

***Homo Mediaticus: Immigrants, Identity, and (Tele)Visual Media in
Contemporary Francophone Literature***

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Acknowledgement | i |
| Dedication | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| Introduction: Immigrant Literature and the Mass Media: A New Perspective on Historical and Literary Entanglements | 1 |
| Chapter One: <i>Homo Mediaticus:</i> The Birth of the Immigrant as a Haunting Media Figure. | 75 |
| Chapter Two: Covering Illegal Immigration: Literature, Media, and the Question of Death through Images. | 115 |
| Chapter Three: Television as the Evil Eye? Media H(a)unting of Immigrants in <i>Beur</i> and <i>Banlieue</i> Novels | 171 |
| Chapter Four: <i>Pour un autre droit de regard:</i> Re-imagining the Self through the Mediascape of Television | 259 |
| Conclusion: Of Immigrants, the Media and the Transmutational Power of Literature in the Visual Era | 323 |
| Bibliography | 335 |

Introduction: Immigrant Literature and the Mass Media: A New Perspective on Historical and Literary Entanglements

To say that *migration* and its corollaries, *immigration* and *emigration*, are in 2016 the many-headed hydra of our times is far from being an exaggeration. In a context of globalization, “[e]conomic, political, and social asymmetries account for transitions in migratory patterns within countries and continents and beyond strict national/ continental borders” (Dominic Thomas, “The Global Mediterranean: Literature and Migration” 140). Many in the fields of Social Sciences and Humanities will agree that international migrants and especially immigrants—people who leave their country to settle in another one permanently—are the ultimate political and media symbols of a global social, political, economic and human crisis in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

Over the last three decades, immigration, characterized by mass migrations from the so-called *Global South* to “more prosperous geographic zones in the European Union” (Thomas), has been among the most talked about issues in politics and in the mass media around the globe, and especially in a country with a long history of immigration such as France—host today to a large number of immigrants from the African continent. Most recently, in a context of tighter European internal and external border control, events like the Syrian refugee crisis,¹ which saw the arrival of over a

¹ This crisis (2015-2016) is not really “new” as some might think. It finds its roots in the wake of the events following the 2010-2011 “Arab Spring” also known as the “Arab revolutions,” which started in Tunisia and then later spread to the neighboring countries of Libya, Syria, and also Egypt. These events have been the object of intense media coverage (i.e. radio, press, television, internet) worldwide. As we will see later, the role played by the media, especially by social media (e.g. *Twitter*, *Facebook*) has been particularly crucial to disseminating the news and bringing the tragic events *closer* to us.

million migrants—and more to come—in Europe² since 2015, have been the object of intense political debates and have triggered a media frenzy worldwide. Likewise, in the past few months, the increased death toll at sea of refugees and other undocumented migrants trying to reach the European *Eldorado* by crossing the Mediterranean by boat has been covered in depth by all media. More than ever, our screens have been flooded with images of capsized boats, floating corpses, or “hordes” of immigrants walking alongside roads trying to reach northern European countries, especially Germany. In France, where immigration has been increasingly politicized, spectacular events like the famous 1983 “Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme,” famously known as the “Marche des Beurs,” the different “headscarf affairs” since the 1980s, the “Sans-Papiers” case (also known as the “Église Saint Bernard” affair) in 1996, the 2005 riots that struck major French cities while opposing ethnic minority youth of immigrant origin against the police, the 2009-2010 national debate on what it means to be French, or the recent *Charlie Hebdo* and Paris attacks in 2015 have all contributed throughout the years to making France’s immigrant and ethnic minority populations more visible in the public and media sphere.

Such hypervisibility would almost make us forget that these same immigrants and their children—mostly originating from the nation’s former colonies of North and Sub-

² We should note that Syrians are not the only nationality in this migratory phenomenon, which gained full attention in 2015. Among these migrants are Iraqis, Afghans, Somalis, and refugees from South Asia. According to the website of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in 2015, a total of 1,046,599 migrants arrived in Europe either by land or by sea. More recently, a “situation report” published by IOM and entitled “Europe/ Mediterranean, Migration Response” (May 19, 2016) stipulated that “[a]s of 18 May 2016, 196,325 migrants and refugees have arrived to Europe by land and sea routes since the start of 2016, the majority of whom have entered through Greece (155,975) and Italy (33,907).” Consulted online on May 23, 2016. <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/Europe-Med-Migration-Response-Sitrep21-19May.pdf>.

Saharan Africa—are most of the time invisible in the social and political arenas due to a lack of political representation and recognition and increasing social marginalization. These events certainly raise difficult questions related to the social and political condition of immigrants, as well as to their representation in our contemporary societies, media and collective imagination. For example, in France, over 5 million immigrants (INSEE)³ were counted in 2013, and since the continuous arrivals of populations from her ex-colonies of North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia (particularly the former Indochina) and the Caribbean (Martinique, Guadeloupe)⁴ during the Post-War period and the period following the Independences in the 1960s, immigration has been perceived as a growing and insidious problem. Hence, one must first point out that, on the political front, these events have foregrounded deep issues linked to the presence of postcolonial immigrants living in France in dire socio-economic and cultural conditions; among these are issues related to high unemployment, economic insecurity, lack of social inclusion, and racism, to name a few. Also noteworthy is the fact that each one of these French events has been preceded or followed by the adoption of new political and economic measures and implementation of new policies supposed to address effectively the immigrant problem. A good example of such political measures can be found in the creation by the Sarkozy government of a *Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-Development* (2007) charged with regulating migration flows, promoting immigrants’

³ For more information, see *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (INSEE) and Chantal Brutel’s article “Les immigrés récemment arrivés en France. Une immigration de plus en plus européenne.” *Insee Première* 1524 (Novembre 2004) <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=ip1524>

⁴ It should be noted that, like the inhabitants of French Guyana and of the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, Martinicans and Guadeloupeans are full French citizens. Yet, because of their phenotype and other differential marks, namely their accents, their clothes, they are often treated as foreigners or, worse, as immigrants.

integration and, among other things, restoring pride in a national identity in crisis two years after the November-December 2005 riots. Secondly, in the light of such politicization accompanied by hyper-mediatization, it has become obvious that immigrants, as a social category and preferred news subjects/objects, have morphed, literally and figuratively, into haunting and hunted media figures. Like specters, immigration and its “hordes” of immigrants have kept haunting our screens and collective imagination; they have been turned into an eerie spectacle. Furthermore, as a pernicious effect of constant media coverage, the “immigrant,” who is usually confused with the figure of the “foreigner” (*l'étranger*),⁵ has come to symbolize the ultimate figure of strangeness and alterity—the *Other*—the one who does not *belong* and who is perceived as a *threat* to national cohesion and peace. Immigrants are those who, in times of crisis, are also used as the perfect scapegoat by politicians and news media and sacrificed on the public altar.

Yet, although immigration is once again a global hot topic in the wake of the ongoing Syrian and European refugee crisis, and immigrants are becoming one of the most filmed, photographed and, as such, the most watched or studied “objects” of our

⁵ Part of this confusion stems from a lack of clarity surrounding both terms. While according to the definitions published on the INSEE website, “un immigré est une personne née étrangère à l'étranger et résidant en France [...], “[u]n étranger est une personne qui réside en France et ne possède pas la nationalité française, soit qu'elle possède une autre nationalité (à titre exclusif), soit qu'elle n'en ait aucune (c'est le cas des personnes apatrides). Les personnes de nationalité française possédant une autre nationalité (ou plusieurs) sont considérées en France comme françaises. Un étranger n'est pas forcément immigré, il peut être né en France (les mineurs notamment).” What seems to differentiate both “étranger” and “immigré” is the fact that whereas one can cease to be a foreigner, being an immigrant is something permanent: “La qualité d'immigré est permanente: un individu continue à appartenir à la population immigrée même s'il devient français par acquisition. C'est le pays de naissance, et non la nationalité à la naissance, qui définit l'origine géographique d'un immigré.” We can clearly see why such a definition becomes problematic in the case of individuals born in France of immigrant parents, such as the Beurs, who after two or three generations are still considered as immigrants or foreigners. For the complete definitions, see INSEE, “Définitions,” <http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=definitions/liste-definitions.htm#def_1>.

time, the public is still left to wonder about the following questions: what or who is an “immigrant” in today’s global society? What is the *condition* of an immigrant in a media-saturated and information-based society? Is he really who/what we see on our screens, and to what extent? One cannot ignore the fact that immigrants, as the public knows or, rather, *sees* them, have had their identity shaped by their various encounters and interactions with the media apparati that make up this post-modern ocularcentric world, and the results have not always been good.

Contemporaneous symbols of human misery and suffering, often depicted as a social problem and a national threat, immigrants, especially those from Third world countries, are conflated with their public image associated by accusation in the media with delinquency, illegality, and terrorism, and the stereotypical labeling that comes along with them—a labeling and imaging from which they constantly try to demarcate themselves with more or less success. Such is the case of postcolonial immigrants in France, specifically North African immigrants and their children, the *Beurs*, living in the disenfranchised outskirts of France’s cities, the *banlieues*, and who have been constantly represented in the media as illiterate, poor, violent thugs (*lascars*), illegals (*clandestins*), or terrorists due to their geographical origins, upbringing, and Muslim and Arabo-Berber culture.⁶ Such images and discourses have dangerously blurred the frontier between what is *real* and what is *fictional* to the point that the word “immigrant” itself has been voided of its original meaning. Already in an identity in limbo or crisis, in that it is neither totally from here nor any longer from there, caught between two nations and two cultures, immigrants find themselves confined by media and politics to a liminal position. Worse,

⁶ In other words, it is because of their difference and their apparent refusal to assimilate.

given the reductionist media discourses, all immigrants have been literally “put in the same bag,” and have become, in effect, a metonymic and phantasmatic figure that, for my purposes, I shall name the *Immigrant*.⁷

Hence, as his social identity and public image are at stake, one must therefore ask how the Immigrant manages to mediate, question, and negotiate such representations. Is the Immigrant a simple victim of the media’s destructive representations, or does he play an active role in the construction of his social and media image and identity? How does he free himself from the power of the *Gaze*, that of the public, of the native others, which is mediated through the artificial eye of the camera? In a context of hyper-mediatization, what role does another medium like literature play in such mediation processes? In such a political and media climate, it is no surprise that, in France and beyond, immigration has not only constituted an important object for scientific, critical and theoretical inquiry, but also an important source of inspiration in the various art forms of film, music or literature. In the fields of history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and political science, it has also given rise to a myriad of publications devoted to the analysis of issues relevant to this social phenomenon. In the literary field, the presence of so many postcolonial immigrants has favored the emergence of a *littérature de l’immigration* (immigration literature). Written by immigrants themselves or their children, this literature puts at the forefront the social and cultural reality of immigration through the

⁷ For simplicity, I will use throughout the dissertation the capital “I” to denote the metaphorical and archetypal nature of this (media and literary) figure (the Immigrant) and lower case “i” to refer to real immigrants and/or their social origins. I will also use the masculine third-person pronoun to refer to the *Immigrant*, whereas feminine and masculine pronouns will be indistinctively used when referring to “real” immigrants or when signaling the gender of an immigrant hero.

depiction of the life journey and plight of a fictional immigrant character modeled on his real counterpart—in sharp contrast with the usual media image and stereotypes. Given the disparity between immigrant narratives and media representations, one must wonder the following: How do immigrant writers engage with and question the mechanics of media representation and the effect of the mediatization of immigration on immigrant (self) identities and role as social agents? How do they counter the negative and stereotypical images and discourses—understood here as speech acts—that sustain them? If we consider immigration and the Immigrant as a social and media construct, and as such discursive,⁸ what other discursive configurations about them do their works offer? How do they manage to make the Immigrant (or immigrants) *more* visible and more human? For, lest we forget, this hypervisibility has paradoxically condemned the immigrants to a permanent state of invisibility, as the public does not get to *see* them—the *real* immigrants, but just an *image*. A transcendental figure, a bodiless subject born at the interstice of word and images, of the real and the virtual, the Immigrant seems thus to bear only the name of his real counterpart, as both the figure and the term that designates him encompass multiple and often negative connotations. If seeing is believing, the Immigrant is the result of all of those images and the representational systems to which they belong. They control him. As an object and subject, he is defined by his “mise en image” and therefore by his visibility—in other words, by the way he is *visualized*

⁸ My reference to the concept of “discourse” follows Michel Foucault’s definition of the concept, which he developed in *L’ordre du discours* (“The Order of Discourse”) (1971) and in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; 1972). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (part II and III) where he mainly develops his theory of discourse, Foucault describes a “discourse” as a “way of speaking” (193), as “a group of statements” (80) and as a social and discursive practice that produces knowledge. As Stuart Hall explains in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, “[i]t is important to note that the concept of *discourse* in this usage is not purely a ‘linguistic’ concept. It is about language *and* practice” (44, italics in the original).

(imagined, seen, made visible) and thus known. So, if knowledge is power, as famously argued by French philosopher Michel Foucault, one has to wonder about the hidden power relations involved in such a relationship and the role of writing in shifting these power dynamics.

Moreover, one has ultimately to ask how the Immigrant reclaims power over the terms of his own visibility and identity under such conditions. The answer might be found in his own ability to see and to be seen on his *own* terms. It might depend on his *visuality*⁹—a term which encapsulates the tension between the *visual* and the *visible*, between the act of looking and of seeing (or to be seen)—and on his ability to create (new) meanings.¹⁰ Thus, if *visuality* and *visibility* are the conditions *sine qua non* of his recognition and coming into being as an autonomous subject, what are his strategies to reclaim his “droit de regard,” his right to *look back* (to paraphrase Bell Hooks’ famous expression in “The Oppositional Gaze”)? When and how does the gaze of the Immigrant become a “site of resistance” (Hooks) and agency for him? These are the questions that are foundational for my doctoral project, and which I seek to address in this introduction and subsequent chapters. This introductory chapter aims to foreground the general historical, critical and theoretical foundation on which I base most of my research.

⁹ As we will see, closely linked to the idea of visual perception, the notion of *visuality* also highlights the importance of vision and of its social and cultural significance, especially in the constitution of subjectivities in our “ère du visuel” (Régis Debray). According to visual culture specialists like Nicolas Mirzoeff, *visuality* is none other than a cultural construct. In our media-saturated society, it is a type of vision that is constructed and thus mediated, which differentiates it from the idea of “vision” understood as one of the five senses (sight).

¹⁰For more information on the way semioticians approach this tension between *the visual* and *the visible* that exists within *visuality*—also a key concept in the field of visual semiotics—, see Luisa Ruiz Moreno’s article “De la visualité.” *Actes sémiotiques* 111 (2008).

<<http://epublications.unilim.fr/revues/as/1649#tocto1n4>>

In the following sections, I will first delineate the scope of my project which has at its center the figure of the Immigrant as a *Homo Mediatikus*, by introducing its main arguments. Because the Immigrant is as much a social, political, and media construct as he is a product and user of the media, his identity has often been imposed against his will, generally through labeling and stereotyping. Yet, as we mentioned, although a victim of oppression *par l'image*, he is far from being passive, for he often questions these imposed identities, thus proving that identity is not just a result but a process of identification. Television and other media participate in that process by being valuable resources for the Immigrant's identity projects and quest for recognition and self-assertion. In the second section, I will proceed to establish the context of my work by tracing the history of the relationship between the mass media and Francophone immigrant literature. I will refer to the socio-historical, political and economic context from which emerged a new postcolonial literary field and theme, that of immigration, along with the birth of a new literary figure, the "immigrant" ("l'immigré"), embodied by the figures of the *Beur*, *Jeune de banlieue*, and the *Harraga*. By examining to what extent literary representations of immigrants are intertwined with their media representations, I will show in the third section of this chapter how these three types (*Beur*, *banlieue*, and *illiterature*) of immigrant narratives are fundamentally *évènementiel*—that is, based on historical and current events—and constitute what Khalid Zekri calls the "fiction du réel."¹¹ After setting out my research methodology, I will conclude with a brief outline of the chapters that follow.

¹¹ Khalid Zekri. *Fictions du réel. Modernité Romanesque et écriture du réel au Maroc, 1990-2006* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2006).

I. Re-framing Immigration in a “World-Image”: The Immigrant as a *Homo Mediaticus*.

A. Immigration in the Spotlight ...

My project, as defined by its title, *Homo Mediaticus: Immigrants, Identity, and (Tele)Visual Media in Contemporary Francophone Literature*, examines the figure of the “Immigrant” in the light of the practical and symbolic role of the visual media, especially television, in the processes of identity construction, subjectivization, and socialization, as problematized in specific subsets of Francophone immigrant novels: the “roman beur” (Beur novel), “roman de banlieue” (*banlieue* novel), and “romans de l’immigration clandestine” pertaining to *illiterature*,¹² a new literary genre staging the drama of the undocumented immigrant or *clandestin*, known in Arabic as the *Harraga* (the *brûleur/burner*),¹³ on both sides of the Mediterranean. My work sets out to explore the way a medium like literature allows a better understanding of the dynamics of the Immigrant’s relationship with the mass media apparatus, and especially with a visual medium like television. Through an analysis of the nature, modalities and effect of the Immigrant’s hyper-mediatization and encounter with media technology and popular media culture, I seek to interrogate the extent to which the media have helped shape immigrants into a transcendental figure (the Immigrant), and more specifically, constructed what I call a

¹² This term has been coined by Francophone literature and Cinema specialist, Hakim Abderrezak, in “Burning the Sea: Clandestine Migration across the Strait of Gibraltar in Francophone Moroccan ‘Illiterature’” (2009) to identify a “sub-genre of migrant literature” characterized by the recent production of texts by North Africans depicting the plight and living conditions of undocumented em/immigrants doing *hrig*, that is “*clandestine migration*” (Abderrezak 462).

¹³ According to Abderrezak, the term *Hrig* “translates more accurately the common practice of burning identification documents before undertaking the sea crossing in order to avoid repatriation, and the figurative act of “burning the road” (in this case, the sea), and of illegally “burning up” kilometers in one fell swoop. *Harraga* (“burners”) is the neologism used in the Maghreb as well as by French media to refer to individuals who emigrate clandestinely” (463).

Homo Mediaticus, an autonomous “visual subject.” Drawing on Nicolas Mirzoeff’s own definition of the visual subject, the “visual subject” designates “a person who is both the agent of sight (regardless of biological ability to see) and the object of discourses of visibility” (Mirzoeff, “on Visuality” 54). It is indeed my contention that in our media-saturated and image-obsessed world, we can no longer ignore the influence of media and the cultural practices involved in the life of immigrants and global ethnic youth and in the construction of their identity projects. In this world and the collective imagination, I posit that the Immigrant, whether literal or fictional, emerges not only as a constructed figure of alterity and subalternity, but also as a disembodied and virtual being, a *Homo Mediaticus*, which arises from the interstices of media images and discourses. As a media figure, he is both a product of media representations and, lest we forget, a media user. His existence, subjectivity and identity depend on his visibility. In other words, it depends not only on “being seen,” namely on being visible to the public (as a good news topic, as object of discourses and of the Gaze), but also on his “sight”: as a viewer and consumer of media, the Immigrant accomplishes the performative and meaningful act of “seeing.” In a world marked by the globalization of cultures, thanks to the rapid development of technologies of information and communication, such as television, the Immigrant, as a subject and agent, uses media technology and culture to mediate his experiences within and with society and also to question the politics of representation already in place in a hegemonic system.

B. ...And a New Problematic?

Taking as a departure point the extant scholarship on the image, visuality, television, popular and media culture, identity, and immigration literature, my project contributes to the larger socio-critical and literary debates on the representation(s) of postcolonial immigrants and ethnic minorities by shedding light on the role of mass media, popular/media culture and technology, especially television, in their daily life and identity construction. As mentioned previously, my work also aims to examine the role of literary fiction in addressing such issues. Ultimately, the purpose of my research is to point to a different approach to the study of the literary figure of the Immigrant within the field of Francophone studies by arguing for a new model of subjectivity for the Immigrant, grounded on his visuality, as determined by the interconnection between media representations, media technology, and identity. My work calls for an interdisciplinary approach using a theoretical, conceptual and critical framework heavily influenced by cultural studies, visual studies, media studies, psychoanalysis and the well-developed field of intermediality studies. Drawing comprehensively on literary criticism, deconstructionist, psychoanalytical, media, cultural and postcolonial theories, my dissertation seeks to highlight the complex nature and effects of the relationship between real immigrants, the symbolic Immigrant and the mass media, in particular its cultural, psychological and ontological outcomes. While I value the importance of a strict literary approach when it comes to analyzing the aesthetic value of the object that is literature, I also find important to take into account its sociological, cultural, and ontological dimension. By focusing on the Immigrant as a literary and media figure, we can investigate his coming into being as an autonomous subject. Furthermore, by linking

mass media and literature, we inevitably unearth a complex web of issues related to the influence of the mass media, and especially of what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls *mediascapes*,¹⁴ in diasporic people's lives and cultural practices. As I will show, these *mediascapes* also influence immigrant writers' imaginations and their scriptural practices. While I take into consideration all forms of the mass media (radio, the press, the internet, television), the originality of my project lies in the focus on television and on the particular visuality it provides. Literally *vision from afar*, television considered as an apparatus¹⁵ (a *dispositif* in a Foucauldian sense), a technological commodity, or a virtual "zone of contact," engages viewers in a cultural practice that has not only pervaded the lives of many immigrants but also their imaginary to the point that in most recent fictions it appears to be an integral part of the writers' and their immigrant characters' social and cultural fabric, as well as identification process. As an effect of globalization, as Chris Barker argues in *Television, Globalization, and Cultural Identities*, television "has become a leading resource for the construction of identity projects" (3).

¹⁴ See Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1996). As we will see later, especially in chapter 4, this term, *mediascape*, globally refers to the rise of media of communication (i.e. newspapers, radio, film and television), as well as their abilities to produce and disseminate information and to create "imagined worlds." It is a clear reference by Appadurai to Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities." In his now classic work, *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1st ed), Anderson looks at the way mass media, and especially print journalism or what he calls "print capitalism," have helped shape our collective imaginations, mentalities, practices as societies by giving birth to fundamental myths such as the birth of the "nation," which he defines as a historical, social and cultural construct. The idea of the Nation that brings individuals together as members of a community or group, regardless of distances between them, was born out of the peoples' imagination that fed newspapers.

