and "educated" coming from civilised places not like Iraq and Afghanistan. This is the same Orientalist discourse by which the European is constructed as intelligent and civilised and by which the 'Oriental' is projected as anything but. What is most surprising, however, is not that Orientalism lives on, but that it is casually invoked in a situation of humanitarian crisis, creating an impression that, what constitutes this particular crisis is not that human beings are suffering, but that these are not the class of suffering people 'we' are used to.

2. *Humanitarian Photography*

From the collapse of the Soviet Union on, the world seems to have been living in constant "complex humanitarian emergencies" (Barnett 2011, 162). The Third World, including the Saidian 'Orient', which was supported and armed by both camps during the Cold War, was left to its sort once this war ended. Corrupt regimes and failing states had to face alone the basic human demands of their societies. Unable to secure either safety or food, the Third World became a vast wasteland of violence and famine. Twenty-four-hour media coverage, photographs reaching out from godforsaken lands in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and the rapidity and ease with which information circulated, made it possible for Europeans, and Americans, to know about the plight of others in real time. This accumulated knowledge, coupled with a growing awareness of the repercussions of Europe's colonial history as well as contemporary capabilities, resulted in unprecedented "concern for distant strangers" and "desire and opportunity to help the world's vulnerable" populations (Barnett 2011,166).

According to Barnett (2011), the "growing sense of causal

responsibility" for the pains of vulnerable distant strangers among Europeans led to the development of humanitarianism from a private feeling of revulsion against images of pain and violence into a politically calculated intervention led by nations and international organisations (162-166; Halttunen 1995, 307-317). "Humanitarian communication", facilitated by different forms of media and media coverage, was able to "render vulnerable others into language or image" that would invite audiences to "act upon their vulnerability– to help alleviate their suffering or protect them from harm" (Chouliaraki, Vestergaard 2022, 1). For example, facing the catastrophic pictures coming from Iraq during the Gulf War or from Somalia in the early 1990s, many Europeans, and Americans, became aware that their countries' past and current colonial and neo-colonial activities in these areas had a major role to play in the dissolution of their societies. This awareness drove them to act in order to help the innocent civilian populations caught in the fires of war and starvation. Humanitarian intervention was, in part, a response to a sense of moral guilt toward the innocent caused either by vicarious commission or intentional omission (Barnett 2011, 166).

Humanitarian reactions do not only depend on a historical sense of responsibility or guilt, but they also depend on the construction of the image of the distant foreigner as a vulnerable Other in desperate need for "Western emergency aid" (Chouliaraki 2017, 6-7). In the context of migration, for instance, what is brought forward by the photographic representations of migrants is their weakness contrasted to the West's "power of salvation" (Moeller 2002, 39-50). The migrant is never seen as similar or equal to the observer's self. On the contrary, it is the very nature of the migrant's otherness that is put forward in order to construct her/his identity which would, in its turn, gain her/him the observer's sympathy. For example, on 30 June 2021, the IOM's Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa celebrated the organisation's ability, in collaboration with the European Union, to reach about 125,000 migrants in Yemen and offer them vital assistance.[5] In another

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5   The IOM's article can be consulted via this link: https://mena.iom.int/ news/iom-and-eu-humanitarian-aid-reach-nearly-125000-migrants-

article published on the same website on 23 May 2022, IOM Yemen declared that the organisation's humanitarian aid reached 325,000 "conflict-afflicted people in Yemen", including migrants and displaced individuals.[6] Both articles employed photographs of African women shot after having received vital assistance in the form of food and personal hygiene kits exhibiting the flag of the European Union and the symbol and name of the IOM. The "visual regime" of migration in Yemen appears to be articulated in these images in terms of both Africanisation and feminising (Chouliaraki 2017, 6).

The situation of migration in Yemen is far too complex for the scope of this chapter, however, the pictures employed by the IOM on their site succeed in somewhat simplifying and flattening it. The migrant's situation seems to be presented as an African situation which would trigger instant "emotive if not sensationalist" discourses of patronisation that go as far back as the colonial era (Yanacopulos 2022, 45). Both images also focus on women, shot either individually or in groups, which feminises migration and feminises, in particular, African migrant groups in Yemen. Focalising on representing "women and groups of women" detached and separated from the male component of African social fabric, Young argues, could "present Africa as a place apart[,] devoid of the accepted Western construct of what constitutes the family unit" (2012, 30). This type of representation, according to Young, may have a strong 'Orientalist' impact, for it does not only highlight the otherness of African women, and, by extension, African "social structures"; it also "emphasises the 'need' for Western intervention and aid" (2012, 30). Images that stress "helplessness and dependence", as well as Africanness and feminisation, may increase racial prejudice and negatively influence the way "non-white people were perceived" (Holland 2004, 154).

While the two photographs used by the IOM on its website

yemen-vital-assistance.

6   The article can be consulted via this link: https://yemen.iom.int/ news/iom-and-eu-humanitarian-aid-expand-support-325000-conflict-affected-people-yemen.

diverge from the type of 'Orientalist' photography discussed in the first part of this chapter, they, nevertheless, slip into a new or a renewed form of Orientalism. First, it is worth noting that neither of the photographs represents eroticised female bodies. On the contrary, both pictures capture women fully clothed, and even veiled, in a manner that seems to be the humble opposite of the extravagant costumes presented in Malek Alloula's book. Second, also unlike the 'Orientalist' photographs mentioned above, the picture representing migrant women in Ma'rib and published on IOM's website in May 2022, was taken by the local female photographer Elham Al-Oqabi. These two facts might signal that we have moved beyond the traditional practices of Orientalist photography where a European photographer takes advantage of his colonial position to produce systematic knowledge about the native population that perpetuates the same patterns of asymmetric power.

Photographing 'Oriental' women by other 'Oriental' women may seem to be more sympathetic, less intrusive, and generally more trustworthy; nevertheless, it might be because of these same assumptions that this type of photography may easily slip into what Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams qualify as "biased accounts" that gain more authority and seem more objective by the mere virtue of their author's "native subjectivity" (2010, 284-285). Indeed, the photograph produced by Al-Oqabi could receive more acceptance by both Middle Eastern and European audiences simply because it was produced by a Middle Eastern woman. While the photographer's nationality helps identify her as an inhabitant of the amoebic Orient, her assumed gender inscribes her as a member of the female group she shoots. Both her nationality and gender could then neutralise objections based on the possible bias by which African migrant women in Yemen are represented. Al-Oqabi's photograph, despite picturing African women in a traditional 'orientalist' position of vulnerability and dependency, may enjoy more authority as an objective account of the migrants' situation in Yemen by virtue of their producer's native subjectivity.

Besides the illusion of authority, Al-Oqabi's photograph is problematic because of its assumed objectivity because of what

Behdad and Williams designate as "a journalistic pretense of direct access to truth and the real" (2010, 285). The 'Orientalist' photographs discussed above, and despite their ethnographic pretense of direct access to the reality of life within the harems of North Africa, bore within themselves the signs of their artificiality. Being excessively decorated and apparently staged, their inauthenticity could be easily discovered. Contrarily, Al-Oqabi's journalistic photograph, taken on the move, while women are still receiving the European aids, offer to the observer a more direct access to the site of humanitarian intervention. This instantaneous journalistic documentation of the events as they unfold, and while not giving neither space nor time to the people photographed to compose themselves, order their clothes, choose to pose or to refuse being shot, is what creates this illusion of truth and reality. Looking at the photograph, and taking into account the identity of the photographer, one might assume that what is represented is not a visual construction of the African migrant woman as a person in need, but rather, a visual proof of generalisable "empirical observations" made about her racial otherness and economic vulnerability (Behdad, Williams 2010, 285).

Finally, Al-Oqabi's photograph seems distinctly "ahistorical" for while its caption states the date of its production and the generic identity of its subject, it does not include any other information about the whole context of migration in Yemen (Behdad, Williams 2010, 285). By identifying the photographed women as 'migrant women', Al-Oqabi creates a photographed category akin to those created by Orientalist photographers discussed and criticised by Malek Alloula. Decontextualizing these 'migrant women' by denying them their individual differences and by being oblivious to correctly and thoroughly representing the "important aspects of recent events in the region" leading to their migration, does nothing but create totalising categories resembling those of 'Moorish women' and 'Arab women' (Behdad, Williams 2010, 285). Unfortunately, this overgeneralised, decontextualised, and ahistorical category of 'migrant women' represents one of the lifelines of Orientalist thinking and ensures its survival.

In short, the discussed photographs of migrant women do not seem to break free from the traditional 'Orientalist' tropes

that insist on processes of highlighting the non-European, non-white person's otherness, while bringing forward European benevolence upon which the helpless Other depends. These migrant women's autonomy, self-determination, and resilience were overshadowed by the white humanitarian aid box containing food and hygiene products. While the intentions of the photographers, as well as the people working within and with the IOM, may only be the virtuous and humane goal of helping people in need and encouraging more people worldwide to be involved with humanitarian aid, the display of such images can only typify the issue of migration further. It is partly because of the systematic and decontextualised production and diffusion of such photographs that the Bulgarian Prime Minister was alarmed upon seeing European refugees who look nothing like the normalised image of a refugee.

Furthermore, the generation of images of "human suffering" was believed to result in "stirring collective conscience" leading to "compelling action" that would change the lives of the people in distress (Hoskins 2022, 66-68). However, this belief, according to Andrew Hoskins, is related more to a "false memory of the relationship between media images, knowledge and action" than to an actual "golden age" when images had real effect (2022, 66). What transpires from this is that, in today's context, and as audiences around the world are incessantly bombarded by myriads of pictures of people in distress, decontextualized photographs of African migrant women could easily find their way into the already-existing corpus of racialised and gendered conflicts without having the desired effect of provoking emotions of sympathy and solidarity. Whether it is because people are growing more desensitised towards images of suffering as they are excessively exposed to them, or because images of pain did not have that assumed strong effect from the beginning, the production and diffusion of such photographs risk strengthening the stereotype about Africa and Africans without bringing about a real solution to the vulnerable situation of migrant women in Yemen.

Conclusion

Aware of the limitations of Edward Said's Orientalism theorised almost half a century ago, this chapter strived to analyse some of the late 19th and early 20th century photographic representations of the women of North Africa and to compare them with the contemporary photographs taken of women in the Middle East. This comparison between the images of the female inhabitants of the Saidian 'Orient' aimed at highlighting the visual articulations of information and control. Although diverging at multiple occasions, both colonial and contemporary 'Orientalism' converge in their processes of othering and dominance. On the one hand, colonial 'Orientalism' was successful in creating and preserving visual types and categories into which the vast lands and peoples of the 'Orient' could be organised. North African women, for example, were labelled in the photographs discussed by Malek Alloula as "Moorish women" or "Arab women". The attachment of the textual label to the photographs resulted in excessively anchoring them by further attaching them to what they represent. The viewer had little room left for speculating about the identity or the activities of the represented woman. While the photographs themselves, deliberately staged to accentuate, or even create an exotic nature for their objects, the labelling inscribed these amplifications and creations as truths.

Presented as truthful fragments of the native woman's identity and life, the 'orientalist' photographs turned into an instrument of power. Power was derived not only from the documenting, categorising, and labelling potential of photography but also from the possibility of materialistically possessing the photographed body. Unlike paintings of odalisques that were enjoyed as erotic stimulators−more importantly, as works of art−the photographed odalisque, with its documentary realism could be consumed as a real object of visual pleasure. The detached ethnographic documentation, seemingly seeking to create an objective body of knowledge about the 'Orient's' types soon gave in to a more powerful Orientalist ideology that took pleasure in finding and creating photographed evidence of the 'Orient's' weakness and depravity.

What is most interesting, however, is that this representation of the 'Orient' as distant, weak, deprived, and dependent did not die out neither as the result of the virtual end of colonisation nor because of its own internal essentialist defect. The totalising representation of the 'Oriental' Other as the negative counterpart of the European Self re-emerges in moments of crisis and manifests itself in things similar to Charlie d'Agata's 'lapsus' or Elham Al-Oqabi's 'migrant women' photograph. When seeking to harness sympathy for Ukranian refugees, the peoples of the 'Orient' are called to mind and contrasted to the intelligent and educated European who comes from civilised countries with a known past and about whom no host community needs to worry. When seeking to call for more humanitarian aid to be deployed for migrants in Yemen, the image of the 'Oriental' is evoked as weak, vulnerable, dependent, racially different, and in constant need for European help and assistance. While this 'Orientalist' discourse succeeds in regurgitating and reiterating images of otherness, inferiority, and dependency to indiscriminately attach them to the diverse populations of the 'Orient', it spectacularly fails to contextualise and historicise the suffering of those distant Others. It fails to address that at the core of the issues faced by African migrant women in Yemen lies the global asymmetry of power and wealth caused by the colonial past and the contemporary "neo-imperialist relation of the United States [and Europe] to the Middle East" and Africa, and that these asymmetries require a little more than an "emotional response" or a kit of personal hygiene to be addressed (Behdad 2010, 285; Holland 2004, 155).

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Samira Mechri[1]

"IMAGINED CAMPS AND CONSTRUCTED MIGRANTS"
Biopolitics and Unauthorised Migration in
Ivor Rawlinson's *Tunisian Dreams*

I dreamed my village now was safe,
That wells were full of water
That fields were growing with new life,
And echoed with our laughter.

I dreamed I would do all I could,
To work and send them money,
To save my village, save my world,
And save my lovely Mummy.

Ivor Rawlinson, *Tunisian Dreams*

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the representation of unauthorised migration in Tunisia during Ben Ali's totalitarian regime from a diplomat's perspective.[2] It also examines the epistemology and the debate over migration policies through drawing on the various intertwined discourses of literature, politics, economics, diplomacy, and international relations. A cultural studies approach concerned with specific contexts and conjunctures will be applied to an examination of Ivor Rawlinson's novel *Tunisian Dreams* (2012) in its renderings of the authorities' repressive policies

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1   University of Tunis El Manar
2   Zine Al Abedine Ben Ali served as the second Tunisian President from 1987 to 2011 after ousting Habib Bourguiba, the founder of the nation, in a bloodless coup. He fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January as a result of the protests against his rule. These protests are also known as the Tunisian Revolution.

towards unauthorised migrants in Tunisia and the emerging subversive terrains of resistance, resilience and solidarity. More specifically, this study will conduct a conjunctural analysis of this novel that examines "historically specific socio-cultural contexts and the political constitution of those contexts," (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015, 60). thus engaging "with the ways in which particular social formations come into being." Rather than adopting a "narrowly historicist concern with origins and development," this approach presents a "deep critical sensitivity to the conjunctural and contextual," exploring "the ways in which tensions, contradictions, and crises are negotiated in specific social formations" (same page).

Tunisian Dreams was published in 2012, in the context of Post-revolution Tunisia, and can be classified as a historical novel. The author served as the British Ambassador to Tunisia in the late years of Ben Ali's rule, just before the 2010-2011 Revolution broke out. As diplomat and author, Rawlinson is concerned with what was going on in the country: corruption, oppression, trafficking, and irregular migration. As witness to the tense political situation then, he sums up the crisis saying: "you will hear the distant rumble of thunder" (Rawlinson 2012, vii). Stephano Baldi and Pasquale Baldocci who have examined literature written by diplomats state that "the most original contribution" they "can make to the historical record of the time is objective testimony of political and social reality." In fact, while they have "a privileged position that can aid literary production," their "mastery of language and its nuances can open up unlimited expressive spaces for [them] in an intellectual balancing act" (Baldi, Baldocci 2017, 64). Ivor Rawlinson, like a considerable number of diplomats, works with "a pen in hand," as he writes reports, analyses, memos, while in service. His continuous engagement with writing and his familiarity with the political situation, the places and the people in Tunisia spark in him a desire to write fiction after his retirement from the Foreign Service and he chooses to write on the issue of migration, the problem no one wants to face.

Rawlinson's *Tunisian Dreams* has not received any review yet and this undertaking is probably its first critical reading. The novel

is undoubtedly set within the rumble of thunders and the tensions manifested in the repression, silencing, and policing of people and the management of the 'crisis' of unauthorised migration, in the post-revolution era. Rawlinson's novel is about migration and bio-politics and the construction of borders and camps. In addition to its "historical-political" impulse, the novel also aligns itself with migrant literature. As this chapter demonstrates, the novel provides a counter-narrative, an alternative discourse and imaginary, "by confronting consensual yet politically, ethically, and ideologically problematic modes of representation of [unauthorised migrants]" (Gallien, 2018 722). Tunisian authorities, be they politicians or businessmen, tend to consider Sub-Saharan migrants a threat to national security. Under Ben Ali, the issue of unauthorised migration was considered a taboo. There was a total criminalization of migrants arriving in Tunisia via unauthorised routes. Undocumented migrants have been constructed as bodies that bring disorder and danger to the receiving country while the government has been using several power technologies such as deportation, detention camps and segregationist laws to keep the situation under control. In *Tunisian Dreams*, the African migrants are confined in Bir Assaya, a fictional name for a detention camp located ten miles away from the capital that reminds one of El Ouardia camp with the very bad reputation, claimed as a "welcome and orientation" centre south of the Tunisian capital. During the Ben Ali era, the country was involved in and complied with the EU externalization policies. Hence the authorities established more than thirteen unofficial, secret detention camps run by the police and the National Guard, especially in the coastal areas.[3]

When it comes to the novel as an unlimited expressive space, the literary renderings make the representation of events and contexts highly complex. Rawlinson's *Tunisian Dreams* belongs to a very special genre in which fact and fiction, reality and invention, and politics and poetics overlap and intermingle. Part of

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3   For more details about El Ouardia Camp, also spelled Wardia refer to *Migrants Placed in the Wardia Centre Detained then Deported or Forcibly Returned*. 16/12/2019, FTDES. https://ftdes.net/ar/migrants-placed-in-the-wardia-centre-detained-then-deported-or-forcibly-returned/.

the entanglements within this 'unlimited expressive space' is the question of readership. What particular audience does this novel target, especially if one considers the major issue that the author addresses, namely the way the Tunisian authorities approach unauthorised migration during the Ben Ali era?