¹⁵ In "The Confession of the Flesh" an interview conducted during a round-table with Alain Grosrichard et als., Foucault gives the following definition of the term apparatus *dispositif*: "What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions. [...] The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements" (194). For the complete interview, see Michel Foucault's *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. ed and trans. Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 194-228.

As we live in what has now been called the “*medial turn*” (Mark B.N. Hansen),¹⁶ the influence of the media on literature is widely recognized within the field of literary studies and specifically Francophone studies or Postcolonial studies. Questions of media representations of ethnic minorities or media use by diasporic populations have constituted important lines of inquiry and a theme within the relevant scholarship. In effect, the interplay between fiction and visual media such as photography and cinema has long been a focus of literary critics in Postcolonial and Francophone studies, along with other issues such as exile, migration, social exclusion, racism, identity, and cultural hybridity. Yet, within these same fields, unlike cinema, music (rap, hip-hop), or photography, television has often been overlooked, mostly for its apparent lack of aesthetic value or literary interest. Critics within my field, I have noticed, have not given due attention to the impact of television in Francophone literature¹⁷ nor on the postcolonial subject identity formation. It is not until the end of the 1990s and 2000s that this research topic catches Francophone literary scholars’ interest: Alec Hargreaves’ and Mark McKinney’s edited volume, *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (1997), Sylvie Durmelat’s *Fictions de l’intégration* (2008), and Typhaine Leservot’s *Le corps mondialisé* (2007) are all examples of an intellectual and epistemological shift. Likewise, the emerging field of Francophone Intermediality studies has also helped to promote new

¹⁶ For more information about the *medial turn*, a phrase attributed to literary scholar and media theorist, Friedrich Kittler, see Mark B.N. Hansen’s “Media Studies” in the edited volume by Bruce Clark, Manuela Rossini and Paul Whitfield Horn, *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁷ In 2006, in the article “Televisual narratives: Toussaint and Echenoz,” Emer O’Beirne, French studies scholar and specialist of French writer, Jean Echenoz, made the same observation regarding the place of television as a valid object of inquiry in French cultural or literary studies. For more information, see Emer O’Beirne, “Televisual narratives: Toussaint and Echenoz.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 10.3 (September 2006): 239-248.

paradigms by highlighting the textual cross-pollinations made possible by the marriage between literature and mass media in Francophone literature. The recent collective work, *Médias et littérature. Formes, pratiques et postures* (2014) edited by Ivoirians Philippe Amangoua Atcha, Roger Tro Dého, and Adama Coulibaly, is a good example of critics' recent efforts to “cerner les mécanismes et les figures produits par l'intrusion des médias dans les textes littéraires francophones” (back cover).

Still, despite these new developments in the literary and scholarly realm, the scarcity of works dedicated specifically to the cultural and ontological function of a media like television, as a valid object of inquiry—as a *motif d'écriture*, a literary topos or even as a protagonist—in Francophone immigrant literature is still an issue. This creates a gap in the scholarship that my dissertation attempts to fill by focusing on the effect of the *mediatization*¹⁸—understood globally as media coverage and the social and cultural changes brought about by media institutions and technology—on the immigrant experience. This is even surprising if we consider, as noted by media theorist Knut Lundby, that “[t]he media are everywhere [and that] media environment and mediated communication are part of the contemporary high modern condition” (*Mediatization 2*). All the more surprising is how critics have overlooked how significant a role French mainstream media (i.e. press, radio, television) have played in the emergence of what I call “la génération du visible,” and the significant influence it had on Beur literature and

¹⁸ *Mediatization* (also written *mediatisation*) is a key term in both communication studies and media studies to describe the process through which modern society and culture have been shaped and influenced by the media. Although not new, the concept has been the recent object of many debates and new developments in these two fields. Illustrative of that critical and theoretical shift is the work of Friedrich Krotz or Knut Lundby. See for instance, Knut Lundby's edited volume, *Mediatization. Concepts, Changes, Consequences* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), or Peter Lunt's interesting article “Is ‘Mediatization’ the New Paradigm of our field? A Commentary on Deacon and Stanyer (2014, 2015) and Hepp, Hjavard, and Lundby (2015)” in *Media, Culture and Society* 38.3 (2016):462-470.

culture and, more generally, on the “littérature de l’immigration.” As we will see, this relationship between mainstream media and immigration is effectively at the heart of many novels by North or West African writers. It was against such negative media representations of immigrants that most Beur writers took a stand in the 1980s and 1990s.

Nevertheless, while most critics have focused on televisual content and the notion of “Representation” in their deconstruction of negative media discourses and images of immigration in general, I assert that the questions raised by the presence of television in most recent immigrant novels are more complex and entail new literary and discursive practices related to the question of the relationship between the Immigrant and the mass media, as well as new identity configurations. Situating my analysis in such global historical, sociological and cultural contexts, as well as those that are specifically French, I argue that, when it comes to the analysis of the role of mass media, especially the televisual media, in the construction of figure of the Immigrant and his identity, it is as important to think in terms of representation as it is in terms of “remediation” or, if not, in terms of “mediatization.” Rather than simply depict them as victims of an oppressive system or passive consumers of cultural products imposed on them, I propose to show that immigrant subjects are producers of new meanings and new identities that reflect the subversive, hybrid and transcultural nature of their postmodern and postcolonial existences, which defy any traditional notion of identity as sameness and as fixed. Far from just being unilateral, the relationship between the Immigrant and the media is fundamentally dialogical. Television viewing or the Immigrant’s discourse on the media become moments of empowerment that need to be considered as well.

Hence, while I recognize that my use of the name “Homo Mediaticus” to designate the media figure that is the Immigrant is indebted to Massimo Ruggineda’s own use of the expression in his article “The Homo Mediaticus and The Paralysis of Critical Thought” (2009), it differs inherently from it. Whereas Ruggineda sees in the *Homo Mediaticus* a passive and “lazy” consumer of media texts, in particular those produced by television, and thus “prefers [...] not to go beyond the [...] curtains of television’s world” (8), I will claim that for (immigrant) minority groups the interaction with the media is a time of intense cognitive productivity and creativity that confers a more active role to them, especially in the negotiation of their identities. It is this dynamic that I find in most of the Francophone immigrant novels that compose my corpus, and which I intend to foreground throughout my doctoral project. Such a dynamic, I contend, allows us to open the field of reflection for questions relative to the “textualization and theorization of the Immigrant experience” (Susan Ireland)¹⁹ and identity in the light of his daily encounter(s) with media texts, culture and technology in his everyday life as well as his consumption and appropriation of them. Products of the “génération du visible,”²⁰ the novels that I study offer grounds for reflection on the political, social, cultural and, most importantly the psychological and ontological effects of not only the media’s obsessive representations of the Immigrant, but also on his own relationship with the mass media in both a hegemonic context (as subaltern) and as a subject in an image-obsessed era.

¹⁹ Susan Ireland, *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001) 3.

²⁰ As I will point out later, I use this expression in opposition to Tahar Ben Jelloun’s own expression, “génération du silence,” in reference to the first generation of North African immigrants in France.

II. From the *Génération du visible* to the *Génération de la suspicion*: A Brief History of Immigrants in the Spotlight.

A. Visualizing the New Faces of Immigration in a Francophone Context: The Case of the *Beur*, *Jeune de banlieue* and *Harraga*.

I take as a point of comparison the 1980s-1990s figure of the “*Beur*,” child of Magrebi immigrants, later replaced in the 2000s by the figure of the “*jeune de banlieue issue de l’immigration*”²¹ (immigrant suburban youth) of North and West African descent, as well as the more extreme figure of the undocumented immigrant, known in France as “*Sans papiers*,” “*clandestin*” or “*Harraga*” on both sides of the Mediterranean. Choosing North African immigrants as embodiments of *Homo Mediaticus* seemed to be the most logical choice for me. First, they are probably one of the most politicized, mediatized, and stereotyped immigrant groups in France. As shown by Saïd Bouamama in “*De la visibilité à la suspicion: la fabrique républicaine d’une politisation*” (2006), it is important to realize that in France (and beyond), the politicization of the socio-economic phenomenon of immigration occurred, and continues to occur, at the same time as its “*visibilisation*,” and consequently, its mediatization.²² In effect, these three figures (the *Beur*, the suburban youth and the *Harraga*) have become in their own way politicized media symbols of the *immigrant problem* by being object of intense scrutiny from politicians on both sides of the spectrum as well as from the media and mainstream

²¹ It should be noted that “*jeune de banlieue*” can also refer to youth from French-French or Caribbean origins, who are also typical figures in the *Beur* or *banlieue* novels because also low-income residents of suburban housing projects.

²² Saïd Bouamama, “*De la visibilité à la suspicion : la fabrique républicaine d’une politisation*,” *La république mise à nu par son immigration*, ed. Nacira Guénif-Souilamas, (Paris: La fabrique, 2006).

society during the last thirty years.²³ In his article, Bouamama identifies three periods of politicization, and consequently of *visibilisation* of immigration, the first being what I rather call the “age of invisibility” to identify the first generation, also known as “génération du silence;” it goes from the immediate post-war period to the 1970s.

According to Bouamama, this first period is characterized both by “une invisibilité sociale et une non-existence politique” (198) of immigrants. Nevertheless, as he points out, close to its end, due to many “mutations sociologiques” and “luttres sociales,” this age is also the time when immigrants refuse “d’être cantonnés à un statut de non-citoyens, de leur réduction au simple statut de force de travail transitoire [...]” (200). This new positioning led to the second age. This second age, from the 1970s-1980s,²⁴ corresponds with the emergence in the public sphere of the second- and third-generation Maghrebi immigrants²⁵ embodied by the Beurs, also known as the “génération de la parole” (Tahar Ben Jelloun) but which I call the “génération du visible.” It is indeed the age of the “prise de parole” and as such of the age of visibility of an entire generation made famous by the highly mediatized 1983 “Marche des Beurs” and subsequent marches. Most importantly it is the age of “intégrationnisme” characterized by what Bouamama calls “le culte de l’intégration” (208) on both sides of the political spectrum.²⁶

²³ See Richard L. Derderian, *North Africans in Contemporary France: Becoming Visible* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

²⁴ Contrary to Bouamama, I locate this age of “la mode beur” (208) in the years 1980-1990.

²⁵ Although born and raised in France and being French citizens, they were labeled by officials and the media—and are still referred to—as “issus de l’immigration,” suggesting that the *immigrant* social status is in their DNA—an uneraseable biological marker.

²⁶ For a good definition of “intégrationnisme” or “intégration,” see on the following website, *Les mots sont importants (lmsi.net)*, an extract from the *Dictionnaire des dominations* (2012) which was co-authored by Saïd Bouamama (as one of the members of the “Collectif Manouchian”) and entitled “Intégration et

Finally, the third stage started towards the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s²⁷ with at its center the figures of the *Jeune de banlieue* or “*jeune issue de la colonisation*” (211). It is the age of suspicion, as the gaze (*regard*) on the immigrant and immigration changes in a context marked by the closing of the borders, the “discovery” of undocumented immigrants (“Sans-Papiers”), discourses on (the incompatibility of) Islam and French cultural identity,²⁸ and the 2005 riots, which sparked controversy about the state of France’s *banlieues*²⁹ (suburbs) and its immigrant and ethnic populations’ living conditions. This stage also marks the rise of the *Sans-papiers* or *Clandestin*, a figure of the shadows who lives in illegality but who in the past two decades has become more and more visible, as politicians struggle to find a solution to the ever increasing problem of illegal migrations. Actually, the *Sans-papiers*³⁰ has never been under so much scrutiny, or rather surveillance, as he is now. The most extreme figure of immigration, arousing suspicions and fear, the undocumented immigrant is constantly under

assimilation”: < <http://lmsi.net/Integration-et-assimilation>>. See also Bouamama’s article “L’intégration contre l’égalité (première partie)” previously published as “Le paradigme intégrationniste et l’occultation des inégalités” (February 2005) : <http://lmsi.net/L-integration-contre-l-egalite>.

²⁷ If we take into account Bouamama’s periodization and when his article was published (2006), this age also goes into the 2000s, which would mean that we are still in the third age. Nevertheless, in the light of recent events in France and across the Mediterranean, we might wonder if we are not already in a fourth age, with at its center the figure of the immigrant as a refugee and terrorist. The rise of fundamentalism symbolized by 9/11 and terrorist groups like Al Qaida or ISIS (the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria) contributed to that shift and to a coming into a new age of politicization of immigration.

²⁸ A large part of the *banlieues*’ populations is Muslim and comes mostly from North, West and Sub-Saharan Africa.

²⁹ While the word “banlieue” literally means “suburbs” in English, this symbolic urban space corresponds less to what Americans usually refer to as suburbs and more to what Americans know as inner city “projects.”

³⁰ As I have mentioned earlier, in my dissertation, I prefer to focus on the figure of the undocumented immigrant known across the Mediterranean region (North Africa included) as the *Harraga* instead of the “Sans-Papier” figure, who is very specific to the French context. For more information on the *Sans-Papiers* movement and figure, see the following articles: Mireille Rosello’s “Representing illegal immigrants in France: from clandestins to l’affaire des sans-papiers de Saint Bernard” (1998); or Didier Fassin’s “The Biopolitics of Otherness: Undocumented Foreigners and Racial Discrimination in French Public Debate” (2001).

surveillance—either by human eyes or the artificial eye of the photographic or televisual camera. Worse, in the past decade and particularly in the last year with the Syrian refugees, this tragic figure of mass migrations has become for the entire world the ultimate political and media symbol of human misery.

Another reason for giving prominence to all three figures can be found in the fact that their names alone are enough to evoke in the collective imagination a range of mental and pictorial images that mostly feed on stereotypes, and that their social existence seemingly depends largely on being seen (on paper or on screen). It is my contention that second and third generation Maghrebi immigrants are the most emblematic figures of the both negative and positive role played by the mass media in the process of identity construction. Comparing them to a *Homo Mediaticus* not only exposes their liminal status as figures of the *uncanny* (Sigmund Freud; Julia Kristeva) and of the disquieting *neither nor* (neither French nor Arab; neither real nor virtual), it also highlights the constructed nature of their identity and the performative function of speaking as well as of seeing. As ethnic minorities living in France's projects, the *Beur* and *Jeune de banlieue* have been in effect the most receptive to global cultural changes as they were born at a time when globalization was in full swing, information and communication technologies came into prominence, and access to radio and television was made easier (Hargreaves; McKinney). Cultural hybrids, caught between the French and Maghrebian cultures and consequently two “given” identities, they have also been sensitized to American popular culture, relayed through music (i.e. rap, hip-hop), arts, cinema and television series. Such external influences have only managed to open up

their cultural identity horizon, resulting in the formation of transcultural identities. In fact, the consumption of televisual culture by these ethnic youth is so important that they have even been referred to by the French-Congolese rapper, Passi, in his famous song “Je zappe et je matte” (1997) as “enfants de la télé.”

B. The Rise of the Visible Generation: The *Beurs*.

It would be hard to deny the fact that, more than the generation of parents, the *Beur* generation has been so far the “immigrant”³¹ group most praised and demonized by politicians and the media altogether. In comparison to the generation of the parents known as the “génération du silence,” thanks to the conjugated actions of public authorities, social actors and the media, as well as to their own headline-catching entrance into the public sphere and French collective imagination during the 1980s-1990s, the *Beurs* truly were to become not only “the génération de la parole” (Tahar Ben Jelloun), but also the “génération du visible.” This change was due mostly to greater access to social and political visibility in the public sphere and consequently to their gaining a long desired social recognition. Their visibility, or rather *hypervisibility*, was mostly due to three factors: the politicization of immigration by politicians on the left and right (the far-right included); the mediatization of the immigrant problem; and the *Beurs*’ activism and involvement in diverse communal and cultural associations. All three factors have roots in the first age of visibilisation when their parents and grand-parents set foot on French soil.

³¹ I am using quotation marks to highlight the ambivalent use of this qualifier for a generation born and raised (for the majority) in France, and as such French nationals, but still considered as immigrants due to their filiation.

Since the official end of labor-driven immigration in France in 1974 under the Giscard presidency and the beginning of family reunifications (*regroupements familiaux*) shortly thereafter,³² the presence on the French soil of former subjects of the French colonial empire of North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa has ever since drawn the attention of the French press. Television coverage in particular allowed France's immigrant population to impose itself progressively on the French collective imagination—and enter their homes. As explained by Alain Battégay in *Les images publiques de l'immigration* (1993), “[I]a France mit longtemps à découvrir la présence sur son sol d’une génération issue de l’immigration. Aucune référence à ces jeunes dans la couverture de presse relative à l’immigration au début des années 70 ” (55). It is effectively almost suddenly that this generation burst into the collective imagination of the French people. This irruption in the private sphere was to be facilitated by the development of France's ever-expanding technologies of communication and information and a local, then nationwide, interest in their plight.³³ Large-scale broadcasting in the 1960s and 1970s of television news reports and documentaries, such as those produced for the TV program “Cinq Colonnes à la Une,”³⁴ played a crucial role

³² For more information on the history of immigration, see Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français : histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris : Seuil, 1988) ; Ralph Schor, *Français et immigrés en temps de crise, 1930-1980* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2004) ; Tribalat Michèle (ed.), *Cent ans d'immigration, étrangers d'hier, Français d'aujourd'hui : apport démographique, dynamique familiale et économique de l'immigration étrangère* (Paris : PUF ; INED, 1991) ; Philippe Dewitt (ed), *Immigration et intégration : l'état des savoirs* (Paris : La découverte, 1999).

³³ The appearance of television in the 1930s and its commercialization in France in the 1950s thanks to the government-owned Radiodiffusion – Télévision française (RTF) marked a shift in French culture and collective imagination. A state property, the Radiodiffusion – Télévision française or RTF, later known in the 1960s as ORTF (Office de la Radiodiffusion – Télévision française) was created in 1945 and played a crucial role in making this first generation more visible for mainstream society.

³⁴ The first “magazine d'informations,” “Cinq colonnes à la Une,” made its appearance in 1959 thanks to Pierre Lazareff and was presented by a team of three journalists: Pierre Desgraupes, Pierre Dumayet et Igor Barrère. Its last broadcast was in 1968. On March 4, 1960, the French program “Cinq Colonnes à la Une”

in making France's new immigrant populations more visible for mainstream society, and attest to the growing popular interest in the dire material and social aspects of immigrants' experience. During that time, the *bidonvilles* located in the outskirts of major French cities noticeably became *à la mode* as a preferred news topic. It goes without saying that this type of media coverage also contributed to the construction of a stereotypical image of the immigrant worker as essentially poor and illiterate. Alain Battégay and Yvan Gastaut argue that immigration and the presence of immigrants insidiously became known through a tragic lens;³⁵ frequent reports of tragedies consequently turned immigrants into victimized figures. Spectacular tragedies throughout that period set the tone and the modalities of their mediatization. Among them was the bloody day of October 17, 1961³⁶ (also known as the "Paris Massacre"), which occurred in the context of the Algerian war and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Algerian demonstrators by firearms and other violent methods used by the French police. For Yvan Gastaut, it is nonetheless the highly mediatized death by asphyxia of five Malian immigrants in the fire of a "foyer de travailleurs" in Aubervilliers in the night of January 1 and 2, 1970,³⁷ that marked a turning point in the collective consciousness and in the

broadcasted, for example, a short documentary shot in a "bidonville" (slum) with the aim to show the stark reality of the work and living conditions of France's North African immigrants, and focusing on the sordid aspects of life there.

³⁵ Yvan Gastaut, "L'irruption du thème de l'immigration dans les médias," *Les immigrés, entre imaginaire et droit. Confluences Méditerranée* 24(Hiver 1997-1998) :15.

³⁶ It should be noted that the media reports concerning October 1961 events were severely censored by the government. For more information on this event, see for instance, Jim House and Neil MacMaster's *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory*, 2006.

³⁷ The condition of death of those Malians quickly made the headlines and caused a nationwide debate regarding the state of immigration in France and the working and living conditions of migrant workers. The French media indeed played a crucial role in highlighting this problem. Among the media outlets reporting this tragedy was the ORTF via the television program *Panorama*. See video on the Institut National de l'Audiovisuelle (INA): <http://www.ina.fr/video/CAF86015496/un-malien-d-ivry-video.html>

way the media would later cover the immigration question. For Gastaut, this mediatized and mediated contact with France's immigrant population, generated by an interest in their plight, led to two contradictory reactions:

Ce premier contact se fait sur le mode de la découverte de deux réalités indissociables et traumatisantes. Pour les Français, la population étrangère apparaît comme une catégorie sociale de moins en moins négligeable : importante en nombre, actrice du développement économique mais exploitée et en situation de grande misère. Parallèlement, ils prennent conscience d'un sentiment de rejet devant ces étrangers qui évolue inexorablement vers un véritable racisme. (15)

It is true that the media coverage of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s highlighted important aspects of the immigrant situation in France, and above all their political and symbolical status. As Maxim Silverman suggests in *Deconstructing the Nation* (1992),

[T]he period 1968-1974 was crucial in terms of the different ways in which immigration came to be perceived in official circles. From having been considered a peripheral and temporary phenomenon, immigration was recognised to be of structural significance; from having been discussed largely in terms of manpower needs and economic necessity, immigration was conceived also [sic] as a 'social problem' and a problem of assimilation and ethnic balance; from having been largely marginalised in France, immigrants became increasingly politicized and involved in conflict and struggle. (46-47)

Arriving *en masse* starting in the 1950s and up to the beginning of the 1970s,³⁸ the first generation of immigrant workers³⁹ were considered temporary labor, a condition that

³⁸ As pointed out by many historians and social scientists, the presence of postcolonial immigrants, most of them from North Africa, has its roots in the colonial period. Algerians were among the first to "immigrate" to the colonial center but only as French citizens in the late nineteenth century until the Interwar period (many came as factory workers and others in the army during World War I). Nevertheless, it is during the Post-war period, after 1945, that this mostly male immigration from the colonies started to be encouraged by the French government for economic and demographic reasons. During the Algerian war (1954-1962) and following the independences was a period of considerable migratory flow toward the French

deprived them of political power and required them, as outlined by Baïmama, to remain invisible and polite, that is, silent. Their situation was not made any easier due to a rise of xenophobic and racist acts targeting them, in addition to their being perceived by most politicians as less *assimilable* than their European—white—counterparts (i.e. Italians, Spanish, and Portuguese). However, in the wake of an economic crisis set off by soaring oil prices, the government’s decision to implement new policies aiming at reducing the number of immigrants coming from non-European countries (especially from North Africa), through a system of quotas, and at restricting the number of work and residence permits issued⁴⁰ sparked a series of protests led by migrant workers in the end of 1972 and in 1973. It is a moment when French society realized that this part of its population not only had a face but also a voice. The French majority was finally able to *hear* the voices of those that since have paradoxically been called the “génération du Silence.”

Nevertheless, it is from the 1980s onward that the immigration problem cristallized and became highly visible. It is the time when symbolic expressions such as “seuil de tolérance” (*threshold of tolerance*) to signify France’s refusal to accept “toute la

metropole. Until the end of the 1960s, economic immigration was perceived favorably by most officials, the reason probably being that it was not supposed to last indefinitely. This of course did not happen since, despite the government’s decision to stop labor immigration in 1974 and its effort to promote repatriation to their home countries, this immigration became permanent as the result of the immigrants reuniting with their families and settling in France. For more information see Silverman (1992), Noiriel (1988), or Sayad Abdelmalek’s *L’immigration ou les paradoxes de l’altérité* (1991, 2006, 2014) ; Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism. Algerians in France, 1900-62* (1997); or Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France. Transpolitics, Race and Nation* (2004).

³⁹ Algerians arrived first and constituted the bulk of this immigration.

⁴⁰ As shown by Silverman, these restrictions were the result of the implementation of new memoranda called the “Circulaires Marcellin-Fontanet” after Marcellin, former Minister of Interior and Fontanet, Minister of Labor, and adopted in January and February 1972. According to these memoranda, “[r]egularisation would be granted only to those who could provide evidence of a work contract for one year and proof of decent housing. Expulsion from the country was the penalty for failing to satisfy this condition” (Silverman 49).

misère du monde” were exploited and made popular by officials, in particular by the newly formed far-right party, *Front National* (FN).⁴¹ As explained by Neil MacMaster,⁴² the theory around the concept of “seuil de tolerance,”⁴³ which was replaced after the 1960s by the term “quotas,”⁴⁴ “maintains that when the percentage of foreign or immigrant people reaches a certain threshold within a given locality or institution (a housing estate, a ‘quartier’, a school or hospital) there follows an almost automatic process of hostile rejection by the indigenous population” (MacMaster 14).

It was also during that same decade that the immigration question became the number one media topic, when the children of immigrants found themselves thrown into the spotlight almost overnight, thanks to spectacular events like the “Rodéo des Minguettes” in Lyon (1981)⁴⁵ or the famous “Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme” or “Marche des Beurs.” This last demonstration, which took place from October to

⁴¹ The far-right political party, the *Front National* was created in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen.

⁴² MacMaster in “The Seuil de Tolérance: the use of a “scientific” racist concept” in *Race, Discourse and Power in France*, eds. Maxim Silverman and Aldershot Hants (1991).

⁴³ Neil MacMaster traces its use since the nineteenth century when it “was employed mainly as a part of a strategy of spatial or territorial exclusion” (14) between the urban bourgeoisie and the “classes dangereuses.” This theory, according to him, was also used during the inter-war and post-war period to “[disperse] and [fragment] any ethnic concentrations” (15) or the “races dangereuses.” According to MacMaster, this concept and the exclusionary practices it allowed, from the 1960s onward, allowed officials (prefects, municipalities, HLM (public housing) corporations) to shape the space “by class and race” (18). It is also worthy of note that the earliest usage of the concept was made, according to MacMaster, in “a technical study of 1964” for a HLM corporation called “Logirep” in order to better understand the conflicts between Algerian families, recently moved to Nanterre, and French families (21).

⁴⁴ This concept has been particularly used under the Sarkozy government, but also when this latter was “ministre de l’intérieur” (2005-2007).

⁴⁵ Taking place during the summer of 1981, the *Rodéos* refers to a series of clashes between suburban (mostly North African) youth and the police in the Minguettes, a disfranchised neighborhood of Lyon. To be specific the term *rodéo* was used to describe the stealing and burning of cars by youth after leading the police in a game of car pursuits. These riots marked the entrance of the *banlieue* problem in media and official discourses.

December 1983⁴⁶ truly marked, with the birth of the “génération Beur,” a break with the previous generation in the political and media spheres. Violent or peaceful, these forms of protest were outlets for the youths’ expression of the frustration and anger generated by their unequal treatment by an unjust social system.

Disenfranchised and relegated to housing projects in the outskirts of France’s major cities, many unemployed and victims of discriminations of all sorts, including being denied access to full citizenship despite being born in France, the Beurs were torn between two cultures, and these events were a way for them to break out of their everyday physical and mental “prisons” and for society to take them into account. The 1980s are in effect the moment when this “new” generation of immigrants became aware that “exister, c’est exister politiquement” (Abdelmalek Sayad)⁴⁷ and that the politeness (“politesse”) of the first generation would not gain for them the respect of their “civic rights” (Bouamama; Sayad). For Sayad,

[l]’expression « droits civiques » non seulement n’effraie plus les immigrés mais, plus que cela, s’inscrit désormais dans leur langage, dans leurs comportements. Elle est un thème de ralliement ; elle est, à elle seule, tout un programme, un mot d’ordre inscrit sur les pancartes, un emblème derrière lequel on se regroupe. L’irruption sur la scène publique,

⁴⁶ The *marche*, inspired by Martin Luther King or Ghandi’s peaceful demonstrations, was a way to protest against racism and police brutality against immigrants and youth of immigrant descents. Starting from Marseille at the instigation of charismatic leaders Toumi Djaida (president of the neighborhood association SOS Avenir Minguettes in Lyon and a former victim of police brutality in June 1983) and the priest Christian Delorme, the over 100 000 “marcheurs” who finally arrived in Paris were to be received by the French president, Francois Mitterand. One of the positive results of that “Marche” was the proliferation of an anti-racism discourse as exemplified by the creation in 1984 of the association “Convergences” by militant, writer and filmmaker, Farida Belghoul, and the more politicized “S.O.S Racism,” an association created by the Socialist party and led at the time by charismatic leader and president Harlem Désir (1984-1992). “Convergences” was also behind the second Marche in 1984 and led by Belghoul. A third Marche, with a departure from Brussels, was also to be organized in 1985 by the association “SOS Racisme.”

⁴⁷Abdelmalek Sayad, *L’immigration ou les paradoxes de l’altérité. Vol.2. Les enfants illégitimes*, (Paris: Éditions Raisons d’Agir, 2006) 13.

donc sur la scène politique, de la jeunesse de l'immigration, la maturité politique dont elle apporte ainsi, précocement, l'éclatante manifestation, le grand sens civique dont elle sait faire preuve constitueront, à n'en pas douter, le fait essentiel de cette décennie, l'avant-dernière du siècle.⁴⁸

Furthermore, as stated earlier, this “irruption publique” into the political realm marked also their arrival in the media realm. The role mass media played in the birth of that generation and the social, political, and cultural movement that it came to represent is undeniable. According to Battégay, the 1980s marked a real turning point with the advent of the “actualité beur,” characterized as a moment of “reconnaissance symbolique” and “médiatisation” (55). Product of his time, society and the media, the figure of the *Beur* stands out as a social, cultural, political and most importantly, as a media construct, as well as the symbol of a new type of immigrant.

Allegedly appearing in the 1980s, the slang word “Beur” has been used to label the typical figure of the disfranchised youth, sons or daughters of Maghrebi parents, born and/or raised in the high-rises of France’s impoverished inner cities (*cités de banlieue défavorisées*). As far as the story surrounding its birth is concerned, it is generally believed that the word was originally coined by immigrant children themselves as a way to (re)claim and assert their “Arab” or Maghrebian origins in a social and political context marked by the rise of racism and anti-(arab) immigrant discourse, promoted by the newly formed *National Front*. According to historians and literary critics,⁴⁹ the word

⁴⁸This quote was taken from an extract of the first chapter of Sayad’s book (pages 13-21) which was published online by the journal *L’Homme Moderne* in September 2006 and made available online. Consulted on June 18, 2016:< <http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/socio/sayad/imm2E.html>>.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, the works by Michel Laronde (1993), Alec Hargreaves (1989; 1990; 1995), Sylvie Durmelat (1998; 2008), Mireille Rosello (1993), or Fatiha El Galaï (2005) on the origins of the word “Beur.”

“Beur” made its first official appearance in 1981 thanks to a popular free radio (*radio libre*) “Radio Beur” created in Montreuil. Its president and co-founder was none other than Beur writer, Nacer Kettane, a doctor by training raised in France by Kabyle parents and later founder of the commercial radio, “Beur FM.” There have since been many contentious debates among critics regarding its true etymology and genealogy. Whereas, on one hand, it is generally accepted that the word “Beur” is the inversion of “Arab” in Verlan (slang),⁵⁰ on another hand, it has also been argued that it might have been an abbreviation of the word “Berbère” (Sylvie Durmelat; Alec Hargreaves). Emblematic of that linguistic confusion is probably this passage from Leïla Sebbar’s novel, *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (1984), in which the mother of a young Beur expresses her confusion to her son after watching news reports about the “Marche des Beurs ” :

“Je sais pas pourquoi ils disent Radio-Beur ; pourquoi ça Beur, c'est le beurre des Français qu'on mange sur le pain ? Je comprends pas. Pour la couleur ? Ils sont pas comme ça, c'est pas la couleur des Arabes... [...] *El Ber*, chez nous en arabe, ça veut dire le pays tu le sais, mon fils, c'est ça ou non ?— Le fils apprit à la mère que le mot Beur avait été fabriqué à partir du mot *Arabe*, à l'envers. Il eut du mal à la convaincre que *Arabe* à l'envers, en partant de la dernière syllabe, donnait Beur ; [...] Le fils ajouta que *Beur* n'avait rien à voir avec le mot *pays*. On disait aussi *Rebeu* pour Arabe ” (28)

Despite these extrapolations, journalist, writer, militant and co-founder of “Radio Beur,” Samia Messaoudi, insists in a 2013 interview with Mustapha Harzoune that the target audience of this independent radio (“radio libre”) was mainly from the North African community, hence underscoring the role played by local actors in the process of

⁵⁰ “Verlan” designates a form of slang, which literally means “à l'envers” (backwards). According to Natalie J. Lefkowitz in “Verlan: Talking Backwards in French” (1989): “Verlan as a spoken phenomenon originates in the working class, immigrant-populated northern suburbs of Paris known as *La Zone*” (313). It takes the form of a language game characterized by the inversion of syllables.

visibilisation and mediatization of this marginal group. According to Messaoudi, it was a way to revalorize their culture, their origins and give their community a voice :

“Ensemble, nous [avons décidé] de faire une radio qui soit l’expression de l’immigration, de son histoire et de l’histoire des quartiers, de la cité... notre histoire.”⁵¹ The 1980s and the years following, thanks to a more or less favorable political climate, witnessed in effect the rise of many ethnic media outlets aimed at an immigrant and essentially Maghrebi audience. Precisely, the liberation of the radio waves⁵² under the newly elected socialist president, Francois Mitterand, was conducive to the creation of other “radios libres” such as “Beur FM” or “radio gazelle,” or other media platforms or products such as the television program, *Mosaïque*, presented by Tewfiq Farès from 1976 to 1987. Thus, as Richard L. Derderian reminds us in *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, “the liberation of the FM band in 1981 represented a victory for free expression and the opportunity to transform radically the French public sphere” (112).⁵³ From an institutional and symbolic point of view, the creation of these media outlets was a way for the North African community to take control of the means of (their) representations.

⁵¹ Samia Messaoudi in Mustapha Harzoune, “ ‘La Marche n’est pas qu’un combat d’immigrés ou de jeunes issus de l’immigration, ” *Hommes et migrations* 1304 (2013). Consulted on March 2, 2015. <<http://hommesmigrations.revues.org/2684>>.

⁵² This opening up of the air waves took place in 1981, thanks to ‘[a]n early reform by the Socialists [which] opened up the air waves to scores of privately run local radio stations. Among these was Radio Beur, which began broadcasting in the Paris area at the end of 1981” (Hargreaves, 1997, 29).

⁵³ Richard L. Derderian, “Broadcasting from the Margins: Minority Ethnic Radio in Contemporary France,” *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, eds. Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London; New York: Routledge, 1997) 112.

Notwithstanding, the term “Beur” was to become indeed even more famous⁵⁴ when, picked up by the mainstream media following the highly mediatized and politicized⁵⁵ “Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme,” also known, as “Marche des Beurs,” it came to symbolize for an entire generation a new face and definition for *Frenchness* altogether. It also came to signify a new cultural trend, referred to by critics as the “mouvance beur” (Michel Laronde, Alec Hargreaves, Sylvie Durmelat) and illustrated by the appearance of a “mode Beur,” a *Beur* cinema, a *Beur* theater, and, as we will see, a *Beur* literature.⁵⁶ As stated earlier, this moment in French history was a turning point that propelled the *Beurs* under the spotlight, guarantying them *de facto* and for the first time a higher visibility and a place on the public stage. Indeed, according to Sylvie Durmelat, “La marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme de 1983, qui a popularisé le mot *beur*, a marqué l’accès à la vie publique et l’entrée brièvement triomphale sur la scène médiatique de jeunes français d’origine maghrébine ” (29).⁵⁷ Nevertheless, with the success of the Marche fading, the following years, and especially the 1990s were to bear witness to the fall from grace of the word “Beur.” Many among the second and third generations of North Africans started to dis-identify with or simply reject the label made

⁵⁴ In 1984, the word “Beur” was among the many words to make their entrance in the French dictionary (Hargreaves).

⁵⁵ “Radio Beur” was actually the first outlet to play a crucial role in spreading the word about the “Marche”; national media at first ignored the demonstration until cofounders, Kettane and Messaoudi were to become key figures of the Beur movement, going from being active participant on the front stage (according to Harzoune, Messaoudi participated in several stages of the “Marche” and was even a member of the “collectif parisien pour l’accueil de la marche de 1983”) to a more discreet role backstage as writers or journalists. As we will see in later pages, the role of Beur writers was crucial to the creation of what has since been called the “mouvance beur” and the emergence of *Beur* literature.

⁵⁶ For a global understanding of the socio-cultural context that led to the creation of a “mouvance beur,” read Laronde’s pertinent article: “La ‘mouvance beur’: émergence médiatique,” *The French Review* 161.5 (April 1988): 684-692.

⁵⁷ Sylvie Durmelat, *Fictions de l’intégration. Du mot beur à la politique de la mémoire* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2008).

famous by the mainstream media and perceived as too politicized, reductive and reifying.⁵⁸ For Saïd Bouamama in *Dix ans de marche des beurs. Chronique d'un mouvement avorté* (1994), the entire movement was a failure as, “aborted,” it did not bear the expected fruit on the political scene despite a few successes.

And yet, the 1990s and 2000s were still to prove the newsworthy potential of this group within a socio-political and cultural context marked by numerous debates on illegal immigration, Islam and national identity and fueled by highly mediatized events such as the multiple “Islamic veil affairs,”⁵⁹ the bombing of the parisian RER *métro*⁶⁰ in 1995, the 2005 riots,⁶¹ or more recently the *Charlie Hebdo* and Paris attacks. Indeed, despite the

⁵⁸ It should be noted that since its creation, the word “Beur,” as a signifier of a social, ethnic and cultural identity was never fully accepted within the North African community and was only grudgingly adopted by part of the North African youth who did not identify with it.

⁵⁹ The first headscarf affair took place in 1989 in Creil when three female Muslim students were banned from their middle school upon refusing to stop wearing their scarf. The mediatization of this story led to numerous debates across the nation regarding the respect of France’ tradition of secularism and the threat of Islam. This “affair” would be followed by the creation of the Haut Conseil à l’intégration (HCI) in 1989 and the voting of a series of *memoranda* and laws such as, the “loi sur le port de signe religieux” in 2004 forbidding any visible religious symbols in French schools. More recently in October 2010, a law (“la loi burqa”) was enacted to ban the wearing of the “voile intégral” (full veil) like the *Burqa* in public spaces. For more information, see for instance Trica Keaton, *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics, and Social Exclusion* (2006). According to Keaton: “The headscarf has been made to symbolize something antipodal to French values and culture, which then triggers those statist practices (i.e., laws and policies) aimed at franco-conformity.” (4).

⁶⁰ From Vaux-en-Velin, a city on the outskirts of Lyon, Algerian-born Khaled Kelkal, became the symbol of the attacks. A presumed terrorist affiliated with the GIA, he was considered the mastermind behind the 1995 bomb attacks in France on the Saint-Michel RER station and the Paris-Lyon TGV railway. Kelkal was killed in September 1995 by the police after resisting arrest. His death was broadcast live, captivating millions of viewers. For more information, see Mathieu Rigouste and Thomas Deltombe, “L’ennemi de l’intérieur: la construction médiatique de la figure de l’Arabe,” in *La Fracture coloniale : La société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, (Paris :La Découverte, 2005) : 191-198 ; Paul Silverstein, Introduction, *Algeria in France, Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 2004): 1.

⁶¹ The riots that shook France during the fall of 2005 have been considered by many critics as an important turning point in the history of the nation and in the way immigrant population was later perceived. Dramatic photographic or televisual images of burning cars, looting, hooded men provoking the police such as those published or broadcasted during the riots, have been enough to leave a solid imprint in France’s collective memory. These violent images, the intensity and duration of the riots, were sufficient enough to negatively change or reinforce the negative way these groups of “jeunes” were being perceived by part of the French population.

fall from grace of the label “Beur,” we witness in the 1990s and the 2000s not only an increase of appearances of these troubled youth in the French news media, especially on French television (mostly due to their role in these events), we also observe a systematic labeling of this fringe population, as other highly charged phrases such as “jeune de banlieues défavorisés,” “jeunes de cité,” “jeunes issues de l’immigration,” “musulman,” terrorist, and “ennemi de l’intérieur,” made their entrance into media and political discourses. This change in the discursive configuration and representational practices translates, as Guy Lochard argues in “Le Jeune de banlieue est un autre,”⁶² a significant transformation of the televisual and other news media’s “regard” or perception of immigration. According to Laura Reeck in *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction*, such labels have been ways for the French institutions and media to name and to refer to the socio-economic, geographical, national, ethnic, and racial origins of these youths. In other words, they have been used to signify the alterity or difference of these individuals who, despite their having French nationality, have come to symbolize since the mid-1980s the *new* “immigrant challenge” (Reeck 2). Such phrases have been the expression of an increased hostility and suspicion toward all immigrants, but especially towards North African and Muslim populations.

C. The “Génération de la suspicion.”

As a proof of this increasingly hostile anti-immigration climate, we might mention the Sarkozy laws on immigration (2003, 2006) that reaffirmed the *Pasqua Laws*

⁶² Guy Lochard, “Le jeune de banlieue est un autre,” in *Qui a peur de la télévision en couleur ? La diversité culturelle dans les médias*, ed. Isabelle Rigoni (Montreuil : Aux Lieux d’Être, 2007).

(1993) and subsequent reform of the nationality code by criminalizing illegal immigrants (the “Sans-Papiers”) and by implementing a systems quota in view of promoting an “immigration choisie”⁶³ (skilled labor immigration over a familial immigration). Added to that are the 2011 Burqa Ban and the expulsion of 25,000 Roms, according to official records.⁶⁴ For some critics, such preventive and protective measures were the sign that France was no longer willing to abide to by its own laws of hospitality and to play its traditional role of *Host*. As a consequence of this rejection, the Immigrant has come to symbolize the unwanted guest. In her analysis of the Immigrant/Guest paradigm in *Postcolonial Hospitality* (2001), Mireille Rosello, addresses many contradictions surrounding the notion of “hospitality” in France. While she does not give a fixed definition of the concept of hospitality, she analyzes how it has been represented and practiced in a France forced more and more to confront its “immigration problem.” She argues that while it is well proclaimed that France is a “terre d’accueil” for all and a “universal host,” in practice things are more complex, particularly when it comes to France’s postcolonial immigrant guests, to whom political decisions such as Valéry Giscard D’Estaing’s decision to “close the gates’ [...] made it clear that previous laws of hospitality would no longer apply” (Rosello 23).

It is undeniable that behind such policies and rhetoric hides a deep unconscious fear and hatred of the immigrant *Other*. Beyond his traditional *misérabiliste* image, the

⁶³ Former president Nicolas Sarkozy has made it particularly clear, in his July 2010 discourse in Grenoble, that he was firmly opposed to an “immigration subie,” which according to him, the result of a failed immigration policy and is thus responsible for the failure of integration: “[...] nous subissons les conséquences de 50 années d’immigration insuffisamment régulée qui ont abouti à l’échec de l’intégration.”

⁶⁴ These expulsions of were initiated after the publication of a “circulaire sur les Roms” in August, 2010. It was judged and declared discriminatory and illegal by many French human rights organizations and by the European Commission in 2011.

Immigrant, figure of subalternity and alterity *par excellence*, appears to Metropolitan French as the ultimate mysterious, uncanny, and threatening *Other*. This fear of the *Other*, of the outsider who does not *belong* to the nation-state because of his cultural, religious, political, or racial difference, has always been present and conveniently resurfaces in time of hardship. The fact of the matter is that, regardless of their legal status, immigrants are frequently accused of many ills, and are repeatedly used as perfect scapegoats in times of crisis, held up to public obloquy and subjected to vilification. It is my contention, however, that if there was an epitome of this *crisis of the representation* of immigration, it would be the figure of the illegal immigrant: the *Clandestin*, *Sans-papiers*, or *Harraga*. In the twenty-first century, this figure has managed to supplant in the collective imagination the *legal* immigrant of the previous century, as well as other immigration figures such as the exile, expatriate, foreign student, and even the migrant worker. We can find a good example to corroborate this claim in the recent highly mediatized “Syrian refugee crisis”—a direct aftermath of the 2010-2011 “Arab Spring” and ongoing civil war in Syria.

Since 2010, the massive and continuous arrivals of refugees, asylum-seekers and other undocumented migrants fleeing their poverty-stricken or war-torn countries has become one of the top news stories in France and other European countries—Italy, particularly, formerly an emitting country and now one of the most important receiving ones.⁶⁵ Thanks to a continuous flow of information we are constantly reminded that we live in an era of intense migrations and that Europe is a favored destination for legal

⁶⁵ The Italian island of Lampedusa is actually considered as one of the most important gates to Europe.