In this novel, the author records the political situation under Ben Ali's authoritarian administration and underlines several "unpleasant things" (vii). The whole story of *Tunisian Dreams* is centered on the intriguing journey of Celia, a former BBC journalist who visits Tunis with her boyfriend Sam, an archeologist, to produce a biographical film about St. Augustine.[4] While wandering in the historical site of Carthage, she comes across Khaled, a guard at the Presidential Palace, who discreetly informs her of the presence of one thousand Sub-Saharan African unauthorised migrants imprisoned in a camp located several miles away from the capital. For Celia, the account instantly and irresistibly revives her journalistic curiosity. She joins Khaled and his brother Omar, and they all together venture to sneak into the highly militarized area to discover the plight of the African migrants inside the camp.[5]

1. *The Bir Assaya Camp: A Biopolitical Reading*

Tunisian Dreams exposes the "bio-power" used by the state towards sub-Saharan African unauthorised migrants through confining them to the camp. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's *Means without Ends* and Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, this section investigates the construction of the "camp" and

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4   St. Augustine of Hippo born in Algeria in 354. He was bishop of Hippo from 396 to 430, one of the Latin Fathers of the Church and perhaps the most significant Christian thinker after St Paul. He was also a teacher and a philosopher who spent a great part of his life in Carthage, the Roman city in Tunisia (North Africa) and who had a big influence in the Medieval period and remained, in the Western Christian tradition, virtually uncontested till the nineteenth century.

5   These migrants come from Chad, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria. They flee the horrors of the war, starvation and persecution as Celia mentions at the end of the novel.

the concept of biopolitics at the intersection of literature and philosophy with reference to Rawlinson's narrative. In *Means without Ends*, Agamben defines the camp as "the space that opens up when the state of exception starts to become the rule"(Agamben 2000,39) and which "'tak[es]into custody' individuals regardless of any relevant criminal behavior and exclusively in order to avoid threats to the security of the state" (38). According to Agamben, the camp is the "most absolute biopolitical space" where an arsenal of laws and regulations strips people of their political status and reduces them to naked life (41).

In the same vein Michel Foucault points out how the sovereign conceives power as "essentially a right of seizure of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself" (Foucault 1978, 136). The state has the right to supervise, control and discipline the body and "to decide life and death" (135). In the novel, one of the protagonists, Khaled, describes the site and how: "The camp is remote and new barbed wire has been put all around it, so it is more like a prison than a camp for migrants. No local people know what is going on" (21). More than one thousand migrants are "packed" into a place designed for half the number and "what is terrifying is that over a dozen have died" just in one month (21). Secrecy and silence surround the camp, Bir Assaya. Khaled cautiously reveals to Celia: "What I am doing is illegal.We were told not to speak about it" (4). For him, the camp is "wholly illegal" (25). Transit migrants who come to Tunisia from Sub-Saharan African countries to head to Europe across the Mediterranean must be closely surveilled and controlled from the perspective of an authoritarian regime through which President Ben Ali "ruled the country with a rod of iron" (7). It is quite intriguing that the camp is built on a war site, the old British barracks of WWII, run by the Military and under the auspices of the Tunisian Ministry of Defense. Significantly, the camp is managed by Major Mifsoud, a name that means"corrupt" in Arabic.

Like the prison, the camp is a "heterotoptic" space, as Michel Foucault puts it. This *other* space can be disturbing and unsettling for the outside world, forit is conceived as *deviant*, out of with. In this regard, Foucault explains:

> I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons, and one should perhaps add retirement homes that are, as it were, on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation since, after all, old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation. (1984, 5)

While Bir Assaya camp stands for "the central metaphor for sovereign and destructive violence and as the ultimate sign of the absolute power of the negative" (Mbembé 2003, 12), it can also be considered a heterotopia of deviation and crisis. The migrants are "individuals in a state of crisis" totally overlooked by an autocratic regime where migration is absent in political and public discourses and where a legal and legislative framework on irregular migration is missing. Despite being a transit and host country in this specific context, Tunisia is depicted as a place where Sub-Saharan migrants are still "under the radar" (Abderrahim et al. 2021, 9, 15). During the Ben Ali regime, the authorities who were using a propaganda machine based on ignorance and deception and living in "a web of deceit" worked very hard to make migrants "invisible" (22).This provides evidence of the secret matrix of political space. One of the major goals of migration literature produced by and around migrants is to make the invisible visible and unveil truths never told by media or official narratives. In the case of Rawlinson's *Tunisian Dreams*, it is Celia who reports what is going on in the detention camp of Bir Assaya and exposes its aberrations and atrocities to the large public and the international community.

The camp should also be discussed in relation to the metaphor and politics of the border. In this context, Judith Butler conceives of "the permeability of the border" as "a national threat, or indeed a threat to identity itself," when the nation-state "fears invasion, encroachment, and impingement, and makes a territorial claim in the name of self-defense" (Butler 2009, 43).The narrator describes the camp closely when the three main characters, Celia, Khaled and Omar were on their way to Bir Assaya. The camp has fences over two kilometers, a totally militarized place with barriers and guards. It is full of sub-Saharan Africans, only a few women with

no electricity, no washing facility, no water pumps, fans, no hot water, not enough bedding, and no cups. Major Mifsoud, the officer in charge of the camp complains to Celia, Khaled and Omar: "we do not have the men or the equipment to deal with that sort of thing" (59). He keeps complaining to the Headquarters about the camp's appalling conditions, but they threatened to sanction him if he complains again. Celia who entered the camp with Khaled and Omar in disguise "had not expected the migrants' plight to be so desperate" (60).

Celia became highly interested in the story of the Sub-Saharan African migrants and the camp and she started writing a report about the appalling and inhuman conditions in Bir Assaya. Committed to the migrants' cause: "there was just so much to record. She wanted to film the people, gain their confidence, and hear what they had to say. She wanted to build scenes in a sequence so that the international audience could quickly understand what this was about and how bad it was" (60). Drawing on the detention camps in Britain, Claire Guallien argues that the civil society should advocate the cause of refugees and forced migrants. She explains this mission saying that: the interventions of artists, writers and activists also expose what is not visible to the eye of mainstream media or what is deliberately kept invisible. For instance, the Freed Voices collective mapped UK detention centres that until recently remained notoriously unmapped "for security reasons" and based their cartography on the visual memory of the detainees themselves (72). This confirms the fact that arts and literature play a big role in raising awareness about migrants' suffering and about what was going on behind the scenes as Celia puts it in *Tunisian Dreams*.

The migrants plight in Bir Assaya was aggravated especially when typhoid ravaged the place due to poor hygiene and a lack of decent sanitation which caused the death of over a dozen migrants. Major Mifsoud was informed by the *chef de cabinet* in the Ministry of Defense who confirmed the cases of typhoid in Bir Assaya, the Migrant Holding Camp, after conducting tests. The authorities explained the ravaging of infection as it suits them: They implicitly hint at the fact that it was the migrants who brought in the virus as recent outbreaks of typhoid started

in Central Africa. Here, one can detect the "othering" of the Sub-saharan Africans and the racialisation of their lives. As a result the authorities imposed sanitary measures and quarantine in the camp. Hence, "Bir Assaya is to be isolated with immediate effect. No migrants, no service personnel or any persons whatever may leave Bir Assaya until further notice" (66). The infected migrants were abandoned and left with no medication or proper food. They were left to die. In this context, Agamben argues that the "calculations" of life and death are the core of the supreme sovereign power. He points out "Placing biological life at the center of its calculations, the modern state therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life" (Agamben 1998, 6). In Bir Assaya, the migrants are stripped of their humanity and of any legal and political status and protection. Their suffering is beyond limits and their psychological and mental health is endangered. The whole situation is a "humanitarian scandal" (168) as depicted by the narrator:

> Some of the migrants tried to look busy—sweeping, tending fires, creating shade. But theirboredom was pervasive and pernicious. Most sat doing nothing, looking resigned, vacant and depressed.These were people brought up in open spaces—herders who walked dozens of miles each day with their cattle; farmers whose plots were scattered as far as the eye could see; hunters who could be gone for days at a time. Forced to seek safety, food and work elsewhere, they now found themselves surrounded by armed guards and barbed wire. These were people on the point of mental and physical breakdown (142).

The politics of cruelty deployed in Bir Assaya are echoed in Judith Butler's "grievability," the fact that "certain lives do not qualify as lives" according to certain "epistemological frames" that evolve from "'breaking' out," or "'breaking' from" due to a "loosening of control" (Butler, 11). These frames expose the authorities'oppression and racial position towards certain categories:

> Such frames are operative in imprisonment and torture, but also in the politics of immigration, according to which certain lives are perceived as lives while others, though apparently living, fail to assume perceptual form as such. Forms of racism instituted and

active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable (24).

Tunisian Dreams migrants are "reduced to naked life" and hit by abuse, the "typhoid epidemic," and death, which makes them fit into Butler's concept of grievabilty and frames. In the camp of Bir Assaya life is so cheap. It is a space for the manifestation of power and control over mortality; similarly, life, as Mbembe highlights in it his concept of "necropolitics" is defined as: "forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" (39). Rawlinson's camp in *Tunisian Dreams* can be metaphorically depicted as a "death world" that ironically grows into an arena of resistance, resilience, and negotiations as the following section is going to demonstrate.

2. *Solidarity, Resilience and the Politics of Cruelty*

In his narrative of the crossings, Rawlinson did not miss the opportunity to account for the motives behind the journey of Sub-Saharan African migrants to Tunisia. These migrants from Uganda, Sudan, Chad, and West Africa cross the desert, and most of the time they are dehydrated when they reach Tunisia. They flee their countries because of wars and poverty as Khaled, one of the protagonist of the novel and advocate of the migrants' cause, claims:

> They are people totally desperate who have nothing to lose. If you can see them as we have seen them. It is pitiful. They have great determination to succeed somehow, somewhere; they have great courage. Most of them have walked hundreds of miles when they reach our territory. Their sandals are sometimes held to their feet by bits of cloth or even string. They have had to suffer for weeks in order to get there (18).

In Bir Assaya, the "inhuman camp," Celia, the British journalist and filmmaker, also witnessed "the suffering of a thousand men and women" who "had paid five hundred dollars upfront to come

this far. Most knew they had to pay the same again to the people traffickers to cross the Mediterranean" (138). They want to go to Europe because it is safe and full of opportunities. Most of these migrants save money to be able to cross the sea to Lampedusa:

> These dollars are unimaginable riches for them – Several years of income for a poor farmer from the south – yet somehow they manage to find the money. By selling cattle or camels or jewellery; by borrowing from the extended family; by a gift from abroad from someone who has already successfully fled (19).

But the disaster is that a considerable number of the migrants lose their lives in the Mediterranean in the "death boats."[6] Through this narrative of trauma, one can actually approach the novel as a genre of "nightmare realism" (Gallien, 724). The migrants of Bir Assaya can be defined as part of forced migrants who flee their native towns in Sub-Saharan Africa because of violence, conflicts and unsustainable living conditions seeking asylum or planning

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6   There is no exact data concerning the number of deaths at sea for there was no registration of the number of people before boarding the boats. The counting starts only when the bodies are found. Police and media always rely on the survivors to have information about those who die in the sea. For more information on this issue, refer to Phillippe Fargues, *Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe: A Review of the Evidence*, 2017, International Organization for Migration (6-7). Hassen Boubakri and Sylvie Mazzella cite *Le Monde diplomatique* which estimates that 4000 people were drowned in the sea between 1992 and 2003. Refer to *La Tunisie entre transit et immigration*, 2005, nt.2. But the death toll has seen a significant rise since the "refugee crisis" in 2015. According to the UNHCR Briefing Notes: "In 2021, 3,231 were recorded as dead or missing at sea in the Mediterranean and the northwest African routes, with 1,881 in 2020, 1,510 in 2019, and more than 2,277 for 2018. Even greater numbers may have died or gone missing along land routes through the Sahara Desert and remote border areas." Refer to *UNHCR Data Visualization on Mediterranean Crossings Charts Rising Death Toll and Tragedy at Sea*, 10 June 2022. "From January 2011 to July 2012, an estimated 386 immigrants drowned at sea but only 95 bodies were recovered. Victims included Tunisians and people of other nationalities, essentially from SubSaharan Africa." Refer to Hasséne Kassar , and Paul Dourgnon *The big crossing: Illegal Boat Migrants in the Mediterranean*, 2014.

to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe. Their experience throughout the journey and their suffering in the camp echo Frantz Fanon's depiction of the oppressed and the wretched of the earth, in this case the colonized people, who are totally dehumanized, denigrated and confined in a "heterotoptic," space, the "native town," similar to Bir Assaya, as "a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light" and "a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire" (Fanon 1963, 39).These undocumented migrants in *Tunisian Dreams* are what Hannah Arendt calls, "*les hommes faibles*," the "*peuple malheureux*" that have become the "equivalent for misfortune and unhappiness" (Arendt 1963, 75).

Sub-Saharan African migrants' traumatic experiences of crossing the desert and the Mediterranean Sea reveal migrants' exposure to violence en route by authorities as well as traffickers. By bringing the death of migrants into vision, *Tunisian Dreams* forces the readers and the public opinion to acknowledge the vulnerability and precariousness of their lives and the conditions of physical deprivation which spurred the journeys of migrants, but also their self-determination and agency. These journeys of suffering should be debated in a much more complex way within a multiregional and global context and from multiple perspectives. Tunisian young people are also undergoing similar experiences to the Sub-Saharans'. They also cross borders to the Northern part of the Mediterranean, burn or destroy their documents and lose their lives. So the unauthorised migration process called in Tunisian Arabic *Harga*, metaphorically meaning "*partir à tout prix,*" burning one's documents and semantically meaning crossing borders in an undocumented, irregular way has never been one way traffic destination. It is multi-routed, located at the traffic jam of the Mediterranean area.[7]

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7 For more details about the issue of *Harga*, refer to Mehdi Mabrouk, "*El Harikoun*, pour une approche sociologique du milieu social des immigrés clandestins et de leur imaginaire" (2003), pp. 15-49, Riadh Ben Khalifa, *L'émigration irrégulière en Tunisie après le 14 janvier 2011 : Le problème des disparus : pouvoirs publics et société civil* (2013), pp. 182-188 and Hassène Kassar and Paul Dourgnon, *The big crossing: illegal boat migrants in the Mediterranean* (2014), pp. 11-15.

Like their Tunisian counterparts, Sub-Saharan migrants represent the most vulnerable category exposed to exclusion, alienation, deprivation, and othering.Throughout the novel, the one thousand migrants on the camp living under an oppressive regime are silenced. They are not supposed to have a voice or answer back. They are totally dehumanized and depicted as inactive, lethargic, hunger stricken and diseased. The migrants are stereotypically lumped together as a mass of males. The only exception is the Nigerian little girl named Hope. They never speak for themselves. They are never involved in direct conversation with Celia, Khaled, Omar or Major Mifsoud. However, even though the migrants in Bir Assaya camp are voiceless, the novel attempts to subvert the silence on the issue of unauthorized migration. Ivor Rawlinson writes about it and exposes what is happening as a form of resistance against the mainstream official denial of the issue.

Examining the relationship between the protagonists of *Tunisian Dreams* and the migrants, one can note a discursive construction of unauthorized migrants away from the criminalization-threat stigma. Celia and the two Tunisian men, the advocators of the migrants' cause, start to empathize and become so involved in the migrants' lives that they neglect their own. Celia for example is living the migrants' life. She is even infected with typhoid. She together with Khaled and Omar spend six months in the camp, a whole journey of suffering:

> The unpleasantness of her situation was undeniable. She was stuck in an overcrowded, unsanitary, unfit-for-purpose camp which was rife with typhoid fever. It was imprisonment in all but name. The rolls of barbed-wire, the guards and the guns endorsed the feelings (134).

Even Ali Mifsoud who is part of the Tunisian army feels compassion towards the migrants. He out cries: "[I]t was disturbing to be brought face to face with the results of man's inhumanity to man. Something had to be done." For him, even though the migrants entered the country "illegally," they meant "no harm" (150). They came to Tunisia to flee the horror of the conflicts and the civil war. Drawing on Darwin's theory of survival, the narrator of *Tunisian Dreams* likens the desperate African migrants

to animals who can commit the most violent act to escape danger: "*'great pain urges all animals and has urged them during countless generations, to make the most violent and diversified efforts to escape from the cause of their sufferings.'* So wrote Darwin." He points out that the same applies to humans, "to Major Mifsoud's migrants" and "to Major Mifsoud" himself who is in Bir Assaya with Celia, Khaled, Omar and the one thousand detainees (150). These are the asylum seekers who flee their villages because of tribal, ethnic conflicts and civil wars taking place in different parts of West Africa and that the Tunisian legal and political context and agencies would not consider so. The authorities label Sub-Saharan Africans of Bir Assaya 'irregular migrants' in a derogatory way, hence erasing their distinctive identity and agency and evading any legal or political responsibilities towards them. According to Roger Zetter, labelling is "a process of *stereotyping* which involves disaggregation, standardization" (Zetter1991, 44). Here, one can also add stigmatization.

Refugee and migration studies scholars regularly address the conceptual crisis in relation to the categorization, classification and labelling of migrants.[8] Even the most popular conceptualization of refugee, the "'fully labeled' in people's minds" and "widely recognized universal condition" seems to be too evasive to convey any fixed definition as it involves a very complex "set of values and judgementswhich are more than just definitional" (Zetter, 40). The labelling and definitions of migrant categories have been so much politicized. They depend on states' interests and their ideological, political and socio-economic and administrative agenda. In the same vein, there has been so much focus on the use of *refugee/migrant* divide in media and political discourses in Europe. Migrants are not refugees and vice versa. Politicians intentionally deploy the binary to deny any form of protection or duty to provide for the migrants

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8   In addition to Zettler's examination of labelling and migration, one can note the contributions of Mary M. Kritz in *International Migration Policies: Conceptual Problems* (1987), Ju-Sung Lee and Adina Nerghes, *Refugee or Migrant Crisis? Labels, Perceived Agency, and Sentiment Polarity in Online Discussions* (2018) and Julian M. Rucker, et al.*The immigrant labeling effect: The role of immigrant group labels in prejudice against noncitizens* (2019).

in need. In Tunisia, the debate on labelling is even more complex because of the lack of a legal framework governing asylum and refugee issues. Consequently, a whole debate that contests this divide between the two categories has started seeking possibilities for including people who are forced to flee their countries of origin for different reasons and cannot prove any legal evidence to fit into the formal status of 'refugees.' New labels such as 'forced migrant', 'survival migration,' and 'vulnerable migrants' have emerged including victims of trafficking and smuggling. And as Rebecca Hamlin argues, these are terms "without legal meaning" used as "rhetorical framing" to draw attention to the fact that there are people who "deserve care and compassion who do not fit the legal definition of a refugee" (Hamlin 2022, n.p.). Even though, the term 'migrants' has been used throughout *Tunisian Dreams*, and beyond the Tunisian authorities' discourse highlighting the fact that these migrants "had entered the country illegally" (150), the author tries to problematise the concept by referring to the Sub-Saharan Africans' plight and suffering and motives behind fleeing their countries. For Rawlison, the Sub-Saharan Africans are forced migrants who cross the borders for fear for their lives.

Drawing on the concept of "moral economy," and its connection with migration issues such as regularization policies, network of ethnic solidarity, Maurizio Ambrosini defines "deservingness" as a "strategy" used by "migrants" or "asylum seekers" to acquire "acceptance" (Ambrosini 2023, 312) by the receiving society. Bir Assya's migrants are depicted as passive and their "deservingness" stems from the determination of those who are living with them on the camp and sharing their experience. Celia, Khaled and Omar are not the observers who look at "*the spectacle of suffering*" (Boltanski 2004, 3) from distance. They are, as mentioned before, fully engaged with the migrants and their cause, they are allies. As part of this solidarity with the migrants, Celia starts giving language classes to the migrants. Celia and the two Tunisian brothers are not moved by mere "compassion" or "pity" as sentiments that "cannot change the world," but rather by "solidarity", as opposed to compassion and pity, that can lead to action as Hannah Arendt argues:

> Terminologicallyspeaking, solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action, compassion is one of the passionsand pity is a sentiment.Robespierre's glorification of the poor, at any rate, his praise ofsuffering as the spring of virtue were sentimental in the strictsense of the word, and as such dangerous enough, even if theywere not, as we are inclined to suspect, a mere pretext for lust for power (Arendt 1963, 89).

Major Mifsoud's statement "[s]omething had to be done" echoes Arendt's concept of "solidarity," human solidarity, against the abuses of business and politics embodied in Abdelaziz Ayeb, the businessman and tour operator, the character who represents the world of business in the novel and who is responsible for the migrants' plight in different ways.

In *Tunisian Dreams*, Ayeb is depicted as the most powerful man in the country. He is one of the "the most senior people […] the mega-rich, in practice, who ran the country. Or at least the country was run for them" (149). He owns big mega corporations and is involved in the tourism and bond business all over the world. He functions through a very complex web of spies and businessmen and he is in control of the intelligence system in the country. He can find out about Celia's infiltration in the camp in no time. Information about Celia, Khaled and Omar's sneaking in Bir Assaya was on his desk within hours as he received a call from the police informing him about "leaks of information about Bir Assaya" (38). Ayeb gave his orders to the security forces for the surveillance of Celia to prevent her from sending anything about the camp to the BBC. The Sub-Saharan Africans have to remain in the detention camp and this was to protect Abedelaziz Ayeb's tourism investments more than anything else. Ayeb and his propaganda machine would start spreading news about the escalation of crime such as theft and violent acts caused by irregular migrants who are subjects of moral panic threatening the status quo:

> But it was when tourism was threatened that panic set in. Abdelaziz Ayeb knew he would have support when he insisted the army be used to deal with the problem. Nothing, he said, should put the tourists off.

> So the migrants were rounded up and sent, in buses and lorries, to Bir
> Assaya. It was called a temporary holding camp (139).

Ayeb, like many other businessmen around the world, has the
last word. He is much stronger than the government. He represents
"the movers and shakers in the business world" those "who
called the shots, not governments" as he may become Secretary
General of the Davos Forum which "was even destined to play
a crucial role in dealing with what was becoming an issue which
it had studiously avoided up to now—uncontrolled south-north
migration" (70).

John Berger who has been concerned with issues related to
the devastating effects of globalization such as the exploitation
of the working class, the repression of the subaltern groups and
the vulnerability of migrants and refugees in different parts of
the world has also confirmed the power of the world of business
in his "fellow Prisoners": "The market forces dominating the
world assert that they are inevitably stronger than any nation-
state" (Berger 2011, n. p.). The case of Abdelaziz Ayeb leads
to the debate over the selective opening and closing of borders,
providing territorial access to some and banning the others. The
neoliberal system, supposed to be open to flows of capital and
people is required to opt for profit making: in this case opening the
borders for tourists and closing them to unauthorized migrants.
Abdelaziz Ayeb and his business is no exception. This utilitarian,
liberal approach inflicts suffering on the Sub-Saharan Africans as
a vulnerable category. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman, Fabrice
Schurmans exposes what is happening on today's borders:

> [Bauman]sees the contemporary social scene as a frontier land
> similar to that of the Western frontier in nineteenth-century North
> America, where the absence of laws and regulations worked in favor
> of the cattle barons and outlaws. Their current counterparts, according
> to Bauman, are embodied by multinationals and terrorist groups, who
> are equally responsible or producing 'human garbage'—the former in
> the realm of economic progress, the latter in the domain of 'the
> creative destruction' of order (140).

One should also add here traffickers and smugglers, "*les*

passeurs" as Khaled calls them, who have infested the borders. The smugglers in *Tunisian Dreams* operate from coastal, fishing villages and ports, (in this case one can mention Zarzis, Medenine,Kelibia, Chebba and others. The smugglers take the money upfront but they do not care about the conditions of the migrants (lack food and water, the state of the boat and the presence of women). One should pinpoints that smuggling emerges due to different factors including "the internal contradictions and gaps within the nation-state system" and the migration regularization policies. Smugglers are always represented "as external actors who unsettle, blur, transgress and breach the nationalised boundary between legal and illegal commodities and residents"(Keshavarz, Khosravi 2022, 9). But in contrast to the main stream representation which exposes smugglers' violence, Keshavarz and Khosravi depict smuggling as a "a form of negotiable protection from below when states fail to provide, or ignore or actively restrict the rights of certain groups to mobility, wealth and safety" (9). However, this last statement does not excuse the smugglers' from their moral responsibility in exploiting people in situations of precarity and vulnerability. Celia echoes this in the following:

> Imagine what it is like if you are in the hands of an unscrupulous people smuggler who will take hundreds of dollars of your money and will abandon you at the first sign of trouble with bandits, border guards or breakdown. Imagine what it is like hiding in the back of a stinking truck in forty degrees of heat whilst border guards search it (210).

Going beyond the victimization theory, one can detect a discursive representation of the relationship between the migrants and the other characters/actors in the Bir Assaya camp. Within the spectacle or theatre of suffering, there emerges a kind of dynamics through which a call for action is manifested. Major Mifsoud's claim that "[s]omething has to be done" is consolidated by the four characters' determination to pass to action and liberate the Sub-Saharan Africans. As Boltanski puts it:

> The crucial moment in this topic is then the moment of *commitment* understood as the moment of transformation from the state of being a

receiver of information, that is tosay, of being a spectator, observer or listener, into that of being an actor (31).

This is also the moment of "solidarity" that Hannah Arendt argues for in *On Revolution* and that John Berger intrinsically links to "survival" of "fellow prisoners." After six months of suffering, Celia, Khaled, Omar and Major Mifsoud decide to abandon the camp and save the lives of the "*unfortunate*" in the words ofHannah Arendt with the help of other people outside the camp.This is made possible through the creation of a network of stakeholders: doctors, judges, civil servants and members of the civil society: "The idea for the abandonment of the camp had been taking shape after dinner every night in Major Mifsoud's office" (155). The evacuation of the migrants has to be carried out in total secrecy. It is led by the "disillusioned" Major Mifsoud who is fed up with Ben Ali's repressive regime and no longer thinks about promotion or the Army as a whole. He prepared all the logistics and "devised Plan Exodus, which was well-thought out, sophisticated and bold" (154) and wrote "false orders" to the colonel to get twenty buses needed for the evacuation. The most controversial issue that remains is that of the relocation of migrants once evacuated from the Bir Assaya camp. Major Mifsoud, Celia, Khaled and Omar are concerned about the future of the migrants and they feel that they have a moral responsibility towards these people. Celia reassured Khaled and Omar that she has been coordinating for the reception of migrants with Major Mifsoud and Sam, her partner, the archeologist whom she left behind six months ago as he was busy with the construction of the "'The Living Roman Town of Bisuli'" a historic tourist site in Tunisia, run by Abdelaziz Ayeb himself. Omar could manage to go out of the camp in a coffin to get in touch with Hedi Soukni, a friend of his working as a doctor in one of the hospitals in Tunis and who was willing to help with a "humanitarian cause," the plight of the Bir Assya migrants. Omar could use Soukni's computer and use his code to send secret messages to facilitate the evacuation of the migrants.

On the inauguration day of the touristic town of Bisuli and

while Abelaziz Ayeb and his staff were receiving their guests including ministers, ambassadors, VIP, and journalists, the scene was "hijacked" by the migrants and their supporters:

> The red Toyota looked tiny coming through the high-arched tunnel. Khaled was driving, Alison was in the passenger seat to guide him and Omar and Celia were in the back. Celia was actually standing on her seat, holding a large U.N. flag […] Close behind, walking, shuffling, sometimes dancing came the rag-tag army of migrants creating a mist of red dust. They had gathered, more or less, behind their national flags like an Olympic parade (205).

Both Khaled and Celia deliver very moving speeches in front of the audience who came for the Basuli event. They tell them everything about the Bir Assaya detention camp, about the Sub-Sahran Africans' suffering. Celia who witnessed and shared with migrants "misery, sadness, depression and much tragedy" (211) as she was herself a victim of typhoid in the camp, also talked about these people's resilience. The migrants can be optimistic "if given a glimmer of hope." They are also "determined" and brave, willing to learn languages and new skills if they are given a chance. These are people who are desperate for security and desperate "to retain their dignity and eventually to find happiness" (211). Once freed, the migrants gained back their humanity; they felt proud of their identities whatever their nationality or religion. The act of clinking to their flags is quite symbolic.

Hope, the Nigerian, the only girl in the camp, with her traditional bracelets and handmade doll as her name tells has become the symbol and embodiment of resilience, resistance, and solidarity in the camp as her poem, the epigraph of the article, echoing Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*, confirms. This girl fled her country with her uncle, leaving her mother and siblings behind. She crossed the Algerian desert and when they could not pay the traffickers to go to Europe they ended up in Tunisia. She was caught in a raid and brought to Bir Assaya with the other migrants when her uncle was away looking for another boat to cross the Mediterranean. Hope is depicted as the most vulnerable and precarious person in the camp. She is an unaccompanied minor who risks rape, trafficking and violence. She fits into Judith Butler's conception

of "precarity" as she "suffers from failing social and economic networks of support" and with "heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection" (Butler, 25-26).With the help of Celia, Hope could be "emotionally rescued" and grew stronger and became more independent and self-reliant. In her study on "resilience," Analía Castañer explains the significance of the first encounter between the child or adolescent in distress and the adult, saying that: "a resilience process may begin with the single intervention of an adult, even if it is brief and specific" and she adds:

> The message or behaviour other people convey to children and adolescents after they have gone through a painful experience is extremely important for their psychological and emotional stability (Castañer2017, 5).

Hope caught Celia's eye from the very first days in the camp. The eleven year old girl missed her mother and Celia was there to console her. In her turn, Hope liked Celia, played with her and shared with her small secrets. The little girl grows into a kind of an emotional and spiritual maturity culminating in writing a poem telling her story, the story of thousands of refugees sharing her experience of destitution, poverty, fear but also of hope, prosperity and love. The poem sums up what urges these people to flee their countries and what leads them to go back. Celia by the end of her speech says it all in the "simple equation": "No work + No Food = Starvation + Death." She proceeds:

> Rather than starve, they run away, they flee. Wouldn't you do the same? But many of my friends here are fleeing their homes because they are being persecuted. Persecuted because of their tribe, their ethnic origin or their religion" (209).

This last statement confirms the multiplicity of discourses within the novel. Next to the psychological, philosophical, ethical, socio-economic, political concerns, Rawlinson demonstrates the legal framework according to which the issue of 'forced migrants' and asylum seekers should be approached. Here, Celia echoes the Geneva Convention of 1951. On a more practical level, she tries to involve

the audience, not only through raising awareness but also through direct humanitarian action urging people to help the migrants with shelter, food, jobs: "these people need help. Not more persecution. So I appeal to you all, wherever you hear me — help if you can. In the name of our common humanity" (212). The novel ends with an idealistic and optimistic note glorifying civil power, justice and humanitarian action that can be challenged by the problems that the civil society and NGOs can face such as conflicting relations with the local authorities, the polarization and the politicization of humanitarian aid and the criminalization of solidarity.

In their discussion of the concept of "solidarity" and migration in the European context, Tazzioli and Walters refers to the "citizen initiatives" to support refugees in transit during the "refugee crisis" of 2015, especially with building "Refugees Welcome" in which they provide shelter, food and other forms of aid for those in need. However these "grassroots networks" and infrastructures have become a target of the police and laws that criminalizetheir actions of solidarity (Tazzioli, Walters 2019, 176). When it comes to the Tunisian case and with the outbreak of the civil war in Libya in February 2011, and in the context of the Tunisian Revolution and the wave of democratization, the Tunisian civil society and the local people in the South of Tunisia demonstrated an unprecedented sense of solidarity, especially with the Libyan refugees. People in the Southern towns of Tunisia such as Ben Guerdane, Zarzis, Medenine and Gabes hosted Libyan families. In the aftermath of the Libyan war, almost one million refugees fled to Tunisia including Libyans, Africans, Asians and Middle Easterners. The Tunisian authorities and NGOs such as the UNHCR and the Red Cross tried to manage the influx of refugees and the Choucha transit camp was built in 24 February 2011 where most of the Subs-Saharan Africans had shelter. The situation of the Choucha camp is no better than Bir Assya especially concerning lack of food and bad sanitation. At times, violence broke up between the different ethnic groups and demonstrations started as the Sub-Sahran African refugees demanded their relocation in European countries.[9] What is significant about the Choucha camp is the fact

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9   For more details about Choucha camp, refer to Paul Dourgnon

that the refugees there are more visible compared to the Bir Assaya migrants; they are shown by the media and their voices reached the local authorities, the NGOs and the international community.

In spite of Ivor Rawlinson's subversion of the official narrative which hides the Bir Assaya camp by exposing the issue of unauthorized migrants which is considered "a taboo subject […] being swept under the carpet" and which "[n]obody likes to talk about" (170), the migrants remain silent and speechless. Celia describes them as being even unable to "stare back […] because they are understandably shy" (208). Here, the Subaltern can neither speak nor gaze at his/her superiors, be it theTunisian local people or the white Anglo-Saxons.[10]The migrants cannot speak for themselves; their voices are muffled by the political, social and cultural hegemony of the white westerner. They have no story to tell. Speaking on behalf of the migrants, Celia is in her turn committing an act of metaphorical violence as she appropriates their story. The racial hierarchies are very clear here and one can detect the entanglements of migration and postcolonial tensions. Khaled describes Celia as the "brave woman" for what she is being doing for the migrants. The narrator also depicts her as an "English heroine" who lives in Bir Assaya camp for six months. She plays a major role in the liberation of the Sub-Saharan Africans and she is also writing an epic about her experience in the camp and making a film about the "complex story about migration, human suffering, typhoid and bravery against an unexpectedly tense political backdrop" (215). Here, the reader is challenged by an ambivalent Eurocentric white discourse celebrating the white Westerner as the saviour of the black migrants. In this way, Humanitarianism ceases to be apolitical. It is connected to several political questions: Who is supposed to be aided and protected? Whose voice should be heard?What are the terms and conditions of aid?[11] The problem with humanitarianism is that it confines "forced migrants" into

and Hassène Kassar, *Refugees in and out North Africa: a study of the Choucha refugee camp in Tunisia* (2014).