(desirable) and illegal (“undesirable”) immigration despite the tight scrutiny of the European internal and external borders by the agency and surveillance system *Frontex*.⁶⁶ To be more precise, the incessant flow of migrants came to be depicted by many in Europe, and in particular by far-right parties, as an “invasion” and a threat at a time when France, and Europe more generally, are facing one of the worst social, economic, and political crises of their history.⁶⁷ In 2011, the fear of an “invasion” or of a migratory “nightmare,” caused by the revolutions in the Arab world, was quickly disseminated by mainstream media. In some cases, maritime (i.e. “flow,” “waves,” “tsunami”) or biblical (i.e. “exodus”) metaphors were even deployed to somewhat soften the rhetoric used to depict these unprecedented, *apocalyptic-like* events.⁶⁸ Now, five years later, after what feels like a long period of silence (or of blindness), it is as if we have gone back in time and are again in the midst of the “Syrian refugee crisis,” or what has been deemed as one of the worst “European migrant (migration) crisis.” Once again, immigration is among the hot topics in our media. Our screens are being flooded with images of shipwrecks,

⁶⁶ According to its website, Frontex’s full title is “European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union.” [It] was set up in 2004 to reinforce and streamline cooperation between national border authorities.” It has been key in fighting illegal migration across the Mediterranean and beyond. Consulted on May 10, 2016. <<http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/mission-and-tasks/>>.

⁶⁷ The role played by the Front National of Marine Le Pen during that time is quite important as this party was among the first to champion a policy of denying entry on the French soil to Tunisian and Libyan refugees arriving *en masse*. Their role in distilling feelings of fear among the public was quite revealing during a much mediatized trip [by Le Pen to the island of Lampedusa, closely followed by many French and other European media outlets such as *Le Monde* (“A Lampedusa, Marine cible les problèmes d’immigration,” March 16, 2011).

⁶⁸ For instance, in article published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on April 9, 2011, a journalist chose the following title to describe the massive population displacement caused by the Libyan revolt and the concerns raised by their coming to Europe: “450 000 personnes ont déjà fui la Libye. L’exode se fera aussi vers l’Europe.” Hence, the choice to report such a huge number (contested by the Lybian government at that time), in addition to the almost apocalyptic tone of the journalist, and the direct analogy to the exodus of Israelites fleeing the Pharaoh’s wrath, only contributed to warn the West of an imminent danger while highlighting the spectacular aspect of those events.

floating corpses, or large groups of illegal migrants arriving on the shores of Greek islands in the Aegean, and making illegally their way to northern European countries like Germany through the “Balkan route”—also known as the “Eastern European route.” Hence, like in 2011, as we listen to television commentators and their expert guests, it has become clear that the specter of unfettered immigration, and especially what is considered illegal immigration, has resurfaced to haunt the fortress Europe and its collective imagination.

Forced to play the role of the dreaded *clandestins* (illegal/undocumented immigrant), the Immigrant is once again one of the most hunted and haunted media figures—or so suggest scenes of freshly arrived migrants on a Greek beach or migrants trying to flee the police or to bypass the barbed wire of a freshly built wall at one of Europe’s internal borders (i.e. Bulgaria, Hungary) that flash across our screens. Moreover, as large groups of migrants are making their way towards Germany, while France and Belgium are being wracked by waves of terrorist acts (Paris and Bruxelles), this highly documented global migratory crisis has become one of the most important focal points of many heated debates in the European senate, on both sides of the political spectrum. Such tensions find their source in the fact that, in addition to countries along the Balkan route (e.g. Greece, Serbia, and Hungary), traditional host countries such as Germany or France are faced with a political and moral dilemma regarding the fate of these refugees. Indeed, as they struggle to control their borders and with the decision to close them,⁶⁹ they are facing what human right activists deem one of the worst

⁶⁹ We can take as an example what happened in 2011 between France and Italy. Soon after the first reports of massive arrivals of refugees, it became clear from what was being said in mainstream media and internet

humanitarian crises of our time compounded by the growing threat of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. In the light of the real fear that terrorists might infiltrate the throngs of refugees from Muslim countries, Europeans cannot help but wonder whether they are facing the proverbial Trojan horse: are these thousands of people in need genuine asylum-seekers, pitiable victims of war and of human smuggling, or are they criminals or future terrorists in disguise?

This situation is certainly reminiscent of the prophetic warning from Moroccan writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun, in *Télévision d'Europe et immigration* (1993). In the preface of this collective work, Ben Jelloun already predicted the ongoing migratory crisis and warned European politicians and the media of the dangerous consequences of conveying negative representations of immigrants:

La fin de ce siècle sera marquée par un phénomène de déplacement. Des hommes et des femmes vont être obligés de quitter leur terre sèche, leur pays n'arrivant plus à les retenir [...]. L'image que véhicule la télévision européenne est marquée par cette urgence. On ne parle plus des millions d'immigrés légalement installés en Europe. On ne parle que de milliers de clandestins prêts à tout pour ne pas mourir de faim. La télévision espagnole—l'Espagne est directement concernée par cet afflux non désiré—se complaît à montrer les images brutales des arrestations d'hommes démunis, des gens abusés par des passeurs, des Africains et des Maghrébins. Le téléspectateur qui

news sites—as well as within the political circles—that this situation was a poisoned and undesirable chalice. The embarrassment of the European states, particularly France and Italy, was for instance relentlessly echoed by the press between March and April 2011. This unwanted political and diplomatic entanglement is symbolized in the images of a train from Italy, bursting with Tunisian refugees blocked at the French border in April 2011, on the line linking Vintimiglia (Italian side) and Menton (French side), that were splashed across European newspapers. Although armed with Italian temporary residence permits that allowed them to circulate anywhere in the Schengen area (France included), these migrants became, against their will, victims of a political “stand-off” between Italy and France. Attempting to reestablish border controls, as if in anticipation of the repercussions of the Arab Spring, President Nicolas Sarkozy, backed by former minister of Industry, Eric Besson, finally declared in February 2011 that “la France n'accueille[ait] pas de Tunisiens sans visa.” For more information, see the following article *Le Monde*, published on February 16, 2011. <http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/02/16/la-france-n-accueillera-pas-de-tunisiens-sans-visa-a-dit-nicolas-sarkozy_1481128_823448.html>

n'est pas bien au courant se demande si ce sont des trafiquants de drogues ou des bandits que la police vient de capturer. Et l'amalgame se fait entre immigration-clandestinité-vol-insécurité, etc. (9)

In Ben Jelloun's view, immigrants would be the victims of "amalgam[s]" produced and spread by the media apparatus reporting on this migratory crisis. Such mis-associations, the criminalization of immigrants, the illegality of their status, or the *misérabilisme* that constantly taints their public image, would be the direct consequences of a type of mediatization based on the production and dissemination of simplistic and stereotypical representations, which mainly focus on the most spectacular and sordid aspects—or images—of this "situation d'urgence." The problem with this type of emotionally charged images lies in the fact that, with such "mediatization of both information and life" (Rey Chow),⁷⁰ the lines between reality and the imagination are irremediably blurred. This blurring of the line between reality and virtuality is the direct result of a confusing rhetoric of words and images used in political and media arenas to represent immigrants. In face of such *amalgames* and the shift towards the manipulation of reality and of minds by the media, it is perhaps not surprising that critics, scholars, artists and writers have felt the need to examine the immigrant problem after each of the turning points (*âges de visibilité*) described above.

III. The Emergence of Francophone Immigration Literature: Literary and Media Entanglements.

A. Notes on Immigration Literature : Historical and Critical Perspectives.

⁷⁰ Rey, Chow. "The Age of the World Target," *The Rey Chow Reader*, comp. and ed. Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 2-19.

For Odile Cazenave in *Afrique sur Seine, une nouvelle génération des romanciers africains à Paris* (2003), Christiane Albert in *L'immigration dans le roman francophone contemporain* (2005), and Christophe Désiré Atangana Kouna in *La symbolique de l'immigré* (2010), immigration and its representations have been a key literary theme in Francophone literature and the object of intense critical discourses in the academic world.⁷¹ According to Atangana Kouna, “[c]e mouvement social a généré au plan littéraire, une littérature de l’immigration, dont le but était de faire l’esthétique de l’immigration, c’est-à-dire de la représentation littéraire du phénomène sociale de l’immigration” (17). In effect, an important characteristic of this literature is its ethnographic and “évènementiel” dimension. Deeply influenced by the *actualités* (current affairs) and the ongoing political, social and cultural climate surrounding the presence of immigrants on French soil since the 1970s-1980s, this “littérature [...] fait cas du phénomène ne serait-ce que dans sa plus simple variante qui est le voyage” (Atangana Kouna 15). More specifically, “le sujet devient de plus en plus prépondérant en littérature du fait même de l’évolution exponentielle du phénomène social.”⁷² Given the role that the media have played in shaping the migration phenomenon for public consumption, we can conclude that Francophone immigrant literature has evolved in parallel with the politicization and mediatization of the immigration question and the *visibilisation* of the Immigrant.

The novel has certainly provided one of the most fertile spaces in which to address the issues related to the phenomenon of postcolonial immigration. If fictional, the

⁷¹ See also Michel Laronde’s seminal book, *Autour du roman beur. Immigration et identité* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 1993).

⁷² Atangana Kouna 15.

stories related in novels of immigration are generally inspired by true events, lived experiences and individual recollections. These works, in effect, are usually the fruits of authors originating from the former colonies of the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), as well as from West Africa (Cameroon, Senegal, or Mali), or the Caribbean, who have either immigrated to France, or were born, raised and educated there. Their main goal is to bear witness to the experience of postcolonial immigration through the peregrinations and challenges of an “immigré fictif” (Albert) that are in many ways similar to his real counterpart too often silenced by the hegemonic powers in place. As such, immigrant writers have constituted themselves as spokespersons for an entire community.

From the first testimonials by North and West African immigrant writers (first generation immigrants), to the “roman Beur” (second generation) and its offspring, the *banlieue* novel, to the novels of *illiterature*, this medium has allowed Francophone writers to tell the story of immigration from every angle and thus to expose the economic, social and cultural reality experienced on a daily basis by immigrants themselves. More precisely, in these novels, they describe the living conditions of postcolonial subjects, immigrants from the ex-colonies, and their struggle to survive in the former imperial “métropole” while faced with many obstacles such as racism, xenophobia, stereotyping, social exclusion, marginality and their own feelings of social and cultural alienation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, such issues constitute the main topoi and discursive configurations that we usually find novels of the “immigré fictif.” Immigration literature also shares some of the distinguishing features (“traits constitutifs”) and the *symbolique*

(Atangana Kouna) with postcolonial writing. According to immigration literature specialist, Christiane Albert, one must understand that

[l]’immigration n’est pas seulement un thème littéraire, mais c’est surtout un discours qui produit ses propres modalités d’écriture qui ne prennent cependant tout leur sens que lorsqu’on les situe dans une perspective postcoloniale. L’immigration s’ancre en effet dans un contexte historique et social précis où elle apparaît comme un phénomène social directement lié à la colonisation dont les immigrés sont les victimes. (Albert, *L’immigration* 19-20)

Albert argues that “ [l]’écriture de l’immigration [est] comme une “ écriture de la démaîtrise ” qui sert à modéliser dans l’espace de la fiction romanesque la position marginale qu’occupent les immigrés dans le monde contemporain” (20). For her :

[...] les configurations discursives de l’immigration élaborées par les romanciers peuvent s’interpréter comme une résistance à l’impérialisme européen dont les formes d’oppression se sont déplacées sans pour autant disparaître. Ce contexte d’écriture induit donc un certain nombre de procédés d’écritures que les écrivains de l’immigration partagent avec les écrivains postcoloniaux [...].⁷³

In effect, as a way of writing, or “mode d’écriture,” postcolonial literatures have taken many forms that allowed authors to pursue a similar goal by deploying strategies of resistance against colonial and neocolonial oppressions and western cultural imperialism. It has been a constant effort on their part to decolonize minds, discourses and practices, whether it is from the periphery or from the center of the Metropole (ex-empire).

Postcolonial scholar Helen Tiffin in “Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-

⁷³ Albert 19-20.

Discourses”⁷⁴ states that “[p]rocesses of artistic and literary decolonization have involved a radical dismantling of European codes and a Postcolonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses” (95). Writing from the margins, they work at *decentering* (Michel Laronde)⁷⁵ the center and at shifting the power distribution; as such, the space of the narrative constitutes a “place of resistance” (Janero Talens). Such a distinguishing feature directly touches upon the political power of writing that often is manifested through the form of a literature *engagée*, which is also characteristic of postcolonial literatures and of most Francophone immigrant narratives, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s. These texts are indeed the result of the personal and political commitment of authors (*écrivains engagés*) who have used this medium as a springboard to bring to the public’s attention pressing social issues and, ideally, to promote social changes. They have found in the space of fictional narrative a place to write, speak and look back at those who, too often, relegate immigrants and other minorities to subaltern positions and subject them to reductionist and reifying discourses, as in media representations.

The role played by immigration literature in reconstructing the postcolonial *Other*’s/the Immigrant’s image shaped by media representation remains a crucial feature within the scope of Postcolonial and Francophone studies as well as for this doctoral project. Exposing the representational vacuum that surrounds immigration or the role of mass media in the life of immigrants has effectively been a driving force behind

⁷⁴ Helen Tiffin, “Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourses,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London; New York: Routledge, 1995): 95-98.

⁷⁵ Michel Laronde, *L’écriture décentrée. La langue de l’autre dans le roman contemporain*, 1996.

“littérature de l’immigration.” Through a diversity of genres, styles and literary techniques such as irony, humor, or violent depictions, immigrant writers aim at decolonizing minds by deconstructing and re-appropriating the very same representations, discourses and images produced, relayed and disseminated by the media about the non-western Other, in our case, the Immigrant. One must recall that it is against such representational practices and to fill void left by them that, as we saw above, activists, artists, scholars and writers, most of whom have immigrant origins—like Tahar Ben Jelloun who, himself, settled in France in 1971—have taken upon themselves to address the issue of immigration through their art in a more sensitive and human manner.

By demarcating themselves from the colonial novels and first postcolonial narrative genres, such as the “*récits de voyages*,” and by evoking the stark reality of the immigrant experience, these authors have succeeded in creating a more human and multidimensional portrait of the Immigrant—the new subaltern figure—that sharply contrasts with the unidimensional and often *misérabiliste* image usually found in the mainstream media. This is especially true of Beur writers and, to some extent, of *banlieue* writers or those depicting the plight of *Harragas* on both sides of the Mediterranean. Indeed, more recently the same humanistic and political reasons have inspired the emergence of a new variety of “engaged” texts known as “romans de l’immigration clandestine” written in French not only by undocumented immigrants themselves but also by Maghrebian or West African writers living on both sides of the Mediterranean. Among those books are novels and works of non-fiction such as Rachid El Hami’s *Le Néant bleu* (2005), Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *Partir* (2006), Fatou Diome’s *Celles qui*

attendent (2010), Omar Ba's *Soif d'Europe, témoignage d'une clandestin* (2006),⁷⁶ Youssouf Amine Elalamy's *Les Clandestins* (2001), and Salim Jay's *Tu ne traverseras pas le Détroit* (2001). Focusing on illegal emigration and more precisely on the *Hrig*, the dangerous journey to Europe from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and now from Turkey, these novels offer stories based on real experiences and news reports. Through them, the authors do not hesitate to harshly denounce the reality experienced by the *Harragas* ("burners"), a term used to designate the illegal migrants who burn their identification papers before crossing the Mediterranean Sea through, for example, the Straits of Gibraltar. The goal of these writers as well as artists⁷⁷ has been to produce new representations that describe the daily struggles of these men, women and children willing to risk death in the hope of attaining a better life in Europe.

These aforementioned authors have increased the visibility of the immigrant subject and, thanks to the power of the written word, managed to expose the grey zones and blindspots inherent in the media coverage of immigration and, consequently, in representations of the Immigrant.

B. *Beur* and *Banlieue* Novels as Mirrors of Society?

As briefly mentioned earlier, it can be argued that the visibility of the *Beur*, *Jeune de banlieue* or *Harraga* is as much the doing of politics and the media as it is of

⁷⁶ Omar Ba is also the author of *Je suis venu, j'ai vu, je n'y crois plus* (2009) and *N'émigrez pas! L'Europe est un mythe* (2010).

⁷⁷ The artistic production on the *hrig* has been very prolific over the past two decades as exemplified by the many songs or painting depicting the horrors of the journey from beginning to the end—an end that is most of the time deadly. Among these artists are visual artist Youssouf Elalamy or, in music, one can cite songs like Cheb Khaled's "El Harraga" (2012) or the band Zebda's "Harragas" (2012). In cinema, one can name the following movies: Merzak Allouache's *Harragas* (2009), Moussa Touré's *La pirogue* (2012) or Serge Alain Noa's short movie, *Harragas. Les brûleurs de frontières* (2013).

intellectuals and writers. The 1980s onward did mark a turning point for the (representation of the) Immigrant on the cultural and intellectual level as attested by the emergence of a plethora of critical studies and novels on this topic. It is in fact during that time of intense media coverage and political debates that the so-called Beur novel emerged, and a new generation of writers along with it. The birth of the Beur novel is synonymous with a literary success story that propelled many writers, despite themselves, to stardom and to the rank of flag-bearer for the Beur or immigrant cause. A good example can be found in the commercial success⁷⁸ of the first officially labeled Beur novel by Franco-Algerian author, Medhi Charef, *Le thé au Harem d'Archi Ahmed* in 1983, which was enough to signify “la naissance de la littérature beure” (Albert 48). Many novels would effectively be published with more or less success, such as Akli Tadjer’s *Les A.N.I. du Tassili* (1984), Nacer Kettane’s *Le sourire de Brahim* (1985), Farida Belghoul’s *Georgette!* (1986), and Azouz Begag’s autobiographical novel, *Le gone du Chaâba* (1986), whose film adaptation in the 1990’s would propel it to the rank of best-seller.

For literary critics Christiane Albert, Alec Hargreaves, and Michel Laronde,⁷⁹ the success of the Beur novel was as much due to the political and social context as to the role played by publishers and the media, for this genre answered, from an editorial perspective, a strong demand from a public avid and curious to know more about the

⁷⁸ Upon his success, Medhi Charef went on to become a scriptwriter for the cinema adaption of his novel—a life-changing event for him that would lead to him becoming a film director in his own right.

⁷⁹ Michel Laronde and Alec Hargreaves are among the most important specialists of North African immigration in France and of Beur literature. Hargreaves has written extensively on the matter. Among his most representative and pioneering works is certainly *Voices from the North African Immigrant Community in France: Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction*. 1991 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2ND ed., 1997) or *Multi-ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society* (New York, London, 2nd ed., 2007).

plight of the so-called *Beurs* and what was happening in the *banlieues*. According to Albert, the Beur novel filled a void in the literary world; consequently,

[...] pour répondre à cet intérêt du public, les éditeurs entreprirent-ils de publier des témoignages qui privilégiaient souvent la dimension documentaire par rapport à la littérarité des textes et qui constituèrent d'une certaine façon l'horizon d'attente de la littérature beur émergente. En effet, faute de textes antérieurs à valeur littéraire reconnue évoquant les enfants d'immigrés ayant grandi en France, il existait une sorte d'espace vacant dans la représentation que la société française pouvait se faire d'eux. (48)

Hence, as noted by Albert, since the success of this emerging literature was, at first, mostly due more to its ethnographic and documentary value than its literary value, it was long considered a “littérature mineure” (Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari) in the French literary canon. If we were to apply Stendhal’s famous statement that “[u]n roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route” (*Le rouge et le noir*, 1830) to the Beur novel, most readers would agree that literary realism is at work and that Beur novels hold a mirror to society.

Beur fiction, with its history, stories, style, use of colloquial language (slang/Verlan), realistic settings, and characters and themes, often finds its inspiration in personal and historical realities—hence the documentary dimension and ethnographic value attributed to this literature. Indeed, according to Alec Hargreaves in *Voices from the North African Community*, “the diegetic constituents [of the Beur narratives] [...] quickly reveal close parallels with the life experience of their author. Almost without exception, these works are confined to the same historical epoch as that through which their authors have lived [...] (48) Even though, in recent years, very few narratives take

the form of traditional autobiographies, most Beur novels are primarily testimonial in nature; they are factually autobiographical, as inspired by life-experiences.⁸⁰ It is no wonder that the first Beur novels published and the most successful ones either belonged to the autobiographical genre *per se* or took an introspective form (i.e. autobiographic novels, memoirs, diary, testimonies). Thus is the case of the novel *La Marche* (1984), a memoir written by Bouzid and relating his participation in the 1983 “Marche.” Azouz Begag’s renowned autobiographical novel *Le gone du Chaâba* is also a good example. Although heavily inspired by the author’s personal story and upbringing in the shanty town of Lyon of the 1950s and 1960s, it is characterized, nonetheless, by its mixing of fiction with reality. Other examples of introspective narratives are Sakinna Boukhedenna’s *Journal: nationalité immigré* (1987), Farida Belghoul’s *Georgette* (1986), Nacer Kettane’s *Sourire de Brahim*, and Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *Les raisins de la Galère*. Each of these novels features stories taking place in a *cité de banlieue*, whose plot usually revolves around a young protagonist of North African origins who is marginalized, unemployed or highly educated but still facing tough social and personal challenges that he or she must overcome. As Hargreaves points out, “[t]he majority of Beur narratives deal [...] with the period which precedes entry into working life, it is a time of preparation for adulthood [...]”; this is why “[t]ypically, Beur fiction takes the form of a ‘roman d’apprentissage’ or ‘Bildungsroman’, in which the line of the plot follows the learning curve of the protagonist.”⁸¹

⁸⁰ See Hargreaves, *Voices from the North African Community* 48-50.

⁸¹ Hargreaves, *Voices* 50-51.

Nevertheless, critics like Alec Hargreaves, Christiane Albert, Charles Bonn, Michel Laronde, or Mireille Rosello have all pointed out that despite some shared features, Beur literature, especially texts from the 1990s, still marked a rupture with previous immigrant narratives on personal (biographical), scriptural and thematic levels. One of the main differences between both generations is certainly the positioning of the authors and their characters with regard to the home country. While their parents dream of returning to Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia, Beur writers identify more with the country of their birth (France) or acculturation (through education in the French school system) than with what appears to them as a mythical native land. However, as demonstrated by Susan Ireland in “First-Generation immigrant Narratives” (2001),⁸² while “their texts deal primarily with the question of their own place in France, they also evoke the life of their parents, often with the explicit intention of valorizing their experience and giving them a place in history” (24). The Beurs’ dream is no longer to leave France and to return to a “homeland,” but to stay and find their place in a society where they feel excluded and are still considered as *foreigners*. With this focus on integration, Beur novels echo one of the key topics in the political and media realms of the 1980s-1990s. Such preoccupations can explain the collective dimension of these writings and *engagement* of their authors.