10   Here, I relied on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 1985, pp. 67-111.

11   To discuss the issue of humanitarianism, I relied on Casas-Cortes, M., et al. *New Keywords: Migration and Borders* p. 25.

a protection regime that strips them off their "political agency" reducing them to a docile and good "refugees," and this is the case of Bir Assaya Sub-Saharan Africans who are reduced to voiceless victims ripped off their humanity.

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KHAOULA ZITOUNI[1]

"SYMBOLIC IMMOBILITY", "SEMANTIC DISPLACEMENTS" AND THE POLITICS OF UNAUTHORISED MIGRATION REPRESENTATION IN MOROCCAN AND ALGERIAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA[2]

> Discursive formations must be understood to be complexes of both language and images, of rhetoric, text and subtext […] as well as the visual grammar that upholds and enhances the iconicity of particular fetishized figures of 'illegal immigration'.
> Nicholas De Genova, *Spectacles of Migrant 'Illegality'*

Introduction

This chapter examines contemporary representations of the phenomenon of unauthorised migration in Moroccan and Algerian mainstream media by paying particular attention to the ways in which the discursive strategies and narrative framings used by public authorities and media agencies contribute in further 'immobilising' illegalised migrants and dis-articulating their complex individual migratory experiences. Morocco and Algeria, historically considered as sending countries, have−since the turn of the 21st century−witnessed major changes in their migration dynamics, mainly due to the growing number of 'Sub-Saharan'[3] African migrants transiting through their territories on their way to EU-rope via unauthorised channels (Lahlou 2013). While some

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2   Acknowledgement: The present work is adapted from the second chapter of my ongoing Doctoral research project on (counter) narratives around (North) African unauthorised migrations to EU-rope.
3   I denaturalise the use of this appellation as it obfuscates the complex cultural and geographic complexities of the countries situated south of the Sahara Desert.

of these (trans)migrants have managed to cross into the European continent, others have faced obstacles due to the increasingly stringent regulations against what Moroccan and Algerian policy makers refer to as "illegal or clandestine" migration. Accordingly, both Morocco and Algeria have gradually turned from source to transit and destination countries. The illegalisation of unauthorised (North) African-EU migrations is not solely a response to these two countries' security concerns[4] but also, and more importantly, an answer to their EU-ropean neighbours' externalisation of migration control demands (Boubakri 2006).

Although Morocco and Algeria have cooperated with the EU to varying degrees (Lahlou 2018), they have nonetheless contributed – through their border policies, practices and discourses – to the construction of the former's "architectures of exclusion", to borrow the expression used by Robert Lawrence Mckenzie and Allessandro Tewzi (2013), and to the reinforcement of the (North)African-EU "immobility" regime. Due to their strategic geographical location between 'Sub-Saharan' Africa and a borderless European Union and their triple role in the African-EU migration system, Morocco and Algeria have increasingly become extensions of the EU's "border play" (Cuttita 2014). In effect, this concept metaphorically translates the EU's border politics as a performance drawing attention to its theatrical, i.e., fabricated character. Through the verbal and visual constructions of migrant immobility within the spaces of 'clandestinity' 'illegality', and 'precarity', Moroccan and Algerian public and mediatised discourses, I argue, tend to secure the continuity of the EU's performative politics of unauthorised migrants' immobilisation and consequent dis-placement. In these respects, Morocco and Algeria, could be apprehended, on the one hand, as laboratories for the EU's border externalisation experiments, and, on the other, as strategic observatories from

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4   It is important to underscore that any unauthorised entry into, stay in or exit from Morocco and Algeria are established as punishable *criminal* (rather than administrative) offenses (Law 02-03 and Law 08-11, respectively). Although both countries have attempted to reform, to varying degrees, their migration policy framework throughout the past two decades, the implementation of these (pseudo) changes has been impeded by both national and foreign policy interests (Lahlou 2015).

which to (re)view and examine the different narratives around the complex phenomenon of unauthorised migration.

This chapter offers a comprehensive, though non-exhaustive, analysis of a multimodal corpus of news narratives in French and Arabic, both verbal and visual, around unauthorised migration in government-owned media outlets in Morocco and Algeria, produced between 2015-2019. The time frame selected for this study corresponds to a period when unauthorised migration was a highly mediatised topic in both countries and ends before the outbreak of Covid19. By combining tools from Discourse and Narrative analysis "in a mutually beneficial partnership" (M Souto-Manning, 2014), my reading to expose the undergirding mechanisms of hegemonic representations of migrants and retrieve what the public and mainstream discourses attempt to hide. More particularly, this critical narrative examination focuses on the constructions of unauthorised migrants' immobility and the *immobilising* impact that such (dis)articulations tend to have on the former. Therefore, my analysis of migrant immobility tropes and the discursive 'traps' to which unauthorised border crossers tend to fall will be performed by combining the conceptual lenses of "symbolic immobility" -which Kevin Smets (2019,5) defines as "the experience of being confined in particular symbolic mediated representations" - and Arjun Appadurai's (1988,36) '' metonymic freezing''- a representational strategy whereby certain ethnic groups are essentialised and reduced to a single image or idea. These forms of "symbolic violence" (Hall, 1997; Bourdieux, Wacquant, 1992) enable thus the (re)production of cultural clichés and stereotypes around unauthorised migration.

1. *The Politics of Labelling and the 'Discursive Management' of unauthorised migration: 'le migrant clandestin' in Moroccan and Algerian mainstream news media*

The attribution of labels to unauthorised migrants is a constitutive element of the politics of migration representation. Labelling, as André Barrinha (2010, 1) argues, "is a powerful rhetorical tool whereby a particular subject or entity is reduced to a single idea".

Furthermore, according to Richard Jackson (2005, 23), "the act of naming [or labelling] is always a highly charged process that can have serious political and social consequences". "The primary problem (in migration representation)" as Didier Bigo (2002, 64) rightly observes, "is […] discursive in that the securitisation of migrants derives from the language itself and from the different capacities of various actors to engage in speech acts".

Both in Algeria and Morocco, migration-related issues which used to be relegated to secondary/other news items in the news agenda at the beginning of the 21st century, have started to gain increasing visibility in mainstream news media outlets especially with the perceived rise in the number of 'Sub-Saharan' African migrants transiting through Moroccan and Algerian territories in a bid to cross into EU-rope via unauthorised channels.

A pertinent example of the construction of migrant 'clandestinity' can be found in a news footage diffused by the Moroccan (state-owned) TV channel *2M* on the 2nd of July 2015[5] featuring a group of police officers bursting into an apartment suspected of being "illegally' occupied by 'clandestine' 'Sub-Saharan' Africans who intend to cross into EU-rope from Tangiers. In The French version of the news piece, the unauthorised migrants are referred to as "squatteurs" [squatters] and the whole sequence of events or the operation is framed as "La chasse aux clandestins" [the hunt for clandestine migrants]. The Arabic language reportage of the same event includes expressions like "*ihtilal ghair kanouni*" which literally translates as illegal invasion/occupation to describe the migrants' alleged unauthorised appropriation of the flat. Also, the vague reference to their ethnic identity through the use of the umbrella adjective *ifriki* [African] is a way of associating 'illegal' and 'clandestine' practices to the increasingly 'threatening' presence of the people who come from the 'other' end of the African continent. In fact, in Morocco the label *ifriki* is attributed to black-skinned people of 'Sub-Saharan' origins and is loaded with

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5   The brief description accompanying the news footage (literally) translates as "Tangiers: Moroccan security forces put an end to African migrants' Illegal occupation of flats". Available at: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ixSuT4icaOs (accessed 26/05/2022)

negative undertones. This skin-color based migrant construction is not only racist but also geographically ambiguous. By the same token, the narrative that the footage generates simplistically divides Africa into two colours: black and white. This racialised rendition of Africa finds its roots in history. The Sahara desert, as Laurent De Saint Perier explains in an article published in *Jeune Afrique* (29/04/2014), has for long been perceived in the Maghrebis' collective imaginary as "un sas entre une Afrique blanche, Arabo-Musulmane et une Afrique noire, jungle de bêtes féroces vouée à l'anarchie"[an airlock between a White, Arab-Muslim and civilised Africa, and a Black one, a jungle of ferocious beasts doomed to anarchy]"(n.p). Indeed, these phantasmagorical articulations of Black Africans as agents of disorder and chaos are also conspicuously present in the everyday news media framings of unauthorised 'Sub-Saharan' migrants as suggested by the footage. From a discursive perspective, the combination of the French label 'clandestin', and the words "chasse'' and "squatteurs" activate the frame of the migrant as a threat to security that requires to be hunted down and immobilised.

The explicit use of derogatory language and the dehumanising hunting metaphor is overshadowed by the 'heroic' performance of the security forces who have accomplished their duty of protecting the local inhabitants of the neighbourhood by arresting these so-called (security-threatening) squatters. From a narrative perspective, the scene is constructed according to a simple tripartite plot sequence: the set-up (the forces reaching the "invaded/occupied" building), the confrontation (the clash between the 'heroic' national security forces with the "foreign invaders/occupiers") and the resolution/denouement (the arrest and punishment of the migrant 'villains'). The over-simplistic aspect of this representation echoes the classic "goodie/baddie" narrative which plays into moralistic tropes and places the security forces on the moral high ground.

After having successfully "chased" the 'disobedient clandestine' migrant character, the public order forces−the protagonists in this narrative articulation − have restored peace, security and social cohesion in the neighbourhood. It is also safe to argue that in this framing the heroic action of the Moroccan police forces as

well as the voices of the Moroccan inhabitants are foregrounded whereas those of the "chased' migrants are relegated to the background- de-authorising them in the process. Similarly, the violence performed against the dwellers, i.e., the police *forcible*[6] entry and (unauthorised) intrusion of the journalist's camera in the private spaces of the migrants and the subsequent *invasion7* of their privacy and their public humiliation are framed as secondary and unimportant because they are considered "criminals" after all.

The last visual segment of the footage shows the "clandestine African squatters" helplessly running away from the security forces with their bindles on the back. The deliberate zoom out effect of the camera contributes to the visualisation of the migrants as a dispersed, de-individualised homogeneous mass which functions as a metaphorical embodiment and a metonymic extension of the Other side of Africa.

A similar sensationalist construction of the 'clandestine' figure can be illustrated by a news reportage diffused by the Algerian (state-owned) online channel *EchorouknewsTV* on August 6, 2016.[8] As in the *2M* video sequence, the inaccurate ethnic and geographic label *ifriki* is used to refer to the former group of migrants. The footage opens with a third person narrative voice asserting in a rather alarmist tone, that "le phénomène clandestin continue de s'accroître" [clandestine migration is on the rise] despite the numerous operations of "rapatriement" [repatriation] carried out by the Algerian authorities. The images accompanying the footage voice-over feature a large number of stranded 'Sub-Saharan' migrants standing under a bridge. The construction of the 'clandestine' figure in this video sequence is achieved through visual focalisation effects. Indeed, the use of extreme wide-shot enables the visualisation of a 'mass' of migrant 'bodies' in crowded conditions within a small space, which activates the trope of 'clandestine migration' as an imminent threat. Indeed, the narrative

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6   My emphasis
7   My emphasis
8   *Migrants clandestins d'Afrique: faut-il que l'Algérie les régularise?*
     Available at: https://youtube/nVEtBkqvpSo/ (accessed 02/02/2022)

voice (over) emphasises this idea by referring to the dangers posed by this "clandestinité anarchique" [chaotic clandestinity].

The repetition of the word "clandestine" throughout the narrative sequence and the separate visualisation of the Algerian authorities through cross-cut manoeuvres reinforce the binary set of a national *We* vs a 'Sub-Saharan' *Them*. Furthermore, this is complemented by an unequal distribution of voices and a limited narrative viewpoint. Accordingly, migrant 'clandestinity' is constructed by activating the "humanitarian crisis" trope and mobilising attention to the unauthorised migrants' 'un-placeability' on the Algerian territory and the urgent need to "repatriate them", as the "regularisation" of their undocumented status is not an option. Their 'mass' is presented as a 'surplus burden' that the nation is not willing to bear. Migrants are hence pictured as a serious threat to personal safety and collective identity. In both representations, the process that constructs migrant "clandestinity" is carried off through verbal and visual strategies of massification, de-individualisation and de-authorisation. Migrants are indeed "frozen" within places where they should not be (squatted flat, under a bridge); hence, their movement is restricted and their individual stories invisibilised. In these news videos, the label "clandestine" creates the foundation for the narrative to be articulated. Put differently, the label is the starting point of the narrative construction. This is how a discursive selection sets the ground for a specific hegemonic narrative to unfold and for certain violent representational practices to be legitimised.

It is safe to argue that the very label "clandestine" initially dis-lodges the circumstances that led migrants to escape and seek new life alternatives. Thus, the word morphs into a 'border' creating miscommunication and gross misunderstandings. In this sense, through the (mis)use or abuse of the label "clandestine" these two Maghrebi countries enact a double form of discursive 'immobilisation': first, migrants are constructed as being unable to move and act and second, they are symbolically paralysed through figurative language and visual imagery despite the plurality of their stories, voices, migratory aspirations and the complexity of their individual and national histories. According to the aforementioned illustrations, labelling is inevitably political as it empowers the

'nation-narrator', disempowers the "clandestine" character and distances the spectator/narratee.

Interestingly, here the border − a key concept for our understanding of the migrant's "clandestinity", (or construction thereof) immobility and dis-placement − transcends its function as a geographical referent as it acquires a linguistic and political dimension. Thus, by deploying language as a power tool, i.e., by opting for the (derogatory) label "clandestine'in the representation of unauthorised migrants, the media engage in a double process of (un)naming. The unauthorised migrant is first (de)identified, i.e., "removed from the unknown, and then assigned a set of characteristics […] and behaviours" (Bhatia 2005, 9) and is then "inserted into a discursive structure that incorporates and limits its reach and meaning" (Barrinha 2010, 4). The unauthorised migrant is therefore "un-named" and "de-identified" as part of a homogeneous 'mass/mess' or quantified in a statistical construction. Because the unauthorised migrant is a "plural figure" (Souiah 2016) whose identity is unstatic, i.e., constantly "in motion" due to the complex and multi-layered nature of his journey, he becomes difficult to fathom. Thus, in order to overcome this complexity, mainstream discourse makers reduce the multiplex character of the migrant to an oversimplified concept making it less challenging for viewers and the nation as a whole to visually and verbally grasp. Hence, the automatic and uncontested labelling of 'Sub-Saharan' migrants clearly obfuscates their becoming nature as the latter may potentially evolve from one category to another from a mixed-migration flow perspective. In these respects, labelling as a form of "symbolic fixedness" (Smets 2019, 2) downplays the dynamic character of the (unauthorised) migrant and thus makes it inconsistent with the very semantics of migration/movement. Migrant "clandestinity" becomes in this context "an order of being"[9], to use Ruben Anderson's words. By "freezing" the migrant within these essentialist representations, public and political discourse makers succeed in legitimising the

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9   Clandestine Migration and the business of bordering Europe. Lecture by Ruben Anderson, Oxford University. Available at: https://youtu.be/TouzR0UvliA (accessed 20/03/2022).

illegalisation of (unauthorised) migration. In this sense, casting the "African Other" as "clandestine", immobile and "un-placeable" is not only an act of symbolic immobility but also one of semantic dis-placement.

Similarly, the visible ubiquity of the 'clandestine character' in both its verbal and visual manifestations, stands in sharp contrast with the very etymological definition of the word "clandestine"-which is derived from Latin "clandestinus" meaning secret, hidden, surreptitious and furtive. In the Moroccan and Algerian contexts, what is paradoxically perceived as legally unrecognisable, and therefore *invisible* to the police apparatus is "perfectly visible", or even "hypervisible" (Mazzara 2019; De Genova et al. 2014) on national television and online media spaces as illustrated by the footages discussed above.

2. *Dis-placing the blame, or the Politics of Scapegoating*

2.1. *'Sub-Saharan' African migrant as "pollutant"*

The act of scapegoating the migrant [Other] has often been performed through the mobilisation of metaphorical constructions. Indeed, one of the salient tropes that can be identified in Moroccan and Algerian media representations of unauthorised 'Sub-Saharan' migrants is that of the "pollutant". As Thanos Zartaloudis (2021, 2) observes, metaphors, in the context of migration representation, "are systematically used in racist and demeaning manners". He argues that the use of this particular figure of speech "entails an underlying or direct motive at a negative *pushback* [10] due to the fear of the unknown". In this sense, metaphors create distance between the actor of representation, the represented object/subject and the reader/spectator. The word "pushback" in Zartaloudis' definition could be read both figuratively and literally. Put differently, unauthorised migrants, 'Sub-Saharans' in particular, are not only subjected to push back operations, but are also metamorphosed and repelled by the force of language.

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10   My emphasis.

Specifically, contemporary discourse around migration tends to capitalise on metaphors like invasion and disease but it also tends to evoke, through images and words, environmental catastrophes such as pollution and waste in making arguments about migrants (Cisneros 2008, 574). A salient trope characterising the depiction of unauthorised 'Sub-Saharan' migrants in Moroccan and Algerian mainstream media is that of the "pollutant". Another form of symbolic immobility and meaning dis-placement occurs in the video sequences, photos and news articles featuring 'Sub-Saharans' precarious camp life. Paradoxically what is often foregrounded is the impact of the migrants' presence on the neighbouring communities rather than on the potential solutions to the inhumane conditions in which they live. Fear-inducing images of Maghnia camps[11] in Algeria and those of Gourougou forest[12] in Morocco, are pervasive in these two countries' news discourse. They function as prevalent topoi standing for migrant 'clandestinity' and 'unplaceability'. The Moroccan and Algerian audiences often learn about the existence of such camps through the mediatisation of the police raids and roundups as explained in the previous section. Indeed, reading across a range of news articles from *Le Journal de Tanger*, *Libération*, or *Algérie Agence Press* and watching news footages on *2M* and *Ennahar Tv*, it is not

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11　Maghnia is a small town situated in the north-west of Algeria and is only 27 kilometers away from the Moroccan coastal city of Oujda. It has since the beginning of the 21st century become a major transit point used by unauthorised migrants from Niger, Mali, Cameroun and Burkina Faso. However, many of the latter become stranded usually because of their unsuccessful attempt to cross the Algerian-Moroccan border as part of their journey to EUrope. Owing to their condition of protracted "transit" immobility, migrants tend to move to the city''s surrounding country side to build makeshift camps (referred to as "ghettos"). Mainstream news channels often make use of the precarity of the migrants living conditions to foreground their out of placedness and the "burden" they represent to local communities.

12　Located a few miles away from the Spanish enclave of Melilla, Gourougou forest has in recent years become the site of a growing number of "Sub-Saharan" unauthorised migrants' self-managed camps. The place has often been subject to Moroccan police raids, repression and destruction.

uneasy to discern that the camp setting and its occupants are often constructed through images of filth, waste, disease and pollution.[13].

For instance, a news video broadcast on the Algerian channel *ElBilad TV* opens with a bird's eye view of an overcrowded make-shift migrant camp located under a bridge: images of ramshackle huts plagued by rats, cooking fire, acrid smoke, piles of rotten food and buzzing flies create an atmosphere of dread and disorder. The viewer is engulfed by the potential threat of contamination and the damage that the presence of these migrants represents.

When interviewed by the reporter about 'Sub-Saharan' African unauthorised migrants' situation in Algiers, the president of the Red Crescent committee of Blida, Mohamed Gourma, asserted that "living in these *appaling* conditions will not only *aggravate the migrants health* but it will also *endanger ours*."[14] It is crucial to add in this context that this discourse echoes the rhetoric used by Jacques Chirac in a speech delivered June 19, 1991 wherein he referred to the "noise and smell of immigrants" ["le bruit et l'odeur des immigrés"].[15] A few years later, Nicholas Sarkozy explicitly expressed his intention to "clean(se) out trouble-makers [migrants] with a karsher"[16] (2005). Indeed, 'Sub-Saharan' unauthorised migrants have not only been metaphorically immobilised and confined in dirt/pollution-inspired images and symbolically captured in "des espaces d'anormalité" [spaces of exception/abnormality] to use Pascal Blanchard's phrase[17] by the European ex-colonisers but also by the North-African ex-colonised countries' governments, which despite their shared colonial trauma, have adopted the former coloniser's/European [racist and dehumanising] frames of reference. This ongoing

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13   Available at: https://www.elbilad.net/(accessed 02/02/2022)
14   Emphasis and translation mine.
15   Although Chirac does not specify the nationalities of these immigrants, it is nonetheless implied that they are of Arab and/or (North)African origins. He explicitly refers to the fact that they are large families "crammed" in HLMs who receive 15.000 Francs of social benefits without being productive.
16   Translation mine.
17   *Les Zoos Humains, une réalité Française* interview with Pascal Blanchard. Available at: https://youtu.be/A14UeLQ3hXU (accessed 02/02/2022)

"symbolic violence" (Bourdieux, Wacquant 1992) shows the extent to which these discourses have been unwittingly internalised and/or knowingly "cloned" (Fenton 2011) by the ("White"/North-African) ex-colonised and re-used to symbolically freeze the migrants coming from the other end of the African continent.

In the Moroccan context, although left-leaning news weeklies like *Telquel* tend to often denounce the paradox between Morocco's reformed migration policy[18] and the violent practices performed by police forces against migrants in forest camps and urban ghettos, most pro-government and extreme right-leaning newspapers discourse tends to rely on the "pollutant" metaphor as an argument to describe the danger that these "non-citizens" represent. For example, the photo[19] used to illustrate an article published by the Moroccan online news platform *Liberation* (13/12/2018) on the police raids on the (make-shift) camp of Gourougou, features a long queue of men of 'Sub-Saharan' origins standing in the midst of a waste-polluted forest waiting to be transferred to cities where supposedly "les conditions de vie sont meilleures" [Living conditions are better]. The waste on the ground occupies most of the frame and unlike the arrested/motionless migrants, it seems to be spreading across the polluted forest. The spatial continuity conveyed by the image gives the viewer a sense of the magnitude of the phenomenon. In addition, the tension established between the static migrants and the (seemingly) "moving" waste reinforces the idea that they are potential contaminants as they are perceived to be the root cause of the forest pollution. As Cisneros (2008, 591) observes, "The metaphor of immigrant as pollutant articulated in news discourse is significant for the ways in which it constructs immigrants through racial and xenophobic stereotypes, as objects, aberrations, and dangers". Indeed, the textual and visual constructions of unauthorised migrants as danger and threat to the

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18   Officially announced by King Mohamed VI in late 2013, the reform aimed to adopt "an inclusive and human-rights based approach to migration and asylum" and launched a regularisation program for undocumented migrants living in Morocco. (Jacobs, 2023)

19   *Rafles: Des centaines de migrants irréguliers refoulés de Nador et Tanger et débarqués à Tiznit*. Available at: https://www.libe.ma/ (accessed 02/03/2022)

environment and public health are problematic because they inform society's relationship to these "outsiders", influence the direction of public policy and by extension legitimise the violence(s) and human rights violations performed against them.[20]Accordingly, the (unauthorised) migrant is perceived and treated as "matter out of place", to use Mary Douglas' words (quoted in Hall, 1997, 3). For a given culture to maintain a sense of "stability", it needs therefore to "sweep out" this "excess matter", "restore the order and police the boundaries".[21]

Clearly this (implied) association of migrants to "déchets" [waste] recalls Zigmunt Bauman's powerfully graphic argument in his book *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (2004) that the border politics of globalisation categorises certain groups of people as "human waste dumped into the refuse heaps of asylum systems, refugee camps and urban ghettos".[22] These "bordered" human beings, have, as a result of hegemonic "symbolic immobilisation" and "semantic dis-placement" practices, become synonymous with "excess" − a toxic physical and social burden of which the receiving nation wants to be "discharged". Thus, "frozen" and "inactivated" by the linguistic parameters set by the agents of representation, un-authorised migrants' bodies and voices are "removed" to be dis-placed to the margins of representation. As a hyper-visibilised "pollutant", the 'Sub-Saharan' migrant is only made to be "seen" and "caught" to "halt" its spread/flow. In this sense, he morphs into an (im)mobile signifier with a 'fixed' signified manipulated and activated by the agents of hegemonic discourse.

2.2. *Harga as "pathology": Constructions of the Maghrebi harrag as "suicidal Other"*

Along with the "pollutant" metaphor, another predominant trope can be identified in Moroccan and Algerian public and

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20   Ibid.
21   Ibid
22   Quoted in Mazzara (2019,118)

mainstream media discourse which is that of *harga*[23] as (a form of) "pathology". This idea has often been articulated through the use of jargon related to psychological disorders and moral sterility. The fire metaphor in the word *harrag*, refers to the individual's burning desire to cross the sea in order to seek a better life in the fantasised EU-ropean Eldorado. Although at the beginning of the 21st century the *harga* phenomenon in Morocco and Algeria scarcely made the headlines, it has only increasingly become visible in the media after Morocco, in partnership with Spain, intensified its border surveillance system which pushed many Moroccans and Algerians to shift to other routes. Only recently, Souiah (2016) observes, has the Algerian government acknowledged that *harga* is a political issue. Similarly, in Morocco the same representational trend has been observed as the public and mainstream media have tended to foreground the unauthorised transmigration of 'Sub-Saharans' which made Moroccan *harraga*'s cross-border attempts less visible than those of the former (Khrouz 2013). However, as the number of *harraga*'s death at sea has become growingly plain to see (Abderazzak 2016), the Moroccan authorities started addressing the phenomenon in different spheres of public discourse.

Furthermore, one of the major steps taken by the Moroccan and Algerian governments was the criminalisation of unauthorised exits, which, throughout the years, has proven counter-productive. In the face of *harraga*'s "stubbornness" to brave the seas, the Algerian and Moroccan governments have adopted new discursive strategies by instrumentalising Friday sermons or "Khutbah" in mosques to raise young people's awareness of the "suicidal" character of the cross-border journey. Significantly, these sermons have often been broadcast on religious (Islamic) radio, TV and YouTube channels to guarantee a wider transmission of the religious reading of *harga* and its (im)moral implications.

Harga has been more often than not compared to an act of self-destruction as the *harrag* puts his liberty and life at risk by crossing borders in unauthorised ways. Although public and media

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23   In the Maghrebi dialects, 'Harga' refers to the act of 'burning borders' whereas 'harraga' plural form of 'harrag') means 'border runners/ burners'.

discourse makers have often eschewed the explicit use of the word "suicide" when addressing the *harga* phenomenon, they have nonetheless tended to deploy metaphors which allude to its suicidal character. In a declaration made December 27, 2018[24], the then Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs, Mohamed Issa, called upon imams to devote their Friday Khutbah to raise people's awareness of the perils of 'clandestine' emigration by citing the Quranic *ayats* [verses] which forbid acts of self-harm and to warn them against what he called "cette tentation funeste" [this pernicious temptation]. This awareness campaign was very important, he insisted, "pour *chasser les idées noires* de leurs têtes et battre en *brèche leurs illusions25*" [to chase the dark thoughts out of their heads and dispel their illusions]. In the same context, the French language Algerian daily newspaper, *El Moudjahid* (28/12/2018), published an article in which the journalist paraphrases Issa's words, saying, "Le réfèrent religieux […] doit être pris en compte pour *lutter contre les idées extrémistes* et *apaiser les esprits* de la jeunesse Algérienne." [The religious argument must be used in order to fight against extremist ideas and appease the spirits of Algerian youth]. Moreover, while communicating the tragic news of *harraga*'s death at sea, the then Vice Minister of Defense and Chief of Staff, Ahmed Gaid Salah highlighted the fact that the common denominator between unauthorised emigrants is that "ils *sont mal dans leur peau."26* [they are uneasy in their own skin]. Indeed, the negative language used to depict *harraga* constructs them as impulsive, irrational and mentally restless.

In this sense, suicide, as literal self-destruction, is perceived, I argue, at least from the perspective of the Maghrebi societies selected for this study, as symptomatic of a moral and mental "pathology". Because of its "pathological" character, *harga* is 'contagious' and should therefore be 'contained'. Indeed, this is one of the narrative constructions that are disseminated through the Friday sermons shared on YouTube channels like *Adin*

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24   *L'Expression* (27/12/2018)
25   My emphasis.
26   *Freiner le phénomène de harraga: L'armée s'implique.* Available at: https://www.lechodalgerie.dz/ (accessed 02/03/2022)

Nassiha27 and *Nhari tv28*in which the imams, relying on the prophet Muhamed's *hijra* [migration] narrative as articulated in *Surat* [chapter] 49 entitled, *Al-hujiurat* [the Chambers], explain that when migration is "illegal" and "self-destructive", it stands against the tenets of Islam.

Both preachers in the aforementioned channels argue that the prophet was "forced" to migrate from Mecca to Medina due to religious persecution. They also add that the prophet's act of "escape" was undertaken at night so as not to arouse suspicion among the Meccans who preferred to see him and his followers undergo torture rather than leave their city peacefully. The imams particularly draw attention to the fact that the *mouhajiroun* [emigrants] praised in the *Coran*, were those who migrated in order to seek peace and spread the virtues of Islam while emphasising the fact that their *hijra* was performed "legally". Evidently, the legal argument is quite dis-placed in this context as the globalised − yet bordered − world of the 21st century is radically different from that of the 7th century A.D. The instrumentalisation of the religious narrative has been used to dissuade young men (and women) from undertaking the perilous crossing. Accordingly, the "illegal" [*ghair charrii*] act of crossing borders, as interpreted by imams, is presented as a sin [*dhanb*], i.e., punishable by God, for which only the *harrag* is to blame. Moreover, the imams highlighted the fact that risking one's life by crossing the Mediterranean Sea on board of death boats [*kawarib al maout*] is an act of (literal) self-destruction [*tahlouka*] and is thus symptomatic of a mental or psychological disorder. For instance, the imam in *Adin nassiha TV* denounces the irrational attitude of Moroccan youth by satirically mimicking their moto, "plutôt se faire manger par des requins que vivre avec les Marocains!" [I would rather be eaten by sharks than live with Moroccans]. *Harraga* are thus depicted as suicidal and hence pathological. According to this religious articulation, *harraga* are framed as morally sterile, ignorant about and transgressive of their religion, and mentally disrupted as they are

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27   Available at: https://youtu.be/wrFjJPCv5tA/ (accessed 03/03/2022)
28   Available at: https://www.nhari.net/ (accessed 02/03/2022)

unable to control or contain their "excessive"/ "burning" desire and "obsession" to cross into the so-called EU-ropean Eldorado.

Clearly, the blame has been discursively dis-placed: the *harraga* are held responsible for their migratory "madness" and its immoral implications. From the preachers' perspective, these "naive" and "pathological" (non)beings ought to reflect upon the destructive consequences of their acts, or else, they will undergo a double punishment as "illegal" migration entails the transgression of both State Law and the Word of God. This is yet another act of scapegoating performed by discourse makers. Clearly,the *harrag*, the scapegoat(ed) in this narrative, is compelled to absorb the "sins" of his country's inefficient leaders.

Hence, the politics of scapegoating in this context reveals what the mainstream media discourse attempts to hide. As Farida Souiah (2016, para.1) succinctly puts it, "Le *harrag* est une icône laide […] il met à nu le système" [the *harrag* is an ugly icon …s/he lays bare the system]. According to these respects, the scapegoated *harrag*- 'Sub-saharan' or Maghrebi- serves as a "receptacle" for the projection of blame. In other words, it is much easier for governments to associate *harga* with individual failure than with their own misgovernance.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have demonstrated, through a combination of discourse and narrative analysis the extent to which (North)-African unauthorised migrants are symbolically im-mobilised, homogenised and semantically dis-placed in the hegemonic representational practices of Morocco and Algeria's public and mainstream media. By re-using the same immobility and dis-placement tropes deployed by Algeria and Morocco's mainstream media, I have tried to highlight the reductive, schematic and fragmented construction of unauthorised migrants' complex "matrioshka journeys" (Bridgen, Mainwaring, 2016). By examining the political impact of labelling on both the represented migrants and the national audiences and analysing Morocco and Algeria's strategies of blame dis-placement, I have endeavoured

to show the extent to which migrants are instrumentalised, de-authorised and dehumanised. Whether they are *confined* within a securitarian or humanitarian narrative, unauthorised migrants are relegated to the margin and are constructed as the very source of "crisis". This discursive construction, enables thus States to 'displace' attention from their own violent border practices and, by extension, conceal their crisis of migrant hospitality. Through the activation and dissemination of simplistic binary sets like *legal/ illegal*, *White versus Black (Africa)*, mainstream media both in Morocco and Algeria tend to clone the historical tropes of colonialism, enacting thereby an act of (double) symbolic violence (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992).

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MONIA CHANNOUFI[1]

NATIONAL ROOTS AND TRANSNATIONAL ROUTES
A case study of the Tunisian diaspora in Britain

Introduction

This chapter is part of a wider research project on the Tunisian diaspora in Britain. It proposes a qualitative analysis of the experiences of the study group and explores the configuration of their transnational identities. The findings presented in this paper draw on a qualitative research carried out in London between 2022 and 2023. Along with field observation, twenty-five interviews were conducted with members of the Tunisian diaspora in London. Furthermore, five life-history interviews were undertaken with first generation Tunisians who had moved to Britain between the age of twenty and thirty. Through a thematic analysis of the interviews, the paper shows the impacts of the experience of migration on the participants' sense of belonging and identity. Furthermore, it discusses the hybrid nature of transnational identities showing how migrants create a space for the articulation of their identities and a framework of self-recognition which transgresses national borders.

1. *Theoretical Perspectives on Transnationalism*

The last decade of the 20th century saw the rise of a new approach to migrants' integration which emphasized a non-essentialised understanding of cultures and communities, thus challenging multiculturalism[2] and the boundaries of the nation

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1   University of Tunis El Manar/Univesity of Westminster
2   Multiculturalism – a term spanning a variety of policies and institutional

state it promulgates. A large body of studies have revealed transnational patterns in migrants' lives which have been allowed by newer, cheaper, and more efficient modes of communication and transportation (Portes et al. 1999). As Portes (1997, 812) put it: "[These migrants] are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both." The Tunisian diaspora in Europe is particularly illustrative here.[3]

The value of transnationalism was identified by Glick-Schiller et al. (1994, 8) whose *Nations Unbound* has pioneered the field of transnational migration studies. They defined transnationalism as "The processes by which immigrants and refugees forge and maintain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement." These networks of connections create transnational social fields in which migrants not only exchange resources but also forge their identities and maintain their sense of belonging.

Ip et al. (1997) proposed a typology of transnationalism, with a stronger emphasis on identity and citizenship, ranging from relational transnationalism, experiential transnationalism to legal transnationalism. The first is the most quantifiable form of transnationalism and refers to cross-border movements for family

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frameworks – constitutes one of the most articulated concepts within social theories and practice. It is defined by Rosado (1997*)* as *"*a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their sociocultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society". Indeed, the multicultural perspective offers an alternative way of viewing the host society, rejecting the assimilationist assumption of a unified core, ethnic-cultural inferiority and irreversible assimilation.