From a critical and theoretical standpoint, Beur narratives touch on many problematics of Postcolonial theory such as hegemonic power, race relations, racism, colonization, decolonization and the relation between center and periphery, and common themes are differences in religion, customs, language, education and identity.

⁸² Susan Ireland, “First-Generation Immigrant Narratives,” *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, eds. Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (2001).

Characteristically, most Beur and *banlieue* narratives express a deep concern with the question of national and personal identity⁸³ as they focus on the coming into being, as a subject and agent, of the protagonist in a world culturally dominated by majority French society and in which he (or she) is constantly oppressed, objectified and *othered*.

Hargreaves contends that “[m]ore often than not, the works of Beur authors converge thematically in a shared preoccupation with the conflicts between rival cultural systems, and in particular with the choices faced by those who stand astride such cultures” (47).

Traditionally, Beur novels, whether fictional or autobiographical, focus on the cultural, social and psychological alienation faced by the *génération beur* (second and third generation born in France) in what is now their home country. Because they are neither (totally) French nor (totally) North African, constantly torn between two cultures (French culture and the culture of their parents’ home country), “le cul entre deux chaises” as Michel Laronde, among others, puts it, one prevailing concern in their narratives is the ability of the young Beurs to navigate successfully between two cultures while still holding to their own values and representational systems which they are still in the process of developing. Most characters are torn between the duty of preserving the traditions of their country of origin transmitted by the parents, especially the mother, and responding to the imperatives and temptations of *integrating* a Western life that living in France or being French requires. Such an agonizing decision often forces them to reject one cultural identity in favor of the other, or to attempt to embrace both through the making of a third, hybrid identity. This last choice usually offers them the hope to

⁸³ Albert notes effectively that “la dimension sociale de l’immigration souvent prise en compte par ces romanciers [...] [s’estompe] souvent au profit d’un questionnement identitaire individuel [...]” (21).

overcome their own feeling of alienation. Most critics agree that in Beur novels and their subgenres, the “bi-cultural condition of youth from immigrant background constitutes a potentially explosive threat to their mental stability” (Hargreaves 46), which translates into problems of alienation and other psychological imbalances. Indeed, being constantly torn between two cultures is depicted as being source of extreme stress for the protagonist. Nevertheless, by exploring in their works themes such as difference, sameness, and cultural hybridity, Beur writers challenge the notion of a stable, unique identity in favor of a more “plastic” understanding of that concept (Stuart Hall⁸⁴; Hargreaves). Albert develops this notion of plasticity when she states : “[...] désormais de nombreux écrivains francophones semblent donc récuser toute conception monolithique de l’identité ou toute identification avec une nation [...]. Ils revendiquent au contraire explicitement leur appartenance à des univers culturels différents et non exclusifs les uns des autres et entreprennent d’explorer [...] dans l’écriture cette position d’étranger [...] ” (81). This seems to be the attitude of new generations of immigrant writers, especially those of the 1990s and 2000s, as in the case of *banlieue* literature, who do not claim any specific ethnic origins contrary to the Beur generation or the generation preceding them. Albert maintains that

[l]a nouvelle génération d’écrivains de l’immigration n’est plus arrimée à un territoire ou une culture spécifique et rompt de ce fait avec une certaine tradition de l’engagement du roman francophone. Elle revendique au contraire, le dépassement de la notion même de littérature nationale, par un questionnement identitaire qui se situe à la confluence de plusieurs

⁸⁴ For more information, see Stuart Hall’s works in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996) or “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2006) or .in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (1990).

cultures, plusieurs langues, plusieurs imaginaires et rejette tout encrage dans un espace national. (21)

The foregoing quotation describes the message conveyed by the defenders of a “littérature-monde en français” as they signed the 2007 manifest⁸⁵ that would launch the concept in an attempt to denounce the *ghettoization* of Francophone literature and writers based on their geographical and linguistic origins. This institutional ghettoization also seems to be the concern shared by the signatories of the 2007 “collectif *Qui fait la France?*” such as Faïza Guène, Mohamed Razane, and Thomté Ryam, who protest against their “banlieue writers” label created by the French literary institution and the media. As pointed out by an article in the newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur*, this group of “jeunes romanciers d' « identités mêlées » ambitionne de combattre par la plume les préjugés qui les étouffent” who claimed to be “... *enfants d'une France plurielle... [...]* *citoyens de là et d'ailleurs*” (italics in the original).⁸⁶

C. Questioning Postcolonial Identity and Media Representation.

As we can see, the focus on such social and cultural problematics and themes can be explained by the fact that since, in most cases, these prejudices and identity crisis have been personally experienced by those writer, “[i]t is not difficult to see [why] these writers, have made tensions of this kind their central theme” (Hargreaves, *Voices* 47). As

⁸⁵ Published in September 2007 in the newspaper *Le Monde*, the manifest signed by several francophone writers, was followed the same year by the publication of a collection of essays entitled this time *Pour une littérature-Monde* and edited by Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud and Eva Almassy. Among the signatories were, to name a few, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Maryse Condé, Edouard Glissant, Michel Le Bris, Boualem Sansal, Didier Daeninckx, Jean Marie Gustave Le Clézio and Alain Mabanckou.

⁸⁶ Fabrice Pliskin, “ Qui fait la France? Nous! ”: *Le Nouvel Observateur*, September 19, 2007. Consulted on June 10, 2016. <<http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20070919.BIB0087/qui-fait-la-france-nous.html>>.

direct witnesses, they speak from the inside, from the subject position of those *othered* in a dominant culture and a media- saturated world controlled by those in power. They also teach us about the different strategies used to subvert, shift, and resist these power relations at stake in common representations of, and discourses on, immigration and the Immigrant. Their narratives have often been described by literary critics as creating a space in which a counter-discourse and a counter-representation can emerge that aim to empower the immigrant subject whose voice can be finally heard; but it is concomitantly the space of denunciation of the negative effects of political and media discourses and images on the immigrant subject. Thus, in *illiterature*, among the primary concerns and underlying themes is, effectively, the mainstream media's dehumanizing portrayal of the *Harragas*.

IV. Theorizing the Immigrant: Corpus and Methodology.

A. Defining a Corpus.

As I underlined previously, media representation or rather mediatization is at the forefront of the novels under consideration in this dissertation. As mentioned at the beginning of this introductory chapter, these fictions fall mainly into three literary genres or sub-genres: "Beur novels" such as Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982), Nacer Kettane's *Le sourire de Brahim* (1985), and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Les raisins de la galère* (1996); "banlieue novels" such as Rachid Djaïdani's *Boumkoeur* (1999) and Faïza Guène's *Kiffe-kiffe demain*" (2004); and "illiterature novels" such as Youssouf A. Elalamy's *Les clandestins* (2001), Salim Jay's *Tu ne traverseras pas le Détroit* (2001), and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* (2006). Each one of these novels is the

fruit of well-known writers born and raised in France but of immigrant origins (Rachid Djaidani; Faïza Guène; Salim Jay) or of writers having immigrated to France (Ben Jelloun, Nacer Kettane, Leïla Sebbar), with the exception of Youssouf Elalamy, who still lives in his home country of Morocco. Likewise, it is also worth noting that all of these writers have become in their own way media figures and acclaimed *porte-parole* of their generation and community in France. They have been recurrent guests on French television shows to either promote their books or to speak for their community at times when the topic of immigration and the *Beur* or *banlieue* question was a “hot” topic in the political and media spheres.⁸⁷ They have also been the target of the media which, as previously underlined, has habitually labelled them in categories that they do not accept. Faïza Guène, among others, has been very vocal in this regard.

As a result, we should not be surprised if the tension existing between the Beurs or “*jeunes de banlieue*”—embodiments of a cultural and social paradox—and French institutions and especially French media is an important theme in *Beur* and *banlieue* novels, which usually depict the journey of a young and often marginal, disillusioned or hopeful immigrant character. Likewise, novels on illegal immigration account for this strained relationship between the Immigrant and the mass media and the effects of mediatization and its product, hypervisibility, on the former’s life experience and sense of self. In most of the texts that compose my corpus, autobiography is intertwined with the history, the social reality and the current affairs of the author’s time. In fact, most writers

⁸⁷ For more information on the media promotion of *Beur* literature and the role of the *Beur* author as a *porte-parole* and media figure, see the recent book by Kathryn A. Kleppinger, *Branding the 'Beur' author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983-2013* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

in these categories use, along with personal and historical accounts, television reports, radio news broadcast, newspapers articles as their direct or indirect sources. Hence the many references to the mass media or highly mediatized events such as the Paris massacre of October 1961, which constitutes the opening scene of Nacer Kettane's *Le sourire de Brahim*.⁸⁸ Also playing a major role in establishing a secondary narrative are social movements such as the "Marche des Beurs" which closes the narrative in *Le sourire de Brahim* or is described at length in Leïla Sebbar's *Parle mon fils, Parle à ta mère*, or simply alluded to in her *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*. Likewise, in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* or Salim Jay's *Tu ne traverseras pas le détroit*, references to real or fictional newspapers articles are numerous. As a result, many of these authors opt for a journalistic and archivist style.

Also a recurrent topos is the Immigrant's own use of the media apparatus and avid consumption and knowledge of media culture, in particular American popular culture, whence the many intermedial references that fill these narratives. In effect, it is my observation that recent texts, and especially those belonging to *banlieue* literature, mark a rupture in the way other authors have traditionally addressed the question of the media apparatus. More than simply reporting the news or using them as springboard, the news media, the *Jeunes'* own use and consumption of media texts (products) has also become an important although underlying theme. Thus, by focusing on television, this study seeks

⁸⁸ This traumatic event actually constitutes the entire plot of Leïla Sebbar's novel *Et la seine était rouge* (1999). Other tragic events or *faits divers* that echo the tense social climate marked by a rise of xenophobic and racist acts were also a source of inspiration, as in the case of Ahmed Kalouaz's novel, *Point Kilométrique 190* (1986), which was so titled following a news report relating the brutal death by stabbing and defenestration of a young Algerian tourist, Habib Grimzi, by French soldiers in November 1983 on the train line "Bordeaux-Vintimille."

to illuminate the fact that the way each of these authors relates to this medium is symptomatic of the differences between their generations, especially with regard to their cultural practices.⁸⁹ While this is particularly true in the Beur and *banlieue* novels, written respectively in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, it is my contention that they also reveal differences in the way their respective writers—globally from two different generations—relate to the mass media apparatus. While focusing on depicting the everyday challenges of a fictional marginal immigrant, whether she or he be *Beur*, *Jeune de banlieue* or *Sans-Papiers* or *Harraga*, they also highlight both the ambiguous if not conflictual relationship between their immigrant character and the mass media apparatus, as well as the social and cultural practices involved with it. Yet, while the texts from the 1980s and 1990s take a more political and engaged stance through a critique and deconstruction of media representations, later texts, like Djäidani's *Boumkoeur* and Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*, noticeably introduce a break with this trend by being less politicized in their approach to the media question. By giving a larger place to media within the space of fiction, through a plethora of intermedial references, these two texts give its due to the cultural and aesthetic value of a medium like television. In the case of *Kiffe kiffe demain*, this results in the production of a televisual narrative⁹⁰ characterized by its intermedial dimension, as illustrated by the important references to televisual/popular culture. The direct reflections of the cultural practices of the newer

⁸⁹ Their use of media technology and consumption, as well as other cultural practices, have been the object of many scholarly studies. See, for example, Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney's edited volume *Postcolonial Cultures in France* (1997), Valérie Orlando's "From Rap to Raï in the Mixing Bowl: Beur Hip-Hop Culture and Banlieue Cinema in Urban France" (2003) or Dominic Thomas's "Documenting the Periphery: The Short Films of Faïza Guène" (2010).

⁹⁰ With "televisual narrative," I draw on Emer O'Beirne's analysis of this narratological category, which results from the infiltration of television (i.e. images, references, etc.) in the fabric of the narrative. See O'Beirne's article "Televisual narratives: Toussaint and Echenoz" (2006).

generations, such new scriptural practices also illustrate the transformative power of the mass media in our lives. These texts account for societal, cultural and ontological changes made by media technology and culture within diasporic places/spaces. Hence, my focus on television is where the originality of my work resides.

While on a textual level, most Beur, *banlieue*, and *illiterature* novels showcase scriptural practices close to journalistic writing, on a diegetic level, I have noticed throughout my readings that, more than just taking the form of random references to news coverage, the relationship between immigration, television and identity has become, during these last decades, a commonplace within Francophone literature. A recurrent literary *topos*, the presence of television and other cultural products in these narratives reflects the (new) cultural practices of the postcolonial immigrant subject. In the literary texts that constitute my corpus, I have identified several salient features in the role played by television—as an institution, a technology and a commodity. Although television can or cannot play a central role in the narrative, its visible or invisible presence and power are still relevant for the characters in their daily life and their interactions with other members of their community or their host society. As objects, televisions, in these novels, are companions for the characters. They are also the site of popular knowledge and a “space of gathering” (Paul Adam),⁹¹ that is, a space of socialization within the private and the public spheres. They allow the characters to socially integrate by helping them to come to terms with their cultural in-betweenness, social marginalization or psychological alienation. TV screens also function as mirrors that either fail to reflect images of the self

⁹¹ See Paul C. Adam, “Television as Gathering Place,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82.1 (March 1992):117-135.

that enable the immigrant subject to negotiate the terms of his or her identities or succeed in providing the characters with an inextinguishable (re)source from which to borrow or construct their identities. As a window onto the world, a medium like television functions as a “zone of contact” between cultures,⁹² allowing mobility as the protagonist(s) virtually get(s) closer to the European Eldorado, or “Home” (the motherland). Television thus becomes the space of construction of transcultural identities, namely identities without borders that challenge any monolithic or essentialized views of identity or the world. Their texts, I notice, offer a substantial ground for the elaboration of new discursive configurations of the notion of identity grounded on the characters’ own use of the media. As such, they open up the space for the production of a new grammar of subjectivity. The space of the narrative becomes not only a space of resistance against hegemonic and reifying discourses, but also a space of interpretation and (re)mediation of the self where new identity projects take form.

B. Methodology: Bridging the Gap between Disciplines.

It is within that scope that I situate my work as a critical and theoretical reflection on the interconnection between mass media and identity constructions in Francophone immigrant narratives. At the core of this project lie questions of (cultural, social) identity, visibility, (in)visibility, subjectivity and agency, all channeled through the concepts of

⁹² This expression is derived from Mary Louise Pratt’s famous concept of “contact zone,” which she developed in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). While Pratt defines *contact zones* as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (4), my use of the term aims to only emphasize the encounter between the Immigrant and other cultures thanks to the mediation of television. It means to highlight the many cultural exchanges and crosspollination phenomena that follow it. It does not necessarily take into account the power relations at play and the inherent “asymmetrical relations of domination or subordination” involved during that encounter.

representation and *(re)mediation*, two terms that will be further explained. The challenge is obvious since such a project exceeds the simple literary framework and calls for a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. In effect, although literature is at the heart of my dissertation, working on television in contemporary Francophone immigrant literature allows me to approach these novels from an interdisciplinary perspective as I rely on a conceptual and theoretical framework that falls into four major fields of scholarship: psychoanalysis, media studies, postcolonial studies and cultural studies. Each of these fields has contributed tremendously to literary studies for they all have offered new ways to approach the literary object, a result I intend to emulate in this present study.

Imaginative fictions create new realities and a space for new identities that challenge, as stated by Françoise Lionnet in *Postcolonial Representations* (1995), “traditional conceptions of history and culture, literature and identity. They (imaginative fictions) create new paradigms [...] through innovative and self-reflexive literary techniques [...]” (Lionnet 7). This is particularly true for several of the novels of my corpus, as this increasing concern with visual media and culture has creatively influenced the writing practices of their authors. At the junction of history and fiction, of the real and the virtual, the space of the narrative becomes a space of intense creativity. It is a space where new knowledge and subjectivities are born (Wilkerson-Barker), where old discursive configurations give way to new ones, and where the reconfiguration of the Immigrant’s identity is opened to all possibilities. Indeed, drawing on French philosopher

Paul Ricoeur's definition of what the notion of narrative identity⁹³ is in *Temps et récit* (1985) and *Soi-même comme un autre*, I find pertinent to remember that one of the important functions of the narrative (and of narration) is to construct "l'identité du personnage, qu'on peut appeler son identité narrative [...]. C'est l'identité de l'histoire [celle racontée] qui fait l'identité du personnage" (*Temps et Récit* 3, 175). In other words, the space of the narrative allows "l'assignation à un individu ou à une communauté d'une identité spécifique qu'on peut appeler leur identité narrative."⁹⁴ To that concept is also attached the idea of agency. Delving into Ricoeur's understanding of the concepts of identity and the Self, Bastien Engelbach points out how for the philosopher, "[l]'identité n'est pas le nom propre ou la substance par quoi se distingue et se spécifie un individu dans son unicité. Elle renvoie à l'agent d'une action, qui doit pouvoir être identifiable, non comme substance ou comme être séparé, mais comme être pris dans le jeu du monde, agissant en celui-ci et au milieu d'autres hommes" (6).⁹⁵ More importantly, I agree with Ricoeur, who is quoted by Engelbach, about the fact that narrative identity "permet de penser le sujet non pas comme étant toujours le même, mais comme inscrit dans un devenir temporel, agent d'une multiplicité d'actes."⁹⁶

This understanding of "identity" is fundamental for my dissertation project, which takes as its point of departure the concepts of "identity," "representation," and "remediation." While I will refer to "representation" mostly as a visual image that takes

⁹³ Ricoeur sees a difference between the two most used approaches of the concept of identity, understood as *Idem* (same/sameness) and *Ipse* (Self).

⁹⁴ Ricoeur, 442. See also, Ricoeur's "Narrative Identity," *Philosophy Today* 35.1 (Spring 1991) : 73-81.

⁹⁵ Bastien Engelbach, "Du modèle du récit à l'énonciation de soi," *Fabula / Les colloques*, L'héritage littéraire de Paul Ricoeur. Consulted on May 24, 2016.

<<http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document1883.php>>..

⁹⁶ Ricoeur, qtd. in Engelbach 7.

the televisual or photographic form, it is worth noting that the concept itself encompasses a broad spectrum of forms and meanings. But what we should retain is that “Representation” as a concept, according to cultural theorist Stuart Hall in *Representation. Cultural Representation and signifying practices* (1997), is a “signifying practice” through which we make sense of the world and create meaning; as such, it is situated in language, be it visual or verbal. It is also the practice through which emerges a sense of ourselves, our identity as individuals and as members of a group with which we share the same meanings and cultural codes. For Hall, “Identity” is “always constituted *within* [and] not outside of representation” (Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 222),⁹⁷ which evolves according to the time, space and the people who use it. As a consequence, culture and identity are not just “given,” natural, unique, or stable entities; rather, they are socially constructed identifications. They are not fixed but plastic, and what they mean evolves through time and space, as do cultural representations and by extension systems of knowledge. This notion of plasticity will be particularly useful for my argument. Media play an important role in the re-production and transmission of cultural products that shape our identities and mentalities. It is important to remember that, in our highly mediated postmodern and postcolonial society, media play a crucial role in the construction or formation of ethnic, national, gender, racial, cultural, and national identities. A media like television is thus a great resource from which we can borrow and expand our “mille-feuilles identitaires” (Pap N’Diaye, *La condition noire* 46).

⁹⁷ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990): 222-237.

The idea that technologies, such as the visual media, are part of our everyday environment and have a determining effect on users by mediating the way we perceive and represent the outside world, society and ourselves is now a commonly accepted but not unchallenged fact within the field of cultural studies, visual studies and postcolonial studies.⁹⁸ This understanding is crystallized in the emergence of key concepts such as mediation, remediation and mediatization. While also pertaining to the Marxist theory of ‘mediation’,⁹⁹ mediation as a concept has mostly been developed during the 1990s within the field of New Media studies and Communication studies and has been re-defined throughout the years from different scholarly perspectives. We have basically come a long way from an essentially mechanistic and deterministic approach of the medium in the 1960s with the “medium theory” developed by Marshall McLuhan, which, according to Lundby, “explores the influences of communication technologies that go beyond the specific content they bring” (*Mediatization* 2-3). In the 1970-1990s, theorists depart from that approach while preferring the concept of “mediation” as process.¹⁰⁰ While media

⁹⁸ The role of print or visual media such as newspapers, books, postcards, cinema in the construction of a negative representation of the colonized as the ultimate *Other* during colonization has long been studied by postcolonial scholars, theorists, critics and writers. See Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), Malek Alloula in *The Colonial Harem* (1986) or Elizabeth Ezra in *The Colonial Unconscious. Race and Culture in Interwar France* (2000).

⁹⁹ In Marxist theory, “mediation,” as recalls Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), is defined more or less negatively. First, mediation is used “[...] to describe the process of relationship between ‘society’ and ‘art’, or between ‘the base’ and the ‘superstructure’” (98). He reminds us that in such processes social realities in the arts are distorted and “their original content is changed.” Secondly, thanks to the Frankfurt School, mediation appears to be the essence of social realities in the arts, not something external that disguises them: “Here the change involved in ‘mediation’ is not necessarily seen as distortion or disguise. Rather, all active relations between different kinds of being and consciousness are inevitably mediated, and this process is not a separable agency – a ‘medium’ – but intrinsic to the properties of the related kinds” (ibid.). According to Theodor.W. Adorno, as quoted by Williams: “Mediation is in the object itself, not something between the object and that to which it is brought” (Adorno, “Thesis on the Sociology of Art,” qtd in Williams 98). Cf. Adorno in the original German version of this article: “Thesen zur Kunstsoziologie,” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* xix:1 (March 1967).