3   Schmoll C. 2005. *Pratiques spatiales transnationales et stratégies de mobilité des commerçantes tunisiennes*. Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales, 21(1): 131-154; Oueslati A. 2009. «*Les Tunisiens en France, 40 ans après : Nouvelle Photographie et Dynamique Spatio-temporelle*», in   Dubus G. Oueslati A., *Regards sur les migrations tunisiennes*, Agadir (Maroc): Editions Sud Contact, pp.13-32.

visits, tourism and business. The second focuses on how migration affects migrants' sense of identity, belonging and attachment to the homeland. Legal transnationalism involves issues related to citizenship and rights. While legal transnationalism is beyond the scope of this study, relational and experiential transnationalism will be adopted as analytical tools in this case study as they integrate the key themes of the research.

Waldinger (2017) demonstrated that cross-border interactions between origin and destination countries create "tensions" on both sides and that continuing links with the former homeland prevents migrants and their offspring from establishing a sense of belonging to their country of residence. Indeed, transnational connections, more intense than long-standing forms of attachment to homelands, enable migrants to maintain a dual sense of belonging which in turn has a significant bearing on their sense of identity (Vertovec 2001).

Typically, transnational patterns take economic as well as socio-cultural and political forms.[4] While the economic impact of these transnational patterns have most commonly been found in the massive flow of remittances that migrants send to their families in the homeland, the socio-cultural impacts took many forms including marriage alliances, religious activity, civic associations and media.[5] Equally, migrants' transnational connections brought about a variety of political transformations. Transnational political allegiances, or involvement in homeland politics, have taken many forms ranging from community organizations and fundraising,

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4   Transnational patterns in this context are categorized as transnationalism "from below". It refers to the transnational activities and processes initiated by individuals and/or communities which create transnational social field involving migrants and their non-migrant counterparts. *See also:* Smith M.P., Guarnizo L.E. (eds.) 2004. *Transnationalism From Below.* New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

5   Levitt, P. 1998. *Social remittances: Migration-driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion*, «The International Migration Review», 32(4): 926-948; De Haas H. 2005. *International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts*. «Third World Quarterly», Vol. 26, No. 8, pp. 1269-1284; Lacroix et al. 2016. *Social Remittances and the Changing Transnational Political Landscape*. «Comparative Migration Studies», 4 (16).

through party campaigning and international lobbying, to supporting global human rights causes. These transnational patterns are found by a number of studies to have compromised loyalty to the nation state and undermined its container model.[6]

The emergence of transnational diasporas shifted the interpretive frameworks of migration studies, from an interest in multiculturalism to a focus on the hybridity of diasporic identities which emphasizes an understanding of identity as dynamic, spanning national borders.[7] As Hall noted:

> Identity is not a fixed essence, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark, it is not one-and-for all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final absolute return. (Hall 1990, 226)

From this perspective, identity is understood as a multidimensional social product attaching claims to several localities (Phinney 1996).

In this regard, social identity theory is among the most prominent frameworks of analysis used to study collective identities.[8] An identity is formed through the process of self-categorization, on the basis of belonging to a social category or group. This process involves a categorization of individuals who are similar and those

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6   Ostergaard-Nielsen E. 2003. *The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices*, «International Migration Review», 37(3): 760–786: An influential review of transnational political engagement, drawing on field research among Turks and Kurds in Europe, identifying different types of migrant political involvement and discussing the conditions under which each evolves; Shain Y. 2005. *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press; Waldinger R. 2008. *Between "here" and "there": Immigrant cross-border activities and loyalties*, «International Migration Review», 42(1): 3-29.

7   Breakwell G. M. 1986. *Coping with Threatened Identities*. London: Methuen.

8   Tajfel H. 1978. *The Social Psychology of Minorities*. London: Minority Right Group International;1986. *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour*, in Worchel S., Austin W. G. (eds), «Psychology of Intergroup Relations», Pasadena, PA: Burnham Inc. Pub, pp. 7–24.

who differ from the self. The former are labelled as the in-group, the latter as the out-group. In this sense, social identity markers are defined through comparisons with the out-group along particular dimensions (Hogg, Abrams 1988).

To the extent that these aspects are subject to change, identities evolve and change over time and space, shifting focus not so much on the elements of ethnic identity but on the boundaries that demarcate one ethnicity from another (Barth 1969). It is precisely at these boundaries that people become sharply aware of their similarities and differences. It is also there that they begin to borrow characteristics across boundaries, resulting in what Malinowski (1961) described as "culture change".

2. *Research Methods and Analysis*

A multi-research method approach was adopted in this study, consisting of semi-structured interviews, oral history and field notes (Creswell 2009). A thematic analysis was used as a common approach to handling and analysing data. This method of data analysis offered a clearer understanding of content and allowed the interpretation of participants' stories in organised patterns. In addition, a deductive approach was adopted in the analysis process, which was more appropriate to the analytic purposes of the research and fit into the theoretical framework of the study.

The core of the study is based on a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with Tunisians living in London, in order to produce an in-depth understanding of their migration processes, and sense of identity and belonging. While interviews revealed important aspects of the participants' sense of identity and belonging, oral history was valuable in capturing the living memory of first-generation Tunisians and revealing aspects of their lives that could not have been obtained through other research methods.

Twentysix semi-structured interviews (60–90 minutes) were conducted with workers, organization members and leaders, academics, scientists, career researchers, journalists, artists, young entrepreneurs and businesspeople. This set of interviews gave a

thorough picture of their sense of identify and how their translocal connections operate. As Stewart-Weeks & Richardson (1998, 2) noted in their study, "[it is] the quality of social relationships between individuals that affects their capacity to address and resolve problems they face in common."

Five life history testimonies were obtained from Tunisians — three septuagenarians and two sexagenarians — who came to Britain between the 1960s and 1970s. This method tells the researcher less about events themselves than their meaning to the biographer.[9] Indeed, by allowing individual subjectivity and experience to be central to the empirical data, the life histories exposed the life experiences of participants in a way which more formal documentary sources may fail to elucidate. Moreover, the spoken words — in the Tunisian dialect — conveyed feelings and emotions with an immediacy and impact that other sources could not match (Hollway, Jefferson 2000). Equally, these unique personal memories helped revive a sense of self-worth among the narrators who belong to a generation of elders which tend to feel nostalgic or marginalised (Nelson 2016). While recruiting pioneer Tunisian migrants to the study was challenging, the vivid and personal life stories that were obtained offered a powerful and unique insight into the migration experiences of old-timers which could not have been obtained from the qualitative evidence of individual interviews.

Although subjective and personal, these testimonies revealed certain facts that have lingered in the narrators' memories, demonstrating "the complexity of the actual processes of migration" (Jones 1981). Thus by challenging the top-down research approach, individual perceptions provided new information, alternative explanations and different insights into their frameworks of self-recognition (Thompson 1988). As the oral historian Portelli (1981, 100) put it:

> [Oral sources] tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now

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9   Day S. 1988. *Creating the self: stories as transitional phenomena*, «Autobiography», 6:85–92; Hockey J, James A. 2003. *Social Identities across the Life Course*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

think they did… Subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible 'fact'.

Indeed, this "voice of the past", as termed by Thompson (1988), revealed the complex identity (trans)formations that the narrators had experienced as individuals, thus allowing them to express the personal consequences of change and to reflect on the aspects which resisted change, particularly their values, traditions, and beliefs.

Pseudonym	Age	Genre	Language(s) Spoken	Citizenship (s)/ years of residence
'the waiter'	35	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ 10yrs
'the cook'	49	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 25yrs
'the student'	32	woman	English-Arabic-French-Italian	Tunisian/ 8yrs
'the interpreter'	54	man	English-French-German-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 20yrs
'the barber'	28	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ 8yrs
'the fishmonger'	45	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 18yrs
'the lorry driver'	56	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 28 yrs
'the butcher'	65	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 35yrs
'the singer'	33	woman	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/French/ 13yrs
'the hairdresser'	48	woman	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ British/18yrs
'the start-up manager' 36	man	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/ French/ 8yrs	
'the project manager'	42	woman	English-Arabic-French	Tunisian/French/ 10yrs
'the social worker'	47	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ 9yrs

'the journalist'	37	woman	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/ 5yrs
'the academic'	47	woman	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 25yrs
'the swimming coach' 55		man	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/ British/ 23yrs
'the scientist'	56	man	English-French-German-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 32yrs
'the librarian'	55	man	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 28yrs
'the banker'	45	man	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/French/ 15yrs
'the child care worker' 49		woman	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ British/ 21yrs
'the delivery driver'	51	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 23yrs
'the security guard'	37	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ 8yrs
'the store owner'	65	man	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 37yrs
'the sales assistant'	44	woman	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ 10yrs
'the baker'	53	woman	English-Arabic	Tunisian/ British/25yrs
'the internet researcher' 31		woman	English-French-Spanish-Arabic	Tunisian/ French/ 7yrs
'the retired'	71	woman	English-Italian-Arabic	Tunisian/ British/ 36yrs
'the book author'	79	woman	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 57yrs
'the housewife'	62	woman	English-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 35yrs
'the pastry chef'	74	man	English-Italian-Arabic	Tunisian/British/ 46yrs

'the professor'	64	man	English-French-Arabic	Tunisian/ British/ 39yrs

Table 1. Participants

3. The in-between lifeworld of a minority

Figure 1 shows the configurations of the participants' identities through different categories as elaborated from the empirical materials. Four categories underlie the transnational identities of the participants. First, migration as a life transition results in the disruption of three main areas identified by the participants: work, friends, and family. Based on the participants' responses, migration required them to rethink their identities. One participant, the 'waiter', reveals that he bases much of his identity on his profession as a teacher. Thus, changing his job and becoming a waiter in the host society was a shift in his identity:

> When you leave your country, you ask yourself these things: Who am I? What do I want? Well, I was a school teacher. My profession used to define my personality. In this country, I stopped being what I am ...then what are you left with? A plan? Well, [...] the dream that tomorrow will be better […] I am a teacher and I like to feel I am a teacher. The problem is that I cannot work professionally at what I would like to do.
> ('The waiter') [EB4/16].

In this regard, all participants revealed that migrating was their biggest life challenge and marked a turning point in their lives.

The second category underlying participants' transnational identities is the society of origin. Twenty participants referred to Tunisia as their primary source of identification, in addition to ten participants who attached a value to their hometowns, associated with customs, food and typical places. Furthermore, sixteen participants, mentioned religion as a basic feature of their identity. The case that best illustrates the importance of religion in defining identity is 'the shop owner':

Islam is my life; I see myself through my connection with God, I've seen the hand of God, in everything, like when I came here, you understand? In all this, I see it in the past, present and future as well, I believe the hand of God is helping me, so that things turn out well.
('The shop owner) [PE11/13].

In the case of "the singer" there is also a reference to her country of birth, France, where she had lived for 20 years. The option for this participant is a gendered identity which encompasses multiple belongings:

I would say that, originally, I'm from Tunisia, but I've lived in France for 20 years. I feel like I'm more from one place than from the other […] depending on which setting I'm in, although I'd really define myself as a woman.
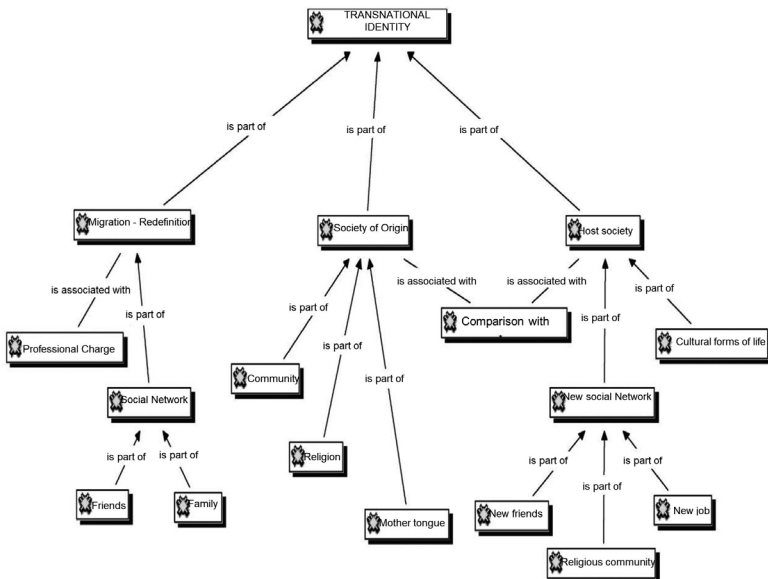('The singer') [T2/ 9]

Figure 1. Categories underlying transnational identity

The third category of identity is related to the various aspects associated with the host society, where identity renegotiations are worked through points of attachment and points of new

identification. In addition to learning new ways of life, the participants succeeded to build new social networks which allowed them to link certain practices from the society of origin with new ones. Indeed, both 'the cook' and 'the social worker' referred to their workmates and the mosque worshippers as the groups with whom they most identify. Together with 'the shop owner', they pointed to the mosque as the place where they feel more at home in London. In addition, 'the student' says she feels that she is a 'Londoner' because she appreciates the new lifestyle in London:

> Even though there are things that don't match with your own culture, you can really like them. Me, for example, I love food in London because it's so hybrid, I love the lifestyle, Christmas, as well, [...] I don't celebrate it, of course, but it's something I got used to [...] and love it.
> ('The student') [E3/14)].

The fourth category highlights the comparisons that participants established between the values and behaviour of people in the host society and those in their society of origin. Indeed, in different fragments of the interviews, the participants defined their identities through the dialectic of *here* and *there*, with the latter used to understand and interpret the former. The case of 'the academic' perfectly illustrates this conflict of self-recognition:

> People here remind me that I'm Tunisian, I've been here for over twenty years and I've lived most of my life here than there and that really affects me. I've started to love people and …even though there are things that don't agree with my culture, I love them.
> ('The academic') [E2/14]

In addition, 'the academic' reveals that she is not satisfied with being regarded by others as simply Tunisian, while in Tunisia she is not treated as such because she lives in London: 'I don't feel good anywhere. If I go there, I'm a complete foreigner, it's something that stays deep inside me' (E3/14). This points to the problematic nature of identity (trans)formation which involves a negotiation of multiple affiliations. Equally, 'the interpreter' articulates his self-

identity within a framework of self-recognition that transgresses national borders:

> I like being ... you know ... I'm Tunisian, from Tunis, but not in the strict sense. I have a more open mind. I can live in London, or anywhere, and not stop being from Tunisia. I'll simply be both things. I identify very much with travellers. I like to live lightly. Many people like to travel but I think, all told, when you travel you live in another world, you leave the routine behind, you live lightly, I like it.
>   ('The interpreter') [I12/13]

  This prompted one of the interviewees to say:

> I feel Tunisian, but home is here [...] I have British habits, so if I go to Tunisia I change habits, if I come here then I change habits again.
>   ('The scientist') [T5/15]

  Similarly, "The barber" expressed this conflict of self-recognition by comparing aspects of his culture of origin and those of the host society:

> You have to be... I've already told you, you have to be morally correct. Here I see a difference with Tunisia. In Tunisia, there are fewer correct people than here but more people who are faithful than here ... I don't know. People here are pretty fair but two faced! I don't know. They're correct, yes, morally, ethically, politically [...]. Yet! say, for example, you are my partner and I'm honest with you: "I've been unfaithful", "I'm honest", but I don't know if that is morally correct, you know? Sometimes, I think people here don't want to suffer and so: "I've been unfaithful, so I tell you, and that's me off the hook", because he doesn't want to suffer. In Tunisia, you wouldn't say that, there's a different character. In Tunisia, people prefer to suffer than to make other people suffer, people close, you know? It's best to keep quiet.
>   ('The barber') [I10/13]

  Central to the process of identity (re)definition experienced by the research participants is the sense of pride they derived from their migration to Britain which marked a significant improvement in their social standing and enhanced their self-esteem. Indeed,

respect and honour constituted positive by-products of the participants' migration. This is particularly the case of participants who had previously low social and economic status in Tunisia. For instance, the 'barber' revealed that he was perceived as "a trouble-maker" and was not recognised for any status. His account suggests his search for self-realisation given that he was allegedly "nothing" prior to migration. He wittily commented:

> I was nothing when I left, you know? [laughs]…my parents told me many times that they regretted having me because I was a trouble-maker, but when I came back with the pounds, they changed their mind [laughs].
> (The 'barber') [T15/16]

In the same vein, the "cook" revealed that sending money and presents changed his position in his family. Feeling valued, this enhanced his sense of pride within the family circle and neighbours. This appeared to constitute an important reason for the continued contact with his family and frequent visits to his home town:

> I did support my family a lot, I was sending more money than they earned in a whole year… I became the man of the house [laughs]…I try to go there whenever possible, spend more time with my parents, my nephews and nieces.
> (The 'cook') [E20/25]

4. *Renegotiating identities in the diaspora: Identity (trans) formation*

Results of the analysis substantiate the view that migrants' identities need to be considered as negotiated in relation to multiple transnational connections. As Clifford (1998, 369) put it, "Identity is also, inescapably, about displacement and relocation, the experience of sustaining and mediating complex affiliations, multiple attachments." This perspective unquestionably determines the ways migrants' identities are constructed. Indeed, the experience of migration places migrants in an identity trap, at

the boundaries of two cultures. This can result in confusions about culture and identity, home and belonging.

As an adaptive strategy, migrants tend to negotiate their forms of cultural socialization in order to forge their identities. This task is especially challenging when the values and beliefs of the ethnic culture differ significantly from those of the host society. As Stonequist (1937, 4) put it, in his celebrated *The Marginal Man*, "Having a dual cultural framework can hinder the location of here and there, leaving them 'on the edge' of each culture, but not fully belonging to either." As shown in the analysis, migration involves not only displacement and relocation but also the experience of sustaining and mediating manifold affiliations and attachments (Clifford 1998). It is a process of *transnational ruptures and sutures*, as termed by Nolin (2002), where identity renegotiations are worked through points of attachment and points of new identifications.

Through this process, migrants form what was dubbed by Vertovec (2001) as "*cultural repertoires*" which translate into "*multiple identities*". These are the product of the combination of insights gained in the society of origin and the new experiences in the host society. Indeed, new identities, with a sense of *multiple belonging*, are formed through this process of renegotiation (Flemming 2004). A process which, as this study has shown, involves a problematic framework of self-recognition, since an identity is forged on the basis of recognition — or lack of it — by others (Taylor 1992). It is equally problematic because, quite often, both the society of origin and the host society may not recognize the dual sense of belonging of people living *here* and *there*.

As the analysis shows, the homeland provides the first ties of *belonging* and the mechanism through which migrants construct their diasporic identities. The nostalgic and emotional attachment migrants generally maintain with their homelands were observed in many of the research participants' accounts and can be explained as a counter-balance to the sense of loss and uprootedness resulting from migration. Furthermore, the accounts in this study showed how belonging is experienced by participants. For them, Tunisia remains a significant emotional frame of reference for belonging. It is generally viewed with affection and longing by all participants.

It represents their social and cultural past, present and possibly future, with communication technology facilitating a vivid daily connection with their families and friends. Their attachment to Tunisia is, therefore, sentimental. However, their attachment to Britain is an instrumental one, as their primary aim from migration is financial gain and, in some cases, upward social mobility.

Similar characteristics were found in the other cases of Tunisians in Europe. As termed by Ouesleti (2009, 7), the "va et vient identitaire" was a prerequisite for maintaining an identity balance for Tunisians in France. It is equally "a question of balance" to Stuart & Ward (2011), in the case of Muslim youth in New Zealand who sought to balance competing demands from family, friends, the community of origin, and the host society in their pursuit of social and material successes.

In line with previous studies, the findings of this study challenge the neoliberal nation-state container model which establishes a zero-sum understanding of social, cultural and political belongings — either *belonging* or *non-belonging*. In fact, frequent visits to Tunisia reinforced the respondents' ethnic identities but also reframed their perceptions of *home*. They perceive Britain as the home of everyday life, work and immediate family, whereas Tunisia is the 'roots', a cultural or sometimes emotional home. For them, it is "*bledi*" — my country, it is also "*ardhi*" — my land. Britain, however, is the familiar everyday home, where their lives are based.

Conclusion

Through an examination of the participants' transnational social fields and perceptions, the results identified four categories underlying the participants' transnational identities and demonstrated how they negotiate their affiliation to two nations within different frames of reference — the homeland and the host society. Equally, the results demonstrated how participants maintained cultural repertoires and selectively deployed them while they skip from one sphere of belonging to another. Thus, the experiences and knowledge acquired in the homeland constitute

the framework in which migrants learn to understand their new setting and redefine themselves. This is evident through the ways in which the participants contrasted and compared their origin and host societies.

In line with previous studies on diasporic identities, this study has shown that transnationalism shifts migrants' sense of belonging and fosters multiple loyalties. It also reframes perceptions of *home*. For those living in the diaspora, a distant homeland might be considered as a kind of partial home, one around which stories and cultural activities are based. Tunisia was discursively constructed by respondents in ways that made it close and special to them, a cultural homeland rather than a literal home or house. With this in mind, future research should look further into the dialectic of *here* and *there* as creative forms of transnational identities, rather than mindsets of "ethnic flight".

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SEX AND FOOD IN TUNISIAN MIGRATION FICTION AND CINEMA
The case of Abdellatif Kechiche's
The Secret of the Grain and Habib Selmi's
Longing for the Woman Next Door

Introduction

"The past is a country from which we have all emigrated," states Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands*. This past is nonetheless a haunted and haunting home. What Rushdie has gone through of recent is but a poignant irony of how this past-country or heritage can all too easily turn into a nightmare. This past is often lived like a burden. Yet, at the same time, it has the pleasure and glamour of dreaminess and nostalgia. It is like Theocritus's pastoral worlds. They are ideal realities only at the phantasmal level.

Migration fiction or cinema work within this politics as well as poetics of nostalgia. As artistic manifestations, they cannot dissociate themselves from their past as "country", that is, from their original geo-historical context. This origin hangs over their present and presence like a shadow or a menace. This depends on how the migratory subject engages with their past, as well as on how the hosting geopolitical context accommodates these "other" cultures and subjectivities.

Yet encounters between host and migrant subjectivities do not happen without tensions. In Tunisian migration literature and cinema, for instance, such tensions are allegorised in images of sexual and gastronomic encounters. Cultural encounters collide and collude in the most carnal and visceral of human spheres: food and sex. The intellectualisation of such encounters only takes place later at the elevated spheres of imaginative creation, that is, in the realms of literature, cinema and art — what we commonly call culture. If food is a cultural emblem immigrants carry along

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for comfort and nostalgia, then sex is much more problematic. The latter involves complex political and ideological issues with demographic and racial undertones which are most often exploited by extreme (and even less extreme) rightwing politics in the host countries. Migration is a betting horse for rightwing politics in Europe today. Eric Zemmour, founder and presidential candidate of the white suprematist Reconquête, wielded the "grand remplacement" conspiracy theory as his pledge to reverse the process of the so-called "grand replacement" of White Judeo-Christian Europe by dark-skinned Muslim migrants.

Contemporary Tunisian migration cinema and fiction are well aware of the allegorical significations of such issues as food and sex as political and cultural markers of identity and nationality. In this essay, I would like to focus on two Tunisian major works, which, in my view, articulate best this filmic and fictional representation of migratory encounters across the Mediterranean Sea. Abdellatif Kechiche's brilliant film, *La Graine et le Mulet* (*The Secret of the Grain*) (2007) and Habib Selmi's novel *Al-Ishtiyaq ila Al-Jarah* (*Longing for the Woman Next Door*) (2021), not only thematise this erotics of culinary pleasures and treasures but, more importantly, problematise its psychological, cultural and even geopolitical implications. Food becomes inextricable from sex and politics, just as sex and politics become intimately related to gastronomy as a twofold cultural and physical experience.

1. *On Couscous Connections and Connotations*

The Secret of the Grain starts with a sizzling sexual scene between Majid and his French bourgeois lover. The scene reeks of sexual politics when we know later she is the wife of the deputy-mayor of the French Mediterranean city, Sète. Erotics is not unfamiliar in Kechiche's films. His *La Vie d'Adèle* (2013) (*Blue is the Warmest Colour*) is a chain of lingering closeups of languorous lesbian sex, in addition to a compelling love story that transgresses gender and class categories. Unlike Kechiche's personae, Selmi's live their sexualities on the phantasmal level. In *Longing*, his sixty-year-old male narrator, a university teacher,

falls in love with Zohra, a Tunisian compatriot who has lived in Paris for decades with her strange and abusive husband (also Tunisian) and mentally-deranged son. She works as a housemaid in the building where the protagonist lives. The story, as it unfolds, reveals deep-seated fantasies wherein food and sex and homeland images intertwine and grow and swell in the protagonist's head to the point of bordering on rape. Exuberant fantasies of culinary and carnal pleasures fog his mind and disturb his sense of discernment and drag him into phantasmagorical worlds which are cut off from objective reality.

Kechiche's protagonist, Slimane, is also a sixty-year-old Maghrebian man. The story charts the tragic fate of a Tunisian migrant, working for thirty-five years in a shipyard both legally and illegally, who suddenly finds himself laid off in such laconic cruelty, "*T'es plus rentable. T'es fatigué et tu nous fatigues*" [You're no longer productive. You're tired and tiresome]. The cog is no longer useful in the capitalist machine. After this brutal dismissal, Slimane has to find a way to survive and reinvent himself in a migration context of precariousness and alienation. The film is semi-autobiographical. Kechiche wanted it to be a special tribute to his father. Actually, he wanted his father to play in the film, but the latter died before the filmmaker could secure financial support. His father's close friend and colleague on a construction site, Habib Boufarès, took over the part and excelled in his performance of a life-beaten sexagenarian Tunisian immigrant. His grave voice and heavy French accent carry a profound sense of alienation. The man has lost touch with his homeland and finds it almost impossible to live his dream in France. It is the pernicious work of both French bureaucracy and family. Kechiche does not shy away from critiquing failures endemic to home family and cultural practices. The film wilfully blurs the boundaries between our expectations, as both French and Maghrebian audiences, and the realities it wants to depict and critique. It is not a migration film in the facile sense of the word. It is not about dichotomies such as "them" *versus* "us," French *versus* North Africans, home *versus* host cultures. It is much more complex and complicated than such simplifications. Yet, I shall demonstrate that such complications

do not happen without running the risk of falling into traps related
to the production of images about selfhood and otherness.

The film established Kechiche's reputation. *La Vie d'Adèle* came
to reinforce this status. In 2008 *The Secret of the Grain* reaped several
awards, including Best Film, Best Director, Best Original Script,
and Most Promising Actress for Hafsia Merzi. Before *The Secret*,
Kechiche also won 5 Césars for his *L'esquire* (2005), another film
on immigration issues. Immigration is paramount in Kechiche's
filmography. *La Vie d'Adèle* is an exception. Green points out that
Kechiche's success is rather "rare for someone who is immigrant
from the Maghreb." It is particularly rare "for one who focuses his
attention on the experience of Maghrebian immigrants in France"
(Green 109). Not only is the context unpropitious for this kind of
themes but it can most likely turn them into clichés about cultural
encounters, conflicts and calamities. Kechiche's film has nothing
of that. It stitches such conflicts seamlessly into a narrative that
is at once compelling and subtle, subversive and self-critical. In
it are exposed not only issues of immigration and its miseries but
also those of hegemony inherent in the Maghrebian culture itself.
Kechiche's criticism targets French and North African structures
of thinking alike. It is Janus-like.

The Sunday couscous with mullet prepared "with love" by
Souad, Slimane's ex-wife, is the context and pretext for erotic
discussions, cultural debates and nostalgic reminiscences. The
first part of the film culminates in a gluttonous enjoyment of the
Sunday lunch set around Souad's table. French citizens of Italian,
Portuguese or Spanish, Russian, and North African origins are
gathered for a moment of conviviality and hospitality at Souad's
table. In this scene, Kechiche's camera tarries languorously on
chewing mouths and lips and pleasure-contorted faces, savouring
every spoonful of the Tunisian couscous made with fresh fish
and "love", as Mario compliments Souad. The scene borders on
what might be described as a culinary orgy. It is not fortuitous. An
erotic conversation sparks off between Mario and his wife, Lilia.
Mario insinuates, in between mouthfuls of Tunisian couscous,
that his wife, in moments of intimacy, expresses her tumultuous
emotions in Arabic. French is forgotten in moments of *jouissance*.
Climactic erotic pleasure expresses itself in the language of the

repressed self, not in the acquired one. The Id speaks in the mother tongue. It is most authentic about subjectivity. Interestingly, the culinary pleasures trigger off this erotic exchange between wife and husband. It is like an exhibitionist scene wherein the wife teaches her husband again how to say "I love you" in Arabic with ostentatious flirtatiousness. Ingurgitating spicy couscous stokes up erotic desires. The buccal is conflated with the genital. Oral pleasures spur libidinal desires. Ingestion and penetration are made synonymous in Kechiche's film. Orifices and lips (read labia), in the Freudian sense, become sources of erotic pleasures. Tunisian chilly powder makes lips and tongues burn and swell and redden. It transforms these organs into erogenous zones, as Kechiche's camera dawdles and vibrates over the munching mouths. "The camera," Benjamin states, "introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (230).

2. *Dismembered Memories, Ambivalent Biographies*

Selmi's academic, Kamal, also wants to reach love through culinary communion. But his quest is just a fantasy that snowballs as the story unfolds. Unlike Kechiche's Slimane, Selmi's professor is a middle-class brain-drain migrant from Tunisia. He leads a comfortable life with his French wife, Brigitte. They live in a posh Haussmannian building They have a spacious apartment. His wife works in a bank. He is respected by his colleagues. His life is uneventful until he meets this Tunisian cleaner, Zohra. She is illiterate and leads a horrible life with her abusive husband, a Tunisian illiterate who has worked all his life in a Renault factory. At the beginning, Kamal looks with disdain at his Tunisian compatriot. He despises her husband even more. Social class erects a wall between these two Tunisian migrants. Although, spatially, they live in the same building, socially, there is a wall separating them. But, later on, when he hears the story of her migration, he starts to lend an ear to her. She is a perfect case of female resilience and resourcefulness. Zohra is a self-made woman, a person who pursues her dream to the end:

The dream of migration took possession of her mind. It didn't quit her head during all the years she worked in houses. When she came of age and could travel on her own, she got her own passport thanks to the help of one of the government officials who hired her as a housekeeper (Translation mine; from now onwards all translation is mine).

The academic is spellbound. Zohra beguiles the professor like a modern Scheherazade. Yet she has no scheme behind her narration of her story, unlike Scheherazade. It is her determination and candid narration of her painful ordeals from one city to the next, from one destination to the following.

Infatuated with Zohra's unaffected talk and charming Tunisian Arabic, Kamal coaxes his wife into hiring her to clean their flat, although he is all too happy to brag that he is a modern husband who does housework on his days off, as if to underscore his adherence to modernity and gender equality ethos. His life with Brigitte is indeed successful because of his appropriation of Western values, lifestyle, as well as philosophical and cultural traditions. Unlike Zohra, Kamal is well integrated into French society. The persona's life by and large charts the author's biography. There is a slight tinge of autobiography in the narrative, just as in Kechiche's film. Habib Selmi is a Tunisian teacher who moved to Paris in 1985. Kechiche migrated with his family to France at the age of six. Stories of autobiographical trajectories crisscross both migration narratives.

Migration predicament stands as the major theme of Kechiche's and Selmi's narratives. Ambivalence haunts the migrant's experience of the host culture and society. This ambivalence more often than not culminates in something of a schizophrenic vision of both native and host realities. Home culture is loved and yet forsaken, and the host culture is desired and yet despised. Kechiche's and Selmi's personae face similar predicaments of alienation and phantasmagoria to varying degrees. Kamal and Slimane refuse to go home after retirement. Kamal is happy with his lot and loss of love. When Slimane's sons urge their father to go home and resume his pre-migration life with his friends in North African sunshine instead of wasting the rest of his days in France, he refuses. Rym, his adoptive daughter and daughter of

his mistress Latifa, encourages him vehemently to reject their callous suggestions. "Your sons dump you like a piece of shit," she indignantly tells him. Slimane finally decides to launch his hospitality business, a Tunisian restaurant, on a decayed ship that he wants to restore. His undertaking is something of a revenge on the system on its grounds or, better still, standing his ground against ruthless capitalism. Gym helps him through the meander of French bureaucracy.

If names are random in Kechiche, in Selmi they have symbolic meanings. Kechiche quarries in North African names to season his narrative. Selmi not only does this but imbues his personae with semiological tenors. Kamal, for instance, means wholeness or perfection. Yet the name carries irony in its folds. At some point of his perfect life with his French wife, Kamal suddenly finds something missing to give full meaning to his existence, something of a supplement to complement his life and selfhood. This supplement is Zohra. She is the psychic component he has repressed for too long. She is that part of selfhood buried under a veneer of westernisation. Her accent, her bodily smells and her delicious dishes stir up memories of forgotten desires and libidinal pleasures. Zohra's etymological meaning is no less meaningful than Kamal's. She is Venus in Arabic, the goddess of beauty, fertility and sexual desire. Kamal is somewhat her Adonis. He mixes up the signals that she sends him all through their encounters. He is obnubilated by one single idea, that is, the idea he has about her in his head. He refuses to see her for who she is. He goes out to hunt her but, ironically, finds himself hunted and haunted by her She turns into an obsession that gnaws at his life and mind. The hunter is hunted, very much in the Actaeon predicament. Kamal's life is shredded to smithereens when Zohra goes home for good.

Zohra, Venus, invades his mind and body like a venereal virus or obsession. From condescension at the beginning of their encounter, the protagonist's relationship with Zohra then morphs into an obsessional infatuation with her body and character. Class is erased before erotic fantasies of regaining the homeland as both body and culture, as woman and food. His Tunisian fantasised erotic subject now takes on the symbol of culinary pleasures. Like Kechiche's couscous, she becomes the source of unique

gastro-erotic pleasures that Kamal enjoys in secret like onanistic experiences. Onanism is a major theme in Selmi's novel *Bikarah* (*Virginity*). Zohra now feeds Kamal with dishes not only cooked with love, as Souad's Sunday couscous, but are retrieved from the depths of Tunisian gastronomic traditions in the heart of Paris:

> She also now and then brought to me authentic Tunisian dishes, which were not available in the Tunisian restaurants I went to in Paris, dishes such as *Mulukhiyah* and *Mermez*. I was not surprised to discover she had great cooking skills. I savoured these specialities with much delectation. Better still, I gulped them alone, for Brigitte was not keen on Tunisian food in general.