¹⁰⁰ This approach, as underlined by Lundby, “was a shift to the places and processes where the media are consumed and given meaning” (3).

theorists like Roger Silverstone have always preferred the concept of *mediation* or *remediation* to qualify communication processes, Lundby insists that *mediatization* is now the key word to adopt when studying such processes. Mediatization has effectively become central in fields like media or communication studies and keeps generating many debates among scholars. For Lundby, while a term like *mediation* is too general, “mediatization goes more specifically to the transformations in society and everyday life that are shaped by the modern media [...]. It shapes society and culture as well as the relationship that individual and institutional participants have to their environment and to each other” (4).¹⁰¹ Thus, mediatization processes inherently highlight our dependence on media. It is this approach that I find particularly engaging for my reading of the Immigrant as a *Homo Mediaticus*. Nevertheless, and to put it simply, for cultural specialists, defenders of the cultural transmission approach that focuses on “reception and consumption” aspects of the viewer’s relationship to the media, mediation “could be mainly defined as: “something ‘the media’ do—a process of cultural production and gatekeeping by powerful media institutions that intervenes in (and indeed, distorts)¹⁰² the relationship between people’s everyday experience and a ‘true’ view of reality” (Leah A. Lievrouw, “New Media, Mediation, and Communication Study” 313). Some of these visual representations are also the causes and results of a distorted view of reality. This

¹⁰¹ To be precise, Lundby argues that “[m]ediatization points to societal changes in contemporary high modern societies and the role of media and mediated communication in these transformations” (1).

¹⁰² Such relationships and their effects on society or the individual spectator have since been subjected to positive or negative critiques by theorists and critics such as Marshall McLuhan, author of the famous phrase “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, 1964), have pointed out the social significance of the media, while Jean Baudrillard with his concept of simulation in *Simulacres and Simulation* (1981), and Régis Debray, in *Vie et mort de l’image* (1992) recognizes how media visual representations can blur any distinction between what is real and what is not.

definition of “mediation” is very useful and it is at the base of my analysis of the relationship between televisual technology and immigrant characters, as it is represented in the novels that compose my literary corpus. Such a definition of “mediation” is closely linked to the concept of “representation,” as it implies that media are a site of power struggle as well as being ideological weapons, which may result in the domination and subjugation of the audience often seen as passive.

As an institution, a technology of communication, and as a producer of texts, images, and sounds, in short as a representational practice, which is often used to speak for and about society in general, and minorities in particular, the televisual example raises several urgent issues. Most importantly, this medium has often been accused of not accurately representing the object of its content: news coverage of real events has been criticized for its lack of faithfulness to reality and objectivity as it privileges the producers’ points of view, ideologies, and economic and political interests. Therefore, it is important to note that representations, whatever forms they take, as products or practices, are far from being neutral; they are the results of specific cultural, social, economic and political contexts (or environments). In a postcolonial context, this absence of neutrality in any form of representation intrinsically raises the question of the relationship of media to power and how they can be used as a repressive and destructive tool for social and political control and to reproduce, transmit and impose ideologies.

The interconnection between media and power is, indeed, one of the discursive and narrative configurations that I found reproduced or implied in the narrative of most of the migrant novels I study. As I demonstrated above, the second generation of immigrant

writers (the Beurs) had in mind a representation of immigration closer to their perception of reality than those conveyed by the media about immigrant communities. Mass media, and television in particular, have been and continue to be accused of either not representing immigrant communities at all or of perpetuating a rhetoric of images based on a (re)production of stereotypes that supports the exclusionary politics in a host country, such as France, deeply anchored in a colonial stratum. Thus, to better understand the origins and effects of such representations by the media in these fictions, I will draw attention to the concept of the “colonial unconscious” as it is developed in Nicolas Bancel et al.’s book, *La Fracture coloniale* (2005), as well as Kelly Oliver’s notion of the “colonization of the psychic space” to highlight the oppression exerted by an institutional power like the media on the postcolonial immigrant subject.

To support my claim, I will refer to Bourdieu’s analysis in *Sur la télévision* (*On Television*) of the negative effects of such visual representations on those targeted. For Bourdieu, through its images and news coverage, television is the site of a “symbolic violence” that often goes unnoticed, but has negative effects on individuals’ psyche and self-identity in general, as it perpetuates gender and race oppression. It is also these kinds of effects that postcolonial theorists and scholars such as Edward Saïd denounced in *Orientalism* (1978). As far as the power of images is concerned, I will draw on Jean Baudrillard, Régis Debray, and on Roland Barthes’ works. Barthes’ thoughts on the role of photography in *Camera Lucida* and on myths in *Mythologies* are especially illuminating for the analysis of how images not only produce meanings that can be far

from what they initially denote but also serve the elite's ideological and political interests.

As mentioned above, my general goal is to analyze and redefine the importance of such a relationship between the Immigrant and the media, especially a medium like television, in the corpus of literary works that I propose to study. I have noticed an important difference in the way authors from the first generations of “migrant novel” and the new generation represent television and the mass media¹⁰³ and relate to them through their characters. I will demonstrate that the existence of the immigrant subject is intrinsically linked to the visual media but it is not done necessarily in a submissive way. Willingly or not, the immigrant subject exists socially thanks to and through the media as long as he can be seen or can watch television whose images both capture and captivate him.

This brings about an important aspect of my work that builds on the notion of *visuality* which, Nicolas Mirzoeff in “On Visuality” explains, “[...] implies an engagement with the politics of representation” (76). Constantly in the spotlight and under surveillance, questioning the politics of his representation, the Immigrant refuses to be only object of the gaze (of vision, namely to be an image); he also wants to be in control of that gaze as agent (as a producer of that image whence the importance of his sight) and to be recognized (seen) for who he is. This perspective falls into what Mirzoeff defines as *visuality* and the visual subject in “On Visuality.” Referring to the struggle of minorities (i.e. African Americans; women) to access to more visibility (or recognition),

¹⁰³ Not to mention their communities and society as a whole.

he asserts that “the claim to visual subjectivity was a part of a general claim to majoritarian status within Western nations” (54).

The relationship between the immigrant subject and televisual technology is essentially interactive, reciprocal and not unilateral. Its screen often functions as a “mirror” and a “zone of contact” between his inner self and the world. To prove my point, I will draw first on Stuart Hall’s concepts of “decoding” and “preferred reading,” as well as Roger Silverstone’s “domestication” theory and his idea of television as a transitional object, which emphasizes the appropriation and the practical and symbolic uses of media technology in people’s everyday life and how it affects their environment. According to Silverstone in *Television and Everyday Life* (1994), “Domestication” “[...] involves bringing objects in from the wild [...]” (98). In the case of technology, “domestication [...] refers to the capacity of a social group (a household, a family, but also an organisation) to appropriate technological artifacts and delivery systems into its own culture- its own spaces and times, its own aesthetic- to control them and to render them more or less “invisible: within the daily routines of daily life.”¹⁰⁴

Although the concepts of “(re)mediation” and “domestication” have been used mainly in the field of Media Studies, I find them particularly useful for my literary analysis as the use of, and interaction with, the televisual medium is at the source of new cultural and social practices within the private and public spheres in which the protagonists live and interact with others. I assert that as an object, a medium, and institution, television can be used as an effective weapon, a strategy or tactic to cope with

¹⁰⁴ Silverstone 98.

and, as a remedy to *remediate* the wrongs of everyday life and of society. It is on that aspect of the relationship between the subaltern figure of the Immigrant and television that I focus in this study. This work attempts to demonstrate that, in most recent novels, when it comes to the analysis of the role of mass media in the construction of the Immigrant as a mediatized and mediated being— to whom I refer as *Homo Mediaticus*— it is important to think not just in terms of “mediation,”—“what media do”—but in terms of “remediation.” The concept of *remediation* was first coined by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in 1999 in the now classic *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. However, whereas my use of the concept is indebted to Bolter and Grusin’s understanding of the term as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (273) against a specific technological, economic and social background (or network), hence a re-working (re-mediation) of what has gone before, I have chosen to stay close to its meaning in French. *Remédiation* is derived from the latin *remediare* (from *remedium*, “remedy”; *remède* in French), which means “to heal, or to cure.” To remediate is thus also to find a cure or a remedy for an ill. Television can become for the characters a “transitional object” (Silverston, Donal W. Winnicott), a term which, in psychoanalytical “object relation theory,” designates a substitute for an emotional or physical lack.

Henceforth, using Silverstone’s conceptual framework and Stuart Hall’s concepts of “decoding” and “preferred reading,” developed in the seminal essay “Encoding, Decoding,” I intend to argue that television’s influence on audiences or viewers is not without limit. Far from being passive—as many defenders of the “hypodermic needle

theory”¹⁰⁵ contend—the immigrant characters take an active role in deciphering, interpreting and resisting or opposing the embedded messages of the televisual media. The capacity to do so determines their position as agents or active political subjects; refusing to be objectified by others (e.g. officials, the media), they use the media to negotiate their cultural identity and self-representation in a postcolonial and global era. I am, however, particularly interested in showing how in this postcolonial subject uses technologies and other cultural media such as television as a “survival technique” or “tactic” in his daily life to re-appropriate, resist, deconstruct, subvert or destroy negative representations of and about himself/herself.¹⁰⁶

I aim to demonstrate the transformative effect of the mass media, and in particular of television, on not only the protagonists’ daily cultural practices and imagination but also their identity, which I see as more fluid and transcultural in nature than fixed and unique. Television as an agent of transformation also plays the role of cultural mediator. Referring to the meaning of the prefix *trans* as “across, beyond,” I conceive of transculturation¹⁰⁷ and transcultural identity as something unique that challenges any notion of border, nation, and space, including even the Bhabhian notion of the “Third

¹⁰⁵ To be brief, with this theory, the media, especially television, are compared to a harmful drug injected to a patient, too passive to resist.

¹⁰⁶ Thus, as we can see, I intend to use Michel de Certeau’s concept of “tactic” as developed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) (*L’invention du quotidien. Vol. 1. Arts de faire*, 1980; 2nd.ed.1990). For De Certeau, any daily practices such as grocery shopping, reading, watching TV can be tactics, which he defines as “[...] réussites du “faible” contre le plus “fort” [...]” (De Certeau, 1990, xlvii), “un calcul qui ne peut pas compter sur un propre, ni donc sur une frontière qui distingue l’autre comme une totalité visible. La tactique n’a pour lieu que celui de l’autre (ibid, xlvi). A tactic might involve waiting for the right time to seize or create the right opportunities : “[...] il lui faut constamment jouer avec les évènements pour en faire des “occasions” (ibid).

¹⁰⁷As reminded by Lionnet, “transculturation” or *transculturación*, was first coined by Cuban poet Nancy Morejón “to describe a process of cultural intercourse and exchange, a circulation of practices which creates a constant interweaving of symbolic forms and empirical activities among the different interacting cultures [...]” (Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations* 11).

space,”¹⁰⁸ as well as traditional concepts of identity as oneness, sameness and culture. Culture (or cultural identity) is not just “[...] a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People” (Bhabha, “Cultural diversity and Cultural differences” 208). I will posit that when it comes to the relationship between television and identity, the types of identity and cultures that emerge from these cross-cultural exchanges are transcultural in nature as they virtually cross the borders of nation-states. These cultural identities no longer emerge from the combination of two spaces, but from multiple spaces; contrary to multiculturalism where identity or spaces commingle, they are nonetheless connected and transformed through their constant interactions (virtual or not) with other cultures. Finally, in order to demonstrate how the televisual medium opens an imaginary locus that helps the protagonists to cope with their social, political or economic reality, I will use Arjun Appadurai’s concepts of “mediascape.” I will also use his concept of “imagination,” which he defines as a “social practice” allowing agency. By providing viewers with images capable of mediating and shaping their experience of the world, these media, according to Appadurai, allow viewers to create cultural “narratives of the other” (36) and of themselves.

C. Mapping out the Quest for *Homo Mediatricus*.

¹⁰⁸ Homi K. Bhabha defined “Third Space” as the locus of “enunciation,” a place of intense cultural creation located in the interstitial spaces. For Bhabha, in the article: “Cultural diversity and Cultural differences,” this “Third Space of enunciation” is the “precondition for the articulation of cultural difference [...] [;] it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween*, the space of the *entre* that Derrida has opened in writing itself – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture [...]. It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others” (Bhabha 209). Homi K. Bhabha, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Readers*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London, New York: Routledge, 1995; Taylor and Francis e-library, 2003): 206-209.

My dissertation is a threefold project which aims to first offer a different theoretical approach to the study of the birth of the Immigrant as a transcendental figure, which I compare to a specter, a being caught between the real and the virtual. Secondly, it seeks to analyze the nature, modalities and effects of the Immigrant's media representation and hyper-mediatization. Thirdly, it sets out to explore the processes of mediation, or rather remediation, of his identity, which allows the Immigrant to deal with the gaze of the others (the French) symbolized by the mass media. In each novel, the Immigrant stands out as a visual subject struggling to be in control of his visuality and, consequently, of his media(ted) identity, understood both as what is imposed upon him by the media and other hegemonic powers and the identity that he himself creates, as a media user and viewer.

In my first chapter, I lay out the theoretical foundations of my general argument. My main goal thus is to demonstrate how, as argued before, this figure, the Immigrant, arising from the interstices of image and discourses, is very much similar to a *specter*. Modeled on his real alter ego, the Immigrant can be compared to a specter, that is a being caught between the real and the virtual (fictional), both visible and invisible. Relegated to the shadows (the outskirts) of society, the Immigrant is condemned, like a specter, to a liminal existence. Henceforth, drawing mainly on deconstructionist theory through the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and *Echography of Television*, as well as on semiology, history and critical literary theory, I undertake what I call a spectral analysis based on the relation between word and image. My goal is thus to delineate an on[haun]tology of the Immigrant. In my second chapter, I expand my

analysis of the Immigrant as a haunting figure. I use the plight of undocumented Moroccan immigrants known as *Harragas* in Youssef A. Elalamy's novel, *Les Clandestins*, to investigate the literal and symbolic processes of spectralization and the ontological effects of the objectification undergone by dead or living immigrants as a result of negative and sensationalist visual media representations. Among my main concerns is the deathly power of images. I specifically analyze what I identify as an "esthétique de la hantise" in this novel. I argue that the space of the narrative, as a "virtual space of spectrality" (Derrida), becomes also a space of haunting in which migrants, and in particular those known as "*Harragas*" in the Maghreb, emerge literally and figuratively as spectral figures. Published in 2001, Elalamy's polyphonic novel is the second part of a triptych on the theme of migration in Morocco and is focused mainly on the tragic consequences of the "Hrig" through the return from the dead of twelve *Harragas*.

My third and fourth chapters mark a shift in my approach to the relationship between the Immigrant and the media. In my third chapter, I focus on the psychological aftermath of the encounter with the French Other's¹⁰⁹ gaze, mediated by televisual or photographic screens, which I compare to the "Evil Eye," as experienced by second-generation immigrants in Beur novels like Nacer Kettane's *Le Sourire de Brahim*, Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Les raisins de la galère* or Leïla Sebbar's *Schérazade*. I adopt a psychoanalytical framework influenced by the works of French psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan ("Mirror stage"), Frantz Fanon (*Peau noire, masques blancs*), and American

¹⁰⁹ With this phrase, I will particularly refer to the native French people and spectators to highlight their othering by the immigrant subject in a reverse situation.

philosopher, Kelly Oliver (*Colonization of Psychic Space*) and her analysis of the symptoms of oppression. At the heart of chapter 3 is the concept of the *Gaze* (of humans, of the camera), which I compare to the mythical *Evil Eye*. Indeed, while in my first two chapters I assert that the Immigrant is a haunting media figure, in this particular chapter, I claim that he is a haunted and hunted media figure caught in the media spotlight. In my fourth and final chapter, I mark a complete rupture by shifting my angle of analysis. I demonstrate how, in Faïza Guène's *Kiffe kiffe demain*, television viewing as a "social practice" (Arjun Appadurai) creates for ethnic youth living in the French *banlieues* a time and space of socialization and (re)mediation. As a "transitional object" (Roger Silverstone), a companion, and site of popular knowledge, television thus functions as a "zone of contact" between immigrant youth's inner selves and the outside world. As a remedy and a daily "tactic" (Michel De Certeau) of survival, it enables them not only to claim their "right to inspection" (*droit de regard*), but also to come to terms with their cultural in-betweenness, social and spatial marginalization, and psychological and cultural alienation. Finally, I conclude this dissertation with a reflection on both the role of literature and writing in an era of *simulacra* (Jean Baudrillard).

Chapter 1: *Homo Mediaticus*: The Birth of the Immigrant as a Haunting Media Figure

The Immigrant is a specter! This phrase, as catchy as it sounds, has been haunting me to the point of obsession for quite some time. Of course, the fact that the relationship between visual media, literature, immigration and haunting are the focus of this present chapter has not helped; this sentence, without warning, continues to disturb my train of thought through its repeated irruptions often at untimely moments: *The Immigrant is a specter*. Thus, insidiously, my dissertation topic has been haunting me; it has become my specter. Its sole but untimely presence has been often responsible for a repeated, uncanny, and disturbing feeling, which was at once too strange and familiar and which has been difficult to name or repress: *The immigrant is a specter*. Somehow I knew, yet, did not know, what this statement meant or where it came from. How can an immigrant be a *specter*, a *ghost*, a *phantom*, or what is called in French a “revenant,” when he is very much alive? However, the question I should ask first is to what *immigrant* I am referring. Is it the “real” immigrant, the one shown on television in news reports, or is it the “fictive” immigrant—the imaginary, virtual one—that we usually encounter in literature or cinema? What about its relationship to the mass media, and particularly to visual media like television, cinema and photography?

It appears to me that although this present dissertation is mostly concerned with the literary staging of the plight of real immigrants, and therefore with the fictive character, it will mainly refer to the *Immigrant* as a symbolic and metonymic figure. But

to what extent can I talk about a *spectrality* of the Immigrant as a figure of alterity and of the subaltern? What is *spectral* about its existence?¹¹⁰ If the Immigrant is a *specter*, where and how does the haunting take place? Whom does it come back to haunt, and for what reasons?

Of course, it is no longer news that wherever it “manifests” itself, the global phenomenon of immigration raises important social, economic, cultural, and political challenges, as well as issues that go beyond simple border controls. Immigration and/or emigration have pushed many to challenge, redefine or protect essentialist and fixed views of national and cultural identities and *a fortiori*, of *Identity* itself. A social category and symbol of these changes, immigrants have found themselves at the heart of many conflicts and have become the perfect scapegoat during times of hardship. This has often been the case for North and West African immigrant/emigrants whose massive arrivals from France’s ex-colonies since the end of the Second World War have been perceived by turns both as a curse or a blessing for the national (cultural and economic) cohesion whether it is in the host country or in the emitting country. Relegated to the shadows and outskirts of society (i.e. the *banlieues*, the *cités*, or in prisons), away from the public eye, immigrants and, ultimately, the figure of the Immigrant conveniently reappear during electoral periods or times of crisis when politicians and the mainstream media incessantly conjure the latter through a specific rhetoric of images and words which, in the end, serves to portray the Immigrant as one of “them” (“Eux”) versus one of “us” (“Nous”). A familiar figure who does not really belong to their society, and whose presence among

¹¹⁰ In this particular chapter, I intentionally use the neutral pronoun “it” to emphasize the spectral, metaphorical and, thus, disembodied nature of the figure of the Immigrant.

them remains uncannily disturbing, the Immigrant appears, reappears, and disappears in and out of the spotlight like a haunting ghostly figure.

And yet, it is worth noting that in the field of postcolonial Francophone Studies, most studies dedicated to the literary figure of the Immigrant have traditionally been focused on first and second-generation immigrants coming from France's former colonies in the Maghreb and West Africa and living legally in a host country like France, Belgium or Canada (Quebec). In recent years, attention has notably turned to the figure of the illegal immigrant, known as *Sans-Papier*, *Clandestin* or *Harraga* along the Mediterranean.¹¹¹ However, the focus has been on drawing a socio-economic and psychological profile of the Immigrant, and few works have attempted to delineate or define what we could call, using Derrida's term, an "on[haun]tology" of the Immigrant. Although not new but often incompletely developed, the idea of a haunting or the metaphor of the Immigrant as a specter is, to my mind, almost unavoidable and is at the basis of its birth as *Homo Mediaticus*.¹¹²

Henceforth, in this chapter, I will undertake what I call a spectral analysis of the Immigrant, based on the way it is represented both in the collective imagination and in the visual media. Borrowing the neologism *hauntology*, which has been made famous by French philosopher Derrida since his *Specters of Marx*, I posit that to talk about the *spectrality* of the Immigrant as a media figure is to embrace not only the social, political, and ontological nature and dimensions of the relationship between the Immigrant and the

¹¹¹ Among those works, we should cite Mireille Rosello's early work on the case of Sans-Papiers of Saint Bernard (1998).

¹¹² As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, I borrow this expression from Massimo Ruggena in "The Homo Mediaticus and the Paralysis of Critical Thought" (2009).

visual media or literature, but also their *spectralizing* or “spectral effects” (Derrida). Therefore, my intention is to apprehend the effects of this relationship on the politics of identity construction in order to understand what I would call the ‘spectralization” and “hauntology” of the Immigrant in a postmodern and postcolonial era marked not only by the increasing globalization of mass media (especially tele-technologies, and technologies of communication), but also by the rise of the *simulacra* and *simulation* (Baudrillard), of representations (images) that are more real than reality itself, that is to say, hyperreal.

Ultimately, my goal in this chapter is twofold: firstly, to offer a different analytical framework for the study of the not-so-fictional character of the “Immigrant,” and secondly, to highlight the mechanisms and outcomes of the relationship between immigrant literature and the visual mass media. As we will see later, the Immigrant's media existence and life, like the specter's, is often on the order of the liminal in that it is both visible and invisible, present and absent, real and virtual.¹¹³ It is also of the order of the phenomenal: given the Immigrant's liminal status, each of his apparitions in the media literally creates a phenomenon, an “événement, ” that marks and defines the “actualités” (the news), for he is often at the heart of political and media discourses during elections. As a haunting figure, the Immigrant is too often in the collective imagination a source of fears and the object of negative stereotypes which, through mostly sordid and tragic images, are created, transmitted, and reproduced in newspaper

¹¹³ As we will see in subsequent chapters, such a claim allows for a two-pronged analysis, the one examining the Immigrant as an object and product of the media, and the other probing the existence of the immigrant subject as a consumer/viewer of those same representations. Indeed, from the shadows of the urban outskirts to hypervisibility in the news media, the Immigrant's existence seems to depend on the double regime of visibility/visuality and invisibility, on the fact of to be seen/watched/ as well as on the Immigrant's consciousness and reflective gesture of seeing him/herself being watched.

and television reports as well as political discourses. As a result, all of these negatively impact its image, role and status within society.

I. Conjuring up “Specters.”

Understanding the spectral figure and defining the essence or ontology of the Immigrant requires us to define first and foremost the key words of this analysis: *specter/revenant, spectrality, haunting, and hauntology*. Nevertheless, defining the specter or attempting to compare the Immigrant to a specter, proves to be a difficult task that I will try to simplify along two main lines of analysis that spring from two general acceptations of the word “spectral.” Indeed, to refer to the Immigrant as a spectral figure is to remember the double meaning of the *spectral*, that is, what resembles the ghost, the living-dead, but also what is produced by a medium, the *spectrum* which, according to Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, would refer to a graphic or a photographic *representation* (my emphasis) of an object. It is what results from being photographed: “And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent; [...] any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to “spectacle” and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (Barthes 9). It is this relationship between image (graphic, digital, mental), life and death that I propose to first examine in the following pages.

A. Things “out” of this World: Of “Revenants,” Specters, Phantoms and the Living-dead.

In the imaginary of death and in folktales, a phantom, a specter, or a ghost (from the old English *Gast* and the German *Geist*) is a spirit. It is an entity that is, according to Colin Davis in *Haunted Subjects*, “with visible form [but] without material substance” (126).¹¹⁴ It is immaterial. To be more precise, a ghost designates, according to *The Oxford Dictionaries*, “an apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image.”¹¹⁵ In that it is neither dead nor alive, it is an entity that inhabits the interstitial space, which brings together, and entangles, the realms of life of death. Usually, the specter is believed to be the apparition that comes back from the past to visit and torment or specifically to *haunt* the present of the living often in order to claim an unpaid debt or finish an unresolved action whether it is justice or a proper burial. Often, and according to Freudian psychoanalysis, the specter’s return is linked to the act of mourning¹¹⁶ as it can be motivated thanks to the unresolved grief of the survivors (the living) and generates much anxiety and fear, as the mourners are being haunted by past memories of the dead. This last element is important since the specter, by analogy, often takes the form of a terrifying vision or apparition. In everyday language, to talk about the “specter of” something is to highlight the dreadful nature of that thing which acts as a past, present or future threat. The fact that this threat can be recurrent and untimely only increases the horror.

¹¹⁴ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects. Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)

¹¹⁵ “Ghost.” Def.1. *The Oxford Dictionaries*. Web. <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us>>. This online dictionary is published by The Oxford University Press.

¹¹⁶ See Sigmund Freud’s concept of mourning in “Mourning and Melancholia” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.14, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

Moreover, the reference to a “nebulous image” or “haunting image” to define the specter is, here, particularly important as it reminds us that by analogy the specter refers to an “image” that is either mental or graphic. In the imaginary of death common to many cultures, the relationship between death and images is nothing new and has been underlined since antiquity where verbal images (e.g. the artistic genre of *Danse macabre*) or other forms of visual representations (i.e. the *imago*, or transi tombs) of death. Such representations were considered as a way to confer immortality on the dead (a point to which we will come back later). Thus, the image acted as the medium between the world of the dead and the living. Indeed, as shown by Régis Debray in *Vie et mort de l'image*, the specter—or phantom—was often referred to, in ancient Greece, as the “eidolon,” the spirit-image of the dead. The phantom which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, comes from the Greek *phantasma* (“apparition”) and is linked to *phantazein* (to “make visible”) and *phanein* (“to show”), often serves as a synonym in everyday discourse for “specter” (from the latin *specere*: “to look at”). From an etymological point of view, the phantom, which is immaterial like the specter, usually designates the visual representation of an object, that is to say an *image*. In its second acceptation, it also refers to an illusion, something fictitious or imaginary.

B. Postmodern Visual Media, Tele-technology, Images and the *Spectrum*.

In a postmodern era marked by the *hyperreal* (Baudrillard), the domination of digital technology, electronic media, cyberculture, and the production of simulated worlds or virtual realities, the illusory and fictitious nature of the phantom reminds us that the word “specter,” which signifies and encompasses *a broad range* of meanings, is

also tightly linked to technology. Indeed, it is used within the field of optics and physics, as well as in the field of visual technology or teletechnologies¹¹⁷ (photography, television printing, and video) where it is referred to as the *spectrum*. In optics and physics, the *spectrum* usually designates, on one hand, the diffraction or distribution of light (or sound waves) and, on the other hand, the result of that distribution as in the color spectrum or a rainbow. In the field of teletechnology, the term *spectrum* applies to an image, which can be graphic, printed or photographic as it is the graphic result of that distribution of light: an emanation. It is this acceptance that Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* chooses to adopt to define the object photographed in his reflections on the ontology and effects of photography.¹¹⁸ The camera, for Barthes, is a producer of specters. It is able to record a fleeting moment in time and, therefore, prove that something real has existed: “has been” (“le ça a été”), while still defying time and death. The photograph, for Barthes, is a document that defies both time and death. This death defying power is even more significant and problematic nowadays, during what Debray has called the “era of the videosphere”¹¹⁹ (*Vie et mort de l’image*), as we, the public, the consumers, have become accustomed to images of death, too often observed from a safe distance in our newspapers, on our television or computer screens. We have become deprived of a direct and tangible experience of its reality. As a result, those suffering others, whose tele-presence has been made possible thanks to technology, appear as ghosts who manifest

¹¹⁷ French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, also uses the term “tele-technology” to refer globally to the mass media. For more information, see Jacques Derrida’s interview in Bernard Stiegler’s *Echographies of Television. Filmed Interviews*. Trans. Jennifer Bajorek (2002, 2nd ed.2007).

¹¹⁸ See previous quotation on page 79.

¹¹⁹ This “era of the videosphere” is, according to Debray, characterized by the continuing proliferation of still and moving images.

themselves to us only through the (tele)visual medium, the place and space of haunting. In fact, with the development of digital technologies and cyberculture, Colin Davis reminds us that because they emit “[s]ounds and images without material substance, the electronically mediated worlds of telecommunication often evoke the supernatural by creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form. By bringing this spectral world into the home, the TV set in particular can take on the appearance of a haunted apparatus” (4).

Nevertheless, it is also interesting to notice that the Oxford dictionary adds another layer to the technological essence of the specter or *spectrum* and helps us come to a better understanding of the “spectral effect” of technologies by defining the specter as a “faint, false image” that can be one of the following:

- a.** A secondary image on a television or radar screen caused by reflected waves.
- b.** A displaced image in a photograph caused by the optical system of the camera.
- c.** A false spectral line caused by imperfections in the diffraction grating.
- d.** A displaced image in a mirror caused by reflection from the front of the glass.

Indeed, these different acceptations are not only a reminder of the “spectral quality of teletechnologies” (Derrida, *Echographies of Television*) but also, and alternatively, of the technical/ technological and artificial origins and nature of the specter as “the image of an image.” In addition to that first acceptance, the terms “displacement,” “diffraction,” “reflection,” remind us that, although looking exactly like the original, the specter is always *other*, a copy of the original, a “re-presentation,” that is the re-production, or repetition of something that *really, materially* existed/exists. This diffraction, then, results

literally in an *alteration* which produces a *doubling*, or even a *multiplicity* of the mediated object which is both the same and other *ad infinitum*. As a result, it becomes difficult *to decide* on one particular meaning or definition of the “specter” which, during its apparition, is never totally *here* or *there* as we expect it. It is this “undecidability” (another Derridian term), between presence and absence, virtual and real, that defines its spectral or haunting nature and, therefore, constitutes the “logic of the ghost.”

But before going into further detail and in order to understand from a phenomenological and theoretical perspective the phenomenality and essence of the specter and also of the Immigrant as specter, it remains important to examine the core concepts that support my claim, namely *spectrality* and *hauntology*—terms derived from Jacques Derrida’s “spectral” analysis of the legacy of Marx and Marxism in *Specters of Marx*. I will also adapt for my project Derrida’s understanding of the of the spectral effect of tele-technologies or visual media in *Echographies of Television*, a collection of several interviews between him and French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler.

C. On *Spectrality* and *Hauntology*: Understanding the “Logic of the Ghost.”

“Spectrality,” like its synonym, the neologism “hauntology,” are the core concepts of Derrida’s seminal work on Marx’s legacy in *Specters of Marx* (*Spectres de Marx*, 1994). For Derrida, “hauntology” and “spectrality” question the traditional dichotomy between presence (being) and absence. As explained by Caroline D’Cruz in *Identity Politics in Deconstruction* (2008), “Hauntology” “[...] is a neologism invented by Derrida to describe an infrastructure within a text that makes possible the effects of

presence without itself being given over to the present” (65). While on one hand, “spectrality” technically refers to the spectral nature of a thing/being, that is to the ineffective, virtual or immaterial presence of that being; on the other hand, “hauntology” is a play on words combining “ontology” and “haunting.” While “ontology” refers to the philosophy of being (or Metaphysics), “haunting,” which comes from the verb “to haunt” (from the French *hanter*), signifies the fact of living inside, to *inhabit*. As such, haunting is inherently linked to a place (a *locus*) or a space. Most importantly, D’cruz also points out that “hauntology” (just like “spectrality”) comes, for Derrida, under “the logic of the ghost,” that is the “logic of haunting” (“logique de la hantise”) which itself places each of the spectral apparitions under the never ending sign of repetition: “Répétition et première fois, mais aussi répétition et dernière fois, car la singularité de toute première fois en fait aussi une dernière fois” (*Spectres de Marx* 31).

To be haunted or to experience a haunting usually points in popular culture to the fact of being inhabited (from within) by a foreign entity (usually by a spirit, a ghost) and to be troubled by its presence, whereas in psychoanalysis, it is the state of being troubled by an absence (often of another being who died). As we have seen, “haunting” is also used to describe a return or an obsession (the return or persistent presence of an idea or image) and, therefore, inherently entails *repetition*. Nevertheless, the idea of a haunting may also involve the idea or act of repression. Thus, the return of the dead is carried out under the sign of a repetition (i.e. the “re-venant”) and perceived as something that must be repressed because of the harrowing feelings or uneasiness that it provokes during each of its apparitions. It is mainly due to its own uncanny nature, which defies all knowledge

and/or understanding.¹²⁰ The ghost is a *re-venant*, a dead being who although returning under its former/past bodily form still remains hauntingly *other*.¹²¹ It is in and because of this *évènement* (Derrida), that is, the perpetual movement of starting over, of coming and going, as well as of the doubling and renewal of a state of being, that *hauntology* can be explained. It is the fact of being one thing and its opposite at the same time, being both yet neither, which characterizes the ontology (if there is one) of the specter and lends it its phenomenality.

Therefore, the logic of the ghost, the logic of haunting, is a logic of the “out of joint” (Derrida). It is a logic that I identify myself, like Derrida, as a “logic of disjuncture,” that is, a logic that disrupts and disturbs the certainty of our beliefs (religious, philosophical, scientific). It is a logic that derails and defies our notions of time (past, present, and future) and history for, as Derrida reminds us, the specter is “neither here or there,” neither visible nor invisible, neither virtual nor real. This logic is of the order of the *subcontrary* (my emphasis), as neither nor can be false. Indeed, inviting *scholars* to acknowledge the ontology and phenomenality of the “specter,” Derrida points out in *Specters* that what distinguishes the Specter, “[...] c’est une phénoménalité surnaturelle et paradoxale, sans doute, la visibilité furtive et insaisissable de l’invisible ou une invisibilité d’un X visible” (26-27).

The specter belongs to the realm of the “unspeakable” (*innommable*) and of the intangible. It is “something” (“*quelque chose*”) that one does not know, a *Thing* that

¹²⁰ Indeed, under the sign of the repetition (or double) and the feelings of fears and anguish that it provokes, the specter (or *revenant*) has been tied to the concept of the “*Unheimliche*” (the uncanny or *l’inquiétante étrangeté*) by Freud, for whom the prefix “un” is already a sign of “repressing” (“*refoulement*”).

¹²¹ We will explore further this notion in chapter 2.

escapes all definitions, all understanding, because of its very nature, for “on ne sait pas si c’est vivant ou si c’est mort” (Derrida). The specter, according to Derrida, is a “non-objet,” a “présent non présent,” in that it is something between “quelque chose et quelqu’un,” “cet être-là d’un absent ou d’un disparu.” In *Specters of Marx* and *Echographies of Television*, Derrida also explains that the spectral nature of a thing or being is also made possible or produced nowadays by tele-technologies which, through their images, are able to let us see and make us believe that something or someone who was there but is no longer is still present. Drawing on Roland Barthes’s concept of the *spectrum*, Derrida recognizes that televisual images, photographic or simulated images are eerily able to keep the dead alive and thus are both recorders and producers of specters (*Echographies of Television* 115-117, 120-125). They are also the proof, that is to say, a trace of what is no longer, of what does not *materially* exist anymore.

Thereby, the question of the “trace” (*les restes*) is important in Derrida’s own understanding of the dynamic behind *hauntology* and of *spectrality*. It is linked both to the idea of mourning and also to what Derrida conceives as an ethical politics of memory which implies the ideas of inheritance (“héritage”) and responsibility towards the dead.¹²²

As Davis explains:

The dead returns either because the rituals of burial, commemoration and mourning have not been properly completed [...], or because they are evil and must be exorcised [...], or because, like the ghost of Hamlet’s father,

¹²² We will come back to this idea in chapter 3 during our own analysis of Youssef Elalamy’s novel, *Les clandestins*.

they know a secret to be revealed, a wrong to be righted, an injustice to be made public or a wrongdoer to be apprehended [...].” (3)¹²³

Thus, as noted by Michael F. O’Riley in *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization* (2007), with each spectral apparition comes “[...] primarily a question of responsibility, of an inherited position that must be confronted and whose legacy is ultimately productive” (19). As such, haunting is not just a question of doing justice to the past; it also implies a “responsibility beyond all the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead (Derrida, *Specters* xix). The presence of the specter certainly raises an ethical and political question. In *Echographies of Television*, Derrida explains further his concept of the specter by pointing out the fact that “[t]he specter is not simply someone we see coming back, it is someone by whom we feel ourselves watched, observed, surveyed as if by law: we are ‘before the law,’ without any possible symmetry, without reciprocity, insofar as the other is watching, [...]” (120). The confrontation with a spectral apparition is never synchronic nor specular. This is what Derrida identifies as the “effet de visière” (*the visor effect*) (26), that is to say, the “insigne suprême du pouvoir” (29), which he compares to the *Law*. Hence, in the light of this problematic, that is of what a specter is or not, or what the “logic of the ghost” is, one cannot help but wonder what it is like to define the Immigrant as specter. In sum, to what extent can we really talk about an *hauntology* or spectral identity of the Immigrant? To what extent this type of visor effect or power can be applied to the Immigrant as a subject/object who sees and is constantly under surveillance by authority.

II. Toward an On[haun]tology of the Immigrant?

¹²³ Shakespeare’s famous play serves as one of the bases of Derrida’s spectral analysis.

The previous brief summary of the multiple definitions of the “specter” suggests that referring to the Immigrant as *specter* or a *haunting* figure is far from a simple figure of speech. Firstly, whether they arrive in a host country dead or alive (witness the cadavers washed ashore on Greek beaches), immigrants/emigrants, hauntingly similar to “specters” or “revenants” (spirits who have returned), have become both intriguing and terrifying phantasmagoric figures, blurry images returning obsessively in the collective imagination. As a topic and figure in literature and the media, immigration and the Immigrant, as well as their corollaries, emigration and the Emigrant, have come to represent this haunting figure of alterity and the uncanny, that is of the *Unheimliche* (Freud). Secondly and paradoxically, we notice that it is no longer easy nowadays to define what an “immigrant” or “emigrant” is exactly. As we will see in the following pages, the mere words “immigrant,” “emigrant,” “migrant,” and their corollaries, “immigration,” “emigration” and “migration,” are enough to evoke a multitude of definitions, images, stereotypes and feelings in popular discourses and the collective imagination of any host society. However, it is in that multiplicity, that is to say in that linguistic, discursive, visual and mental *diffraction* that I locate part of what constitutes the motor behind the on[haun]tology of the Immigrant and by extension of Its spectrality: Its *differance* (Derrida).

A. Ghostly Matters: Immigration and the Collective Imagination.

First, to state the obvious, the figure of the Immigrant has always occupied a specific place in the collective imagination, particularly in the national, social and

cultural contexts in which it “manifests” itself. Immigration, in particular, and migration in general, is not a new phenomenon; it has existed since Antiquity and will probably not stop in the near future. As such, if one compares the figure of the Immigrant to a specter, as a phantasmagoric and haunting image of a being, “It” appears to be “achronic” like the latter, that is, an “atemporal” (or timeless) and trans-historical figure. In a globalized world where human migrations between countries are continuous and increasing, the haunting by the Immigrant also appears to be of a trans-territorial and transnational nature. Thus, just like the Derridian specter, the Immigrant defies time and place and challenges any idea of boundaries between a *here* and *there*, or a past, present and future. Indeed, as we have seen earlier, a haunting always inherently presupposes the idea of a movement insofar as the specter is able to *travel* back and forth between two worlds—the world of the dead and the world of the living—without really belonging to any of them. Incidentally, the specter’s multiple and temporary (re)apparitions are perceived as many “interruption[s] in the fabric of reality” (Davis 3) by those who witness them.¹²⁴ It is from that other perspective that the comparison with the Immigrant or the Emigrant proves to be once again conceivable.

Semantically and etymologically, the word “immigrant” designates someone who *comes to* or *arrives in* a foreign country for socio-economic reasons, while an “emigrant” is usually described as someone who *leaves* his native country for the same reasons.

However, as one might notice, becoming or being an emigrant already presupposes that

¹²⁴ The reference to a witness remains important as in order for a spectral *apparition* to be, it must visually materialize and needs to be witnessed. The witness is the one who can give evidence of such event and testifies that it was.

one day one also will logically become an immigrant. Thus, the Immigrant and the Emigrant can be said to be at once the same and opposite, which would correspond to that subcontrarian logic of the “neither nor” that characterizes the ontology of the specter. This ambiguity has been underscored by Christiane Albert in *L’immigration dans le roman francophone*, a seminal work on the literary figure of the immigrant and its symbolic and ideological role in what she calls “Littérature des immigrations.” Albert notices that although the term “immigration” is generally the most used in intellectual, political and media circles and, thus, reflects the host society’s own position with regard to this “fait social” (Sayad Abdelmalek), it remains “indissociable de la rupture avec l’espace d’origine qu’implique le fait d’émigrer” (Albert 12). Thus, not only is the figure of the “migrant” associated with the idea of departures and arrivals, it also inherently implies the idea of “rupture” with the immigrant’s origins, and incidentally, we should add, with the host society’s social and cultural fabric where the arrival and presence of immigrants can often be felt as an “irruption” (from the latin, *Irruptus and irrumpere*: “to break in”), or invasion. As a matter of fact, immigration (maybe more than emigration), as a contemporary social and economic phenomenon, is always by itself an “évènement” that catalyzes and nourishes within nations many mixed and uncanny feelings and reactions about it because of its perceived tempestuous dimension. It is often perceived as a source of dissension, and at the most extreme, a source of crisis, that breaks into the generally perceived normalcy of a given host society.

Much like a haunting, these “irruptions” generate fear, anxiety, and hate, as well as a need to repress, repulse or exclude the intruders, as the host society does not always

know how to deal with them. Such reactions spring from the fact that the Immigrant is usually associated with disjuncture, a threat that needs to be neutralized, because it is the embodied figure of the *unheimlich* (Freud, Kristeva)¹²⁵ which, ultimately, makes it the specter, a figure of alterity *par excellence*. The Immigrant is, indeed, this familiar but disturbing and frightening presence which is both so similar to “us” and yet irrevocably different. That ambivalence creates an uncanny feeling about it. As Freud explains, just as the German word “*Unheimlich* [the uncanny] is clearly the opposite of *Heimlich* [‘homely’] or ‘*heimisch*’ [‘native’] (Freud, *The Uncanny* 126). Further, “[...] it seems obvious that something [the uncanny] should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar” (126-127). Put differently, “[i]t may be that the uncanny [‘the unhomely’] is something familiar [‘homely,’ ‘homey’] that has been repressed and then reappears [...]” (152).

Henceforth, the Immigrant, if one follows Freud’s theory of the uncanny, somehow would bear the mark of the return of the repressed. Supposing, from a psychoanalytical and symbolical point of view, that the Immigrant is a haunting figure, that is to say an obsessive idea or image in the collective and cultural imagination, its presence usually inspires feelings of fear or of anxiety that need to be repressed. The Immigrant inhabits the collective imagination; in fact, it is quite a familiar figure and has always been present (i.e. France is historically a country of immigration and has always welcomed foreigners on her soil). Yet, every time it is evoked in the public arena the Immigrant is constantly presented under the sign of newness (i.e. an “old” problem

¹²⁵ Kristeva, Julia. *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

becomes “new”) and disruption.¹²⁶ Indeed, its sole presence is enough to provoke the immemorial fear of the *Other*, the stranger, the foreigner who disturbs the social and cultural cohesion that one might expect within a nation whose national myths are rooted in the concept of unity. For instance, such feelings and perceptions are particularly prevalent within specific geographical, social and cultural contexts like, in our case, within Europe, where immigration from third world countries, and especially from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, is being experienced and, more importantly, *imagined* as a dangerous threat. Such a perception may thus explain the suggestive images of the immigration “waves” or even “tsunami” that have been used by some politicians and right-wing groups to describe the imminent but unapproved arrival of immigrants in their country. Too often conjured up, these feelings are often manipulated as political weapons by conservative and far right movements for their own agenda at specific times. As we have seen lately, in the case of France, with the massive expulsions of *Roms*, with the enactment of laws targeting Muslim immigrant communities, or with the flood of refugees from the Middle East to Europe following the Arab springs or Syrian civil war, the Immigrant is often the unwanted guest who, as shown by Mireille Rosello in *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (2001), perpetually challenges the limit of one nation’s definition and conception of hospitality.

Most importantly, what these inhospitable and hostile attitudes in and from the host society reveal, nevertheless, is that the *repression* or *exclusion* of immigrants in Europe and especially in France is symptomatic of a “cultural haunting” (Kathleen

¹²⁶ It is the conflation of the familiar and unfamiliar that makes the Immigrant such an uncanny figure.

Brogan). According to Fiona Barclay in *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (2011), it is critical to remember that “France’s ghosts are produced by socio-historical factors, but they cannot be accommodated easily within sociological realities.” Therefore, “[e]xclusion is a recurrent motif, a mark which regulates the haunting economy of the spectral” (xii). If understood from the angle of both mourning and a politics of memory and in the context of a postcolonial immigration and emigration, this “cultural haunting” highlights not only the inability of the French nation to assimilate the populations from its former colonies in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, but also its inability to deal with its past and, in particular, with the colonial specter and its historical and socio-cultural legacy.¹²⁷

Now, it is not surprising that a particular language of haunting in popular discourses and culture is usually associated with such uncanny feelings and often negative perceptions. Indeed, as pointed out by Mark McKinney in his article, “Haunting Figures in Contemporary Discourse and Popular Culture in France,” an important language of haunting surfaces in popular discourses with regard to immigration. One of his goals in this article is to demonstrate through the example of Europe, and especially of France, that a “[...] haunting language connected to immigration permeates many discursive and cultural formations [...]” (52). Accordingly,

[t]here is afoot in France today a certain kind of [...] language of haunting and fear that often permeates discussion of immigration, race, ethnicity

¹²⁷ In *La Fracture coloniale ; la société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial* (2005), Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire touch upon the issue of a willful amnesia on the part of the French government and public unwilling to contemplate their colonial history in a social and cultural context marked by the marginalization and discrimination of France’s postcolonial immigrant populations. In this context, the Immigrant represents a return and constant reminder of that history.

and France's national identity. Its most striking apparition includes *clandestins*, zombies, cannibals and vampires. Although these fantastic figures in discourse on immigration are not necessarily the most common ones used (with the notable exception of the *clandestin*), they nevertheless constitute some of the most extreme and revealing *representations* of feelings and ideas that are usually expressed in rather more banal language (51, *my emphasis*).

For McKinney, the case of the *clandestin*, also known as *immigré clandestin*, or the “*immigrés des immigrés*” according to Gérard Miller (qtd in McKinney 52-53), is particularly illustrative of this language of haunting and of a haunting of the collective imagination, as it is one of the “most haunting [...] figures in France” (McKinney 52). In anticipation of chapter 2, which is devoted to the spectral analysis of the *Harraga*, it is worth noting that this form of illegal immigration features many of the characteristics of a specter not only because the word designates “a kind of outlaw ‘illegal’” from outside the national territory,” it also evokes the idea of “secrecy, hiddenness, the ability to avoid detection by the panoptic gaze of state authority.”¹²⁸ This conception can be explained by the fact that, by living in the shadows and on the outskirts of society, by being invisible and at the same time in the public eye, by not belonging to the community, by being represented as dangerous and thus feared, the *clandestin* has come to represent all immigrants and become the perfect archetype of a disturbing and frightening spectral presence that needs to be controlled or expelled.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ McKinney 52.

¹²⁹ This of course reminds us, once again, of Freud's theory of the *Uncanny*, in particular of what happens in the case of the unexplained situations where an uncanny presence or feeling is not only repressed, it is also doomed to silence and to secrecy.

McKinney's observation is significant for three main reasons: not only does he touch upon the important question of the negative representation of immigrants in France (also Europe and the world in general), by emphasizing its plurality of signs, meanings and connotations, he invites us to reflect on the concept of "representation" itself and its various modalities. Most importantly, according to cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural representations and Signifying Practices*, "representation," be it an image, a word or a musical phrase, is a "signifying practice"; it is "[...] a complex business [...] [that] engages feelings, attitudes, and emotions, and [that] mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper level that we can explain[...]" (226). He reminds us that, for instance, stereotyping is a "representational practice" (225), a way in which we make sense of the world around us and in particular of the differences between others and ourselves. Representation is, thus, the way in which we confer or add meaning to something that already exists.

This is particularly important since, in a context of immigration, the above-mentioned negative representations deeply fill people's minds (or imagination) and sustain the continuous feelings of haunting that determine their thoughts and behaviors toward the immigrants as well as the status (place) they attribute to them. For the crucial questions are not just where these feelings of haunting or of the uncanny come from, but also, how are they expressed and how often? By whom and in which contexts? Finally, if this language of haunting is deeply embedded in our minds and already "permeate[s] our discursive and cultural formations," what role do these representational practices play in perpetuating or (re)-producing that haunting figure that is the "Immigrant"? By

highlighting the issue of representation through language in its semantic, lexical, and semiological dimensions, McKinney forces us to reflect on the nature and diffracting effects of representational practices like stereotyping in the *production* and *phenomenality* of the Immigrant as an object of representation and as a *specter* or *haunting figure* in popular culture.

B. Of Diffracted Representations: The Immigrant as a Figure of Differe(a)n

So, how does an immigrant¹³⁰ become a *specter* without dying? How does he become this transcendental and haunting figure, that is a figure of repetition, of the uncanny, or of the “neither nor” in the collective imagination, in politics and in the media? To answer these questions, I would like to argue that one way to understand the spectrality or hauntology of the “Immigrant” is to look at the semantic and semeiological dimensions of the word(s) or image(s) used to re-present immigrants. By analyzing the signifying practices and discursive formations around immigration, we will understand the logic and dynamics behind the hauntology of the Immigrant-Specter. Indeed, in taking a closer look, when it comes to defining the “immigrant” and “emigrant,” it appears that the relationship between signifier and signified is more disrupted than ever and, as a result, it has become difficult to come to an exact definition and understanding of what each of these words entails. Because “immigrant,” “emigrant” and even “migrant” remain ill-defined concepts from legal, political, theoretical, and

¹³⁰ In this section, while I am talking about the immigrant in a literal sense, that is as a social category, I will also alternatively refer to that *thing or figure* that is the Immigrant as a Specter (the “Immigrant-Specter”), for which I use the neutral pronoun “it.”

anthropological perspectives, it is thus at the heart of this semantic and semiological haziness (what I call in French “flou sémantique et sémiologique”) that I locate the space of spectralization of the Immigrant and, therefore, the first symptoms or signs of a haunting. This spectralization, however, also occurs visibly in the blurry, virtual image that the visual mass media have managed to produce throughout the years. My goal in the following paragraphs is thus to survey and understand the origins of this “flou,” which is often far from reality.

As it has been shown in diverse studies devoted to the question of immigration in contemporary France and Europe, the terms “immigration” and “immigrant” almost automatically trigger a set of negative stereotypes, images and feelings. It is thus not surprising that, in an international context of increasing xenophobic acts, immigration has come to signify more and more a danger for the common good. In fact, over the last three decades, the word “Immigration” and its corollary “immigrant,” or the couple “emigration/emigrant,” have been increasingly charged with negative connotations of despair, poverty, violence and, above all, illegality and thus criminality associated with immigrants. It is an important point that has been highlighted by McKinney, Albert, Hargreaves, and other social scientists and literary critics like Mathieu Rigouste, Maxim Silverman or Mireille Rosello.¹³¹ Two main factors explain the negative aura surrounding the multiple representations and their duration throughout time: on one hand it seems to be due to the polysemic and polyvalent nature of the signs “immigrant,” “immigration”

¹³¹ See Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (1992); Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype, Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (1998); Mathieu Rigouste, “L’ennemi de l’intérieur: la construction médiatique de la figure de ‘l’Arabe’” in *La Fracture coloniale*, ed. Bancel et al. (2005).

and their corollaries; on the other hand, it can be said to be the result, directly and indirectly, of the role played by the mass media, (especially television, radio, films), the print media and the internet, whose televisual, digital or photographic images and texts, echoing prevailing political discourses, often depict immigrants in unflattering situations. In other words, the negative representation of the Immigrant is mainly due to the conjugated result of a certain type of rhetoric of words and images.

As one of the preferred scapegoats of the media and political class during elections or times of unrest due to economic and social crises, whenever shown or talked about, immigrants are associated with a broad spectrum of images and media reports that play on the spectacular, the tragic and the sordid. As we will see, this is particularly true in the case of reporting on both legal and illegal immigrants coming from North and Sub-Saharan Africa with whom are associated many negative stereotypes and images in France where they seem to exist, and thus become visible, only when there is a problem (i.e. the 2005 riots in France) or a spectacular event (i.e. the famous “Marche des Beurs”). The particular nature of this mode of visibility has also been noticed by Tahar Ben Jelloun in *Hospitalité française* (1984), a book in which he analyzes the relationship between France and its immigrants as well as the ways in which these immigrants are perceived by the general population and represented in the media. According to Ben Jelloun, “L’image de l’immigration est sombre et trop négative. Elle est triste. [...] [Elle] est rarement présentée sans misérabilisme, cette grisaille qui sous-tend le malheur, la crise, et l’insécurité. [...] À force de filmer les immigrés à l’occasion de drames, on va finir par croire qu’ils sont télégéniques dans le malheur [...]” (Ben Jelloun, *Hospitalité*

française 77-79). Thanks to television, the relation “immigrants” equals “tragedy,” “poverty” or “insecurity” is quickly made without proper distinctions between the real perpetrators of criminal activities and the innocent victims, or without even taking into account the socio-economic differences within immigrant groups. Based on reporting of current events of the last three decades, one cannot help noticing, in the mainstream media, a tendency towards systematic generalizations (stereotypes) in the images they project of first- and second-generation immigrants. Among the simplistic assumptions disseminated by the news media are the following generic equations: “Jeunes de banlieue” = immigrants or delinquents; Muslims = terrorists; veiled “Arab” women = submissive women; or finally illegal immigrant = criminal.

These reductive equations are especially illuminating for they demonstrate how problematic and arbitrary the perceived social and cultural status of immigrants can be in any host society. Such arbitrariness is completely due to the misuse of the terminology chosen to identify, categorize and describe this social category. Using the example of immigration in France, Christiane Albert finds it useful to remind us beforehand that immigration, as a global, historical and sociological phenomenon, has indeed favored the emergence of “une catégorie sociale nouvelle désignée sous le terme d’«immigrés»” (12). Nevertheless, she also goes on to highlight how questionable the term “immigrant” is semantically and symbolically, since it has become “un terme générique” that is used more and more to “désigner les personnes d’origines étrangères vivant en France et elle

[cette appellation] se substitue de plus en plus à tous les autres tels qu'exilés, expatriés, migrants."¹³²

This alarming observation regarding the negative consequences of such discursive formations and metonymic process is also made by Alain Morice who, taking a close look at the polysemy of the word "migrant" and its by-products used in the context of sub-Saharan migrations in the Maghreb and Europe, also highlights the political, ideological and theoretical implications of such designations. In his article "Conceptualisation des migrations et marchandages internationaux," Morice notes :

Concernant la qualification des personnes et de leur mobilité, certaines notions paraissent caduques ou réductrices : « *flux migratoires* », voire tout simplement « *é* » ou « *immigration* » sont de celles-là. La trop grande généralité de l'appellation générique de « *migrants* » n'est pas moins douteuse [...] . D'autres notions apparaissent ou réapparaissent, au gré d'enjeux idéologiques et théoriques complexes qui alternativement, les mettent à la mode ou provoquent la désuétude. C'est peut-être dans le catalogue de ce qui est supposé illicite (« *clandestins* », « *sans-papiers* », « *illégaux* », « *irréguliers* »), voire fortement répréhensible (« *passeurs* », « *trafiquants* », « *réseaux* », « *mafias* », termes détournés de leur usage premier pour s'appliquer au champ de la migration dans un contexte de fermetures des frontières), que la prolifération terminologique et son inévitable cortège d'approximations douteuses s'observe le mieux. (194)

What this "prolifération terminologique" reveals when it comes to the imposition and domination of certain representational practices and discursive formations of and about immigration are the power relations at play between the government and the mass media, especially the news media. As we can see, this terminology, which underpins the illegitimate, illegal or criminal presence or nature of these "aliens," is far from the initial

¹³² Albert 12.

economic dimension and meaning attributed to the phenomenon of migration. As Morice points out, it is also worth noting that only individuals from a specific geographical, economic, and cultural origin are subjected to these categorizations:

Avec ou sans les préfixes «*im-*» ou «*é*», «migrants» caractérise globalement des personnes à l'extérieur de leur lieu d'origine, sans considération particulière pour les raisons et les conditions de leur venue, ni pour la durée passée et à venir de leur séjour. Implicitement, le mot désigne sans critères précis des personnes plutôt démunies : les hommes d'affaires, les artistes installés à l'étranger ne sont pas qualifiés ainsi. Spontanément, personne ne considère les «*coopérants*» européens en Afrique comme des «*migrants*»: on parle d'«*expatriés*». En outre, il s'agit d'une définition de la personne par ses origines, résultants donc d'une démarche intellectuelle essentialiste, propre à marquer les gens d'un stigmate. (202)

In the French case, and by extension European case, although the term “immigrant” has been the keyword used to refer to individuals who came to France primarily for economic reasons, the term for the past three decades has served as a proxy for many already essentialized categories: Arabs, Muslims, Blacks, inner city youths (“jeunes de banlieues”). In *Multi-ethnic France*, Alec Hargreaves argues that the word “immigration” has also become more and more a proxy for other issues like race and ethnicity in countries like France and, therefore, it has been used to mark *difference(s)* that serve to essentialize those identified by the term immigrant. One commonly held belief is that all immigrants are either “Arabs” from North Africa or “blacks” from West Africa, an assumption that, of course, does not reflect the complex social and cultural reality of the multiethnic and multicultural country that France has become. As a matter of fact, it is not rare to hear about or see images of individuals who are, almost immediately and in a

stereotypical way, labeled as “*issus de l’immigration*” by a news anchor or commentator because of their obvious phenotype¹³³ or clothing, the irrefutable markers of their racial, ethnic or cultural differences.¹³⁴

These stigmatizing practices are not a new phenomenon. As far as their image is concerned, immigrant have long been associated with many stereotypes and thus stigmatized throughout the years in the mass media. Indeed, as stated by Mireille Rosello in *Declining the Stereotype*,

Throughout the seventies and eighties, popular films and sensational media articles gradually imposed phantasmagoric visions of bloody lambs sacrificed in bathtubs, covers of magazines have focused complacently on apparently huge crowds of men caught at that very moment of prayer when their position makes them faceless and invisible, accentuating the impression of anonymous numbers, and since the 1989 *affaire du foulard* (the Islamic scarf controversy that created strange new alliances and new frictions between antiracists, staunch defenders of secularism, and feminists), photographers have produced endlessly repetitive portraits of female adolescents whose political veil seems to have been put in the same cultural bag as the Odalisques of nineteenth-century orientalist painters.

(3)

Such stereotypes, as described by Rosello, are among those that continue to feed our collective imagination when it comes to representing these social categories. For scholars like Mathieu Rigouste, Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, or Achille Mbembe, these

¹³³ The correlation between immigration and racism is yet another important aspect of the larger issue of misrepresentations of immigration and immigrants that is challenged in most of Beur novels and other novels on immigration but also in the larger framework of Francophone Studies. Among these novels are those belonging to our corpus such as Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *Les raisins de la galère* or Nacer Kettane’s *Le sourire de Brahim*.

¹³⁴ Among the leading theorists having addressed the question of the conflation of racism and immigration politics and the racialization of culture, we should not forget Frantz Fanon’s analysis in his seminal work, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, or Etienne Balibar’s famous article “Is there a Neo-Racism?” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (1991) and his concept of “differential racism.”

cultural and racial stereotypes are the (in)direct heritage of colonization or the symptoms of a “colonial unconscious.” As pointed out by Hargreaves in *Multi-ethnic France*, these media, and particularly French television which is “by far the most powerful mass medium, [and which] has in its dominant forms been the least responsive to minority interests” (77), not only under-represent these groups, but also misrepresent them by confining them to rigid stereotypical categories that essentialize their identity. They have thus been condemned to be identified as an always “them” versus “us,” therefore reproducing a certain colonial paradigm which was once based on binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, master/slave, center/periphery. Taking as an example the media representations of France’s large suburban housing projects in “Le langage des médias sur les cités : représenter l’espace, légitimer le contrôle,” Mathieu Rigouste reminds us that “ [L]es représentations que donnent les médias des “cités” mobilisent des répertoires spécifiques de signes et de codes, des registres de symboles qui produisent du sens, au-delà du texte et des images” (Rigouste 74). In this insightful article on the messages embedded in media images and discourses he contends that the media apparatus “ constitue des récits, avec des personnages, des intrigues, des morales, et diffuse ainsi nombre de messages implicites qui nourrissent les représentations collectives.”¹³⁵

The treatment of the 2005 riots in French inner cities by the local, national and international media is a good example of these neocolonial ideologies. During that time, most of the French media, echoed by politicians and so-called specialists of the *banlieue*

¹³⁵ Rigouste 74.

question, were prompt to label the unrest as the clash between the “France d’en haut” et “France d’en bas,” as if France were divided into two different nations. “France d’en haut” was a clear signifier for the white upper and middle class, the “Français de souche,” whereas “France d’en bas” was supposed to refer to those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, the inner-city youths and by extension the immigrant communities, supposedly recognizable by their visible features, marks of their difference and of the threat they constituted to national and social cohesion (hence the recurrent shortcuts of inner city youth=immigration=violence). What these different examples reveal is not only the plasticity of the word itself, but also the fact that the terms “immigrant” and “immigration” (and their opposites, “emigrant” and “emigration”) have become what Stuart Hall defines both as a discursive construct and a “floating signifier,” that is to say, a word without a precise referent which encompasses several meanings depending on the place, time and context.

As a result, what happens in the long term with the multiplicity of meaning is the departing from or rather a deferment of *the* primary or original meaning of the term. This idea, as we shall see, is particularly meaningful if we keep in mind the other acceptations of the word ‘specter’ which, in media technology or in physics and optics, refers to the (re-)production of an image through the reflection or diffraction of light. However, it is also worth noting that contrary to what one might think, the polysemic dimensions of the words “immigration” and “immigrant,” are actually normal, for as Stéphane Robert points out in “Words and their meanings. Principles of variation and stabilization,” “Polysemy and polyreference are the general rule among languages. A single unit thus

can have several different meanings and point to several different referents” (55). While this linguistic phenomenon is rather normal in any language system, Roberts highlights the potential for misalignment of intended meaning and its reception for, as Robert puts it: “whereas this plasticity in meaning ensures the referential power of a language [...] it also entails another of language’s defining characteristic -ambiguity and its communicative corollary: misunderstandings”(56). Ambiguity and misunderstanding, which is also defined as “a failure to understand; mistake of meaning or intention” (Collins dictionary) is often the core result of most representations of the “immigrant.” Likewise, they are also the results of any attempt to define what our subject matter, the specter, is. This is why, whether communicated through discourse (speech) or images (visual or mental), the fact that “immigration” and its corollaries are polysemic and polyvalent supports the idea that there are linguistic devices and discursive strategies used to socially and culturally conceive of or represent the Immigrant. In other words, they highlight the *artifactual*¹³⁶ origins of the Immigrant. Thus, to say that the Immigrant is an elusive discursive and cultural construct is crucial to my argument regarding the spectrality or spectral essence of the Immigrant.

In my opinion, what emerges from this multiplicity of meanings through language (textual or visual) can be compared to the diffraction of the light through a prism which results in a range of different colors known as a rainbow, or spectrum, which is both the same and other in comparison to its origins, that is to say, to the original referent. What I am trying to say is that the *primary* meaning of each of these words has been diffracted

¹³⁶ We shall return to this notion of the *artifactual* and *artifactuality*, two terms used by Derrida in his analysis of the creative power of what he calls “tele-technology.”

into a vast array of significations which, although linked, mark by turns, singly and inherently, the absence or obliteration of another signification and its haunting presence. Alternatively, the same could be said of televisual or photographic images that have also created a spectral (diffracted) image of the Immigrant by dint of being re-produced, reprinted, re-broadcasted. In every instance, they have succeeded in creating an altogether spectral, abstract being that is difficult to name or define with precision other than metonymically, by association with other, more negative terms. This dissemination of words and images used to represent the Immigrant and echoing one another makes it almost impossible to define the original signified. Thereby, it is at that semiological and symbolical level of representational practices, that is, through the multiplication and dissemination of meanings involved in the acts of defining (naming), categorizing and stereotyping, that a *spectralization* of the figure of the Immigrant is performed. As a consequence, by leaving their imprint in the collective imagination, these media representations are responsible at the same time for making the Immigrant invisible, intangible in both senses of the term, that is impalpable and unclear to the mind, as well as always double or multiple and something always other; in other terms, they make it always different/*differant*.

This brings me to the final point of my argument on what I see as the hidden, metaphysical dynamics behind what constitutes the spectrality and hauntology of the Immigrant. Indeed, as a result of media treatment, (the) *immigrant* or (the) *emigrant*, illegal or not, is not always what it seems to be or what it is thought or meant to be due to

the multiple dimensions of its meaning (polysemy) and their values (polyvalence).¹³⁷ As we have seen, from an ontological and phenomenological point of view, the specter (neither dead nor alive) is an entity that inhabits (haunts) the interstitial space joining the realms of life and death and belongs to the order of visible and the invisible, the real and the virtual. *Neither nor*, both *here* and *there*, *present* and *absent*, *visible* and *invisible*, *virtual* and *real*, *tangible* and *intangible*, it is its ambiguity and undecidability which erases all dichotomy, that is to say, the hidden principle behind its “raison d’être” and, by analogy, of the Immigrant’s spectrality.

This undecidability not only defies all categorization or definition, it also makes the Immigrant-Specter a figure of illegitimacy, of alterity, of an uncanny *différance/differance* (in a Derridean and deconstructionist sense). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida plays on the homophony between with the word “difference” and *differance* to show the differing (not identical) and deferring (“putting off”) aspects involved in writing (or in what he calls “arche-writing”), as the meaning of the word (or sign) “difference” slips away from its main meaning because of the disrupting presence of the letter “a.” While in oral speech, the presence of the “a” is totally absent or fails to be detected because it sounds the *same* as the original “difference,” in its written form the “a” becomes the mark of an *alterity*, by insidiously altering the original meaning of the word and producing *another* one. Therefore, just as with hauntology or spectrality, Derrida uses this (non)concept to question, from a metaphysical point of view, the dichotomy between absence and presence, as the idea of difference is not totally erased from the word

¹³⁷ This would explain why, like the Specter, it (the Immigrant-Specter) belongs to the order of the “neither nor.”

“differance.” As Jack Reynolds points out in his article on Derrida for the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (IEP), “Arche-writing refers to a more generalized (sic) notion of writing that insists that the breach that the written introduces between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed, is typical of an originary breach that afflicts everything one might wish to keep sacrosanct, including the notion of self-presence.”¹³⁸

On a different (but still related) note, we cannot help but recognize that *differance* as