Brigitte likes only couscous, that is, the standardised North African dish popularised in France. But Zohra feeds Kamal *Mulukhiyah*. The dish is a typically Tunisian dish made of a stew of jute mallow plant ground into powder and cooked for hours on end with chunks of beef and other spices. This dish has cultural symbolic dimensions too. It is cooked on special occasions like inaugural cycles of seasons or specific dates, like the beginning of the Islamic calendar or on the prophet's birthday. The dish is imbued with particularist symbolics. It is associated with originality and fertility. Venus is the goddess of fertility and sex, as the myth implies. Zohra unknowingly feeds these thoughts into Kamal's imagination. That he does not share these dishes with his wife, Brigitte, reeks of adulterous fantasies. It is sexual intercourse lived in the depths of the academic's subconscious. With her dishes Zohra stirs up deep-seated memories of motherhood and motherland, libidinal (incestuous) and cultural desires and fantasies. The approach is Freudian, insofar as Selmi is well aware of such unconscious drives in his narratives. His *Bikarah*, for instance, narrates a homoerotic repression between two friends in deep Tunisia. The desire is never articulated. It remains ensnared all through the narrative in the spheres of fantasy, deferral, and occultation of desire. The friends are stuck in their childhood onanistic experience under a carob tree. They couldn't go beyond their homoerotic memories and fantasies.

Selmi is a daring Tunisian writer, just as Kechiche in his films. Both are not afraid to unveil native cultural hypocrisy. They

denounce it with similar vehemence and aesthetic artistry. They subvert its hegemonic strategies and structures. Migrants carry their cultures along like shells. Kechiche and Selmi are ready to shed off these cumbersome shells. They are rather willing to slough off the old skin for a regenerated and regenerating one, for a new selfhood founded on mutual understanding and recognition. Kechiche's "French" personae are not all condemnable. They are not all racist and saboteurs. Kamal's wife, Brigitte, and neighbour, Madame Albert, are good people who operate outside the limits of cultural and racial chauvinism. Kechiche also transgresses these facile dichotomies. He calls for a subjectivity beyond these limited and limiting divides. He finds it in couscous around Souad's table. Yet, just as food helps elaborate it, it may as well jeopardise it, his film implies in the end.

Food is served and unserved. Sex is great or disastrous. After the torrid sexual scene between Majid and the deputy's wife, the film follows a serious course. It is structured like a diptych, with adjacent light and somber panels. The scene involves sizzling sex of spanking and slapping on raw flesh. The scene is tainted with sexual politics. Both personae feed on fantasies of power and retaliation. The wife finds in the Maghrebian stud food for her sexual fantasies. And Majid, a second-generation Tunisian immigrant, feeds himself fantasies of masculine fulfilment and also of vengeance on colonial power. Migration narratives feed on such erotico-political fantasies. Tayeb Salih's, *Season of Migration to the North*, is a *locus classicus*. Yet if the French mistress's husband does not know about his wife's affair, Majid's wife knows about her husband's philandering. But this does not seem to bother Majid, for he quarries his so-called "right" from a culture which is, at best, taciturn on, and, at worst, complicit with extra-conjugal sex, not so much because it is tolerant about sexual practices, but rather because it favours male sexuality. It is phallocentric.

3. *The Erotics of the Belly*

Kechiche debunks this patriarchal view. Yet, the French bourgeoise's unbridled sexual escapades with Majid derive from

two teleologies. The first is endemic to the film's theme, insofar as it reinforces occidental images, or rather stereotypes, about oriental sexuality. Majid, in this sense, is not far different from, say, a Delacroix odalisque. He is a masculinised odalisque, so to speak. Be they male or female, oriental subjects are encapsulated in essentialist images of erotic vehemence or indolence. Rym's bellydance at the end of the film comes to confirm this Orientalist view of the Arab female body.

The second reason for Kechiche's raunchy scene at the beginning of the film aims at setting the thematic and cinematic tone of the narrative. As Green argues, the scene "adds a sexy French twist to the film, making it clear from the beginning that this is not just a grimy-realist tale of working-class life, a perspective later reinforced by the Rym's sensual belly dance" (118-19). This reason caters for the Western gaze. There is no doubt about this voyeuristic, as well as commercial, aims. The film wants to sell itself to the French (and Western) audiences, to carve a place in the Western film market. And it did sell itself brilliantly. The film was a huge office box success in France, but, ironically, not in America. The English title, *The Secret of the Grain*, was understood as an investigation of the secrets of farming cereals.

Since its liberation from State production in the 1980s, Tunisian cinema has sought to cater for the Western audience.[2] The reasons are obviously commercial, in addition to the fact that most of the films were Franco-Tunisian productions. Nonetheless, these strategies of self-selling often culminate in echolalia or cannibalisation of Western cinema. For instance, Moufida Tlatli's successful (and only) film, *Les Silences du Palais* (1994) (*The Silences of the Palace*), clearly cannibalises Jonathan Demme's title, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), itself an adaptation of the Thomas Harris's eponymous novel. Also, Raja Amari's *Satin Rouge* (2002) glaringly echoes Baz Luhrmann's musical *Moulin Rouge*. Strangely, in both films, these Tunisian female directors somehow fall in the trap of

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2   For further discussion of this point, see Robert Lang, *New Tunisian Cinema: Allegories of Resistance* (Columbia UP, 2014); and Alyssa Miller, "Tunisian Cinema after the Arab Spring: Portrait of a Nation in Transition," *Anthropology Now*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (September 2021): 123-28.

wilful "exoticisation," and hence eroticisation, of North African femininity. Although the narratives articulate the violence, moral and physical, that North African women face and endure on a daily basis, they nonetheless fail to distance themselves from the Western perception and representation of Oriental femininity in general. Worse, they reinforce Orientalist stereotypes for the sake of commercial success and fame. Amari's entire musical is about Lilia's plump body undulating to oriental rhythms. She finds her passion for bellydancing in a cabaret as she goes looking for her missing daughter. Since then she sheds off her former reserved self and lets her body shimmy and undulate to oriental music and beat. In so doing she offers herself to both oriental and occidental voyeurism. And, also, in so doing, the film sells in Western office boxes. Art is subversion and subversion entails radical break from preconceived ideas and discursive formations. In failing to do so, the film then finds itself not in collision but rather in collusion with hegemonic discourses proffered by colonial as well as indigenous ideologies.

Kechiche's *The Secret of the Grain* unfortunately does not circumvent this predicament. The closing scene of the film lingers on the shimmying body of Rym, who, in a desperate move to save her adoptive father's business, Slimane's restaurant, embarks on an extemporaneous and languorous bellydance to distract and entertain the customers who by now began to grow fidgety, waiting for the couscous to be served. The couscous cannot be served for Majid, the son, unwillingly — or say unconsciously, in the Freudian sense — disappears with the couscous in his car at the crucial moment. Slimane's hospitality business is jeopardised on the gala opening night. This inadvertent act is akin to Oedipal parricide. Yet, conversely, Rym's intervention to save her father echoes the mythic *Caritas Romana*. If Majid stabs the father, Rym, like a modern Pero feeding her father, Cimon, from her breasts, saves him — at least momentarily. Like in the myth, the metaphor revolves around food and body, nourishment and sexual allusions, albeit tainted with incestuousness in the myth. Pero's father is sentenced to death by starvation and is left languishing in a dungeon. Every time she visits him in prison, Pero feeds her father from the milk of her breasts. Not even the guards discover

her saving scheme. Likewise, Rym saves her frail father from financial and psychological ruination by offering her body to the hungry eyes. Symbolically, she saves him from death. In myth, Pero has nothing to offer her father except her body. Here the question is whether Pero's act of self-offering to her father is an act of absolute love or an abject act of incest. The myth deconstructs such facile, if spurious, moral dichotomies, insofar as it unsettles our perception of such dualities as good and evil, *halal* and *haram*. The myth places the act of generosity beyond such reductive definitions of moral paradigms. It is archetypal in the Jungian sense, for it establishes links between locality and universality. It generates what Levi-Strauss would call *mythemes*. Maupassant's story, *La Boule de Suif* (1880), for instance, is also a variation on mythic *Caritas Romana*. Elizabeth Rousset, a prostitute nicknamed "Boule de Suif" ("Ball of Fat"*)*, decides to free her fellow travellers in the stagecoach from German detainment by offering her body to the German officer for sex. Rym's bellydance at the closing scene rehearses the same *mytheme.* Rym and Elizabeth "prostitute" themselves for the ultimate act of life-saving and charity. This redeems Kechiche at least as far as theme and scheme are concerned. The scene quarries in myth and literary archetypes.

This argument is perfectly sound if the scene is seen intrinsically as part of a long mythic and literary tradition, that is to say, if it is interpreted from within such a tradition. Yet, if the work is interpreted from without, that is, contextually, then the last bellydance scene acquires a radically different meaning. It goes beyond aesthetics. It becomes a crude product of modern capital objectification and commodification, what Benjamin debunks as "the phone spell of a commodity" in the age of mechanical reproduction (224). Our age is of digital reproduction. Modern capitalism's formidable power relies in its capacity to transform aesthetic works into cash and profit. Ironically, even aesthetic works that vocally denounce capitalism, like Kechiche's film, find themselves almost inescapably coopted by capital ethos and logos. Economics lies behind aesthetics. Profit and box office are behind aesthetic genesis. Yet profit in Tunisian cinema is most often

generated by self-exhibitionism in the Orientalist marketplace. Sex sells. And exotic sex is even a better seller.

In refutation of this Saidian interpretation, Green argues that Kechiche is "far from pandering to his audience with an amateur belly-dancer scene." She carries on to argue that "[he] is rather introducing them, like the clientele of Slimane's restaurant, to the beauty of the Arabic musical tradition" (Green 21). This is a naive reading of the erotics and politics of bellydancing. The latter is unambiguously associated with fantasised views of female body and sexuality not only in the Orientalist imagination but in patriarchal phantasmagoria in general. Surprisingly, Green is not unaware of the risk of slippage into such reductionist and essentialist views. She quotes the film critic Ginette Vincendeau in this respect. The latter warns against the dangers inherent in such female depictions in Kechiche's *The Secret of the Grain*:

> While the film celebrates women's dynamism in comparison with ineffectual men, it has problems constructing their identity outside traditional myths of femininity […] In particular, Rym's belly dance — her desperate bid to entertain the diners when the whole enterprise is threatened by the disappearance of the couscous — degenerates into crude worship of female fecundity with endless close-ups of her undulating tummy. (qtd. in Green 120)

4. *Female Bodies or Fantasies of Unforgotten Homelands*

Selmi's narrative is obviously less bound to the marketplace. It was written in Arabic and shortlisted for the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2021. Selmi does not expose his female personae to lascivious voyeurism, be it homegrown or Western. The narrative rather addresses issues of social class and status of two fellow Tunisian migrants, Kamal and Zohra, who find themselves living in the same block in Paris. But their encounter follows a crescendo trajectory as the story progresses and Kamal's obsession with Zohra, both as body and allegory, snaps out of hand. Much of the fantasising, we have seen, happens only in Kamal's head. As the sudden encounter develops into a professional relationship, since Zohra now works in Kamal's

flat, the new context, given the spatial proximity it provides, feeds more and more delusional fantasies into the professor's head. The protagonist's delusion deepens and reaches a climax towards the end of the novel. Kamal shifts from a romantic dreamer of love of a fellow Tunisian compatriot to a jealous stalker and then finally into a sex offender:

> My desire was ablaze to the extent I was no longer in control of it. I hugged her tightly in my arms […] Zohra had never looked to me as exciting as she did at those moments. The more she talked and resisted the more my excitement and desire to kiss her increased. I waited a little, and then advanced towards her, hugged her vigorously, and stretched my neck seeking her lips. She pushed me away again and said:
> —Please Mister Ashur, behave yourself…Please!

Zohra, the illiterate housemaid, teaches Kamal, the professor, proper conduct. What he likes to describe as his "game of seduction" with her is but a game of delusion and self-delusion. It is worse. It ironically belies his claim of seamless integration into French culture and society, and Western modernity in general. Yet his encounter with Zohra unstitches the fabric. The veneer of modernisation and Westernisation cracks and reveals his "true" self. It unmasks him. Metaphorically, Kamal seeks to mask or drench this "true" self in profuse Western perfumes, to the extent that his wife is shocked:

> Sometimes I wore fragrance again after I had already done when I took my shower. In truth, I am keen on wearing perfume in the morning. I love perfume so much, not because I like the smell of it, but because it gives me good mood in the morning and reinforces my self-confidence.

With Zohra he loses self-confidence and drops his guard or pretences. She awakens the dormant patriarchal fantasies of domination and subjection in him. He states that an "Arab woman cannot live alone and stay on her own, especially in a foreign country, even if she had a strong personality and financial means". In Zohra, he also seeks to satiate his "nostalgia for the Arab woman". This does not prevent him, albeit his education and

rationalism, from falling into the trap of irrational essentialisations about Arab, more precisely Tunisian, women and gender relations. Zohra's eruption into his life and space — his flat — reconnects him to his forgotten self through conversations in Tunisian dialect and fantasies of sexual desire — what might be described as the erotics of language and cleavage. Now Kamal derives immense pleasures from speaking Tunisian Arabic with her, after taking pride in mastering French like a native speaker. Moreover, he allows himself to crane his neck and peer into her deep cleavage when he teaches her Arabic.

Zohra rekindles two mythopoetic fantasies in Kamal: sex and language. Food comes later when she feeds him terroir dishes and more sexual fantasies. Her food comes to garnish Kamal's phantasmagoria about his mother tongue and sex with Arab women, things he lacks as a brain-drain immigrant in Paris. Although food is not as present in Selmi's work as in Kechiche's film, it nonetheless has a significant symbolic meaning, insofar as it stokes up memories of homeland and sexual desire. *Mulukhiyah*, we have seen, is associated with fertility rites and cycles. Kamal fantasises about inaugurating a new erotic phase with Zohra but she turns into his *femme fatale*. She hurls him into the abyss of subjective and existential emptiness. She is the mirror he holds in front of his face, reflecting not his "plenitude", as the etymon of his name claims, but the inner emptiness of his selfhood and existence.

Mirrors are important in aesthetic works. They are allegories of mimetic art and literature. Both Selmi and Kechiche imitate reality through stark aesthetic realism. Kechiche's rendering of reality borders on naturalism. He asks actress Hafsa Herzi, Rym in the film, to gain fifteen kilos (33 pounds) for the bellydance scene (Green 119). His lingering closeups on erotic scenes in *La Vie d'Adèle* earn him a scandal. Selmi, however, imitates reality as it unfolds in his flat and its vicinities. Yet mirrors are not always "unflawed". They might be "broken," as Salman Rushdie points out (11). The thesis that art is a looking glass is not always tenable. Broken glasses can distort reality, insofar as they reflect a reality that is not *real*. Yet, for Rushdie, such a distortion is not significant in itself. The broken glass, he argues, "may actually be as valuable

as the one which is supposedly unflawed" (Rushdie 11). Here he builds his argument on Foucault's idea that mirrors are neither dystopian nor utopian spaces. A mirror is rather a *heterotopian* space upon which both reality and non-reality are reflected and blended. They are "placeless places" or "sites with no place", emphasises Foucault, for they paradoxically reveal *real* presence onto a virtual space — that is, in the space of reflection, not in the realm of physical being or existence (24).

Conclusion

Cinema and literature operate within Foucault's paradoxical space of reflection. They are mimetic of reality, however they distort this reality. For this reason, Rushdie regards the broken glass as valuable as the unflawed one, for both remain "reflective" and not authentic rendering of reality. They are trapped in their status as *reflections*, in the Platonic sense. As such, the flawless mirror is as much broken as the flawed one. Both fail to render the essence of reality. Kechiche's and Selmi's narratives, likewise, struggle to render *authentically* the reality they want to reflect in their works. Kechiche denounces modern capitalism only to find his work trapped in its ethos and logos of profit and marketability. Although Selmi's work is less bound by capital ethos, his main character is revealed to himself without being exposed to himself, just like one's reflection on a looking-glass. He sees himself without gaining insight into his essential character or nature. He rather remains trapped in his egocentric Imago, like Narcissus. Although Zohra rejects his pushy and creepy advances, he does not as yet discover the true nature of his ego-phallocentrism, nor his logocentrism, given his intellectual and social standing. He is affronted because she does not enter his phantasmal world, a world that exists only in his head. The object of desire lies outside desire itself. It resides within the realm of obsession or fixation, not desire itself. As such, it is akin to fetishism. Kamal fetishises Zohra in his delusional fantasies. He treats her like a sexual object, rather than a woman with free will and determination. This is his calamity and tragedy at the same time. Like Slimane's couscous at

the end of the film, his fantasies remain unfulfilled or, better still, unserved. Zohra goes home for good, and Kamal's life remains hanging to a special word or two to come from her, but they never come. After all, perhaps this is the ultimate fulfilment of fantasy. It is a hanging, a waiting for something that never comes, that never materialises.

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Rather than being a historicist approach interested in the origins and development of certain social and cultural expressions, cultural studies, in their most recent manifestations, have engaged with the analysis of specific sociocultural contexts and their constitution, as well as with a critical sensitivity to what is conjunctural and contextual. Within this new framework, migration studies have become an essential platform to update the conceptual categories but also to highlight the "contested terrain" of contemporary cultural studies. The goal of this volume is to explore the interconnection between these two fields of studies. Starting from observations made in fieldwork, literary criticism, visual culture and media studies, the contributions collected here analyse issues such as representation and self-representation, the agency of the storytelling, the victimization and criminalization of migrants, the border crossing and the porosity of borders, the cultural practices of meeting and sharing traditions, nationalities, identities.

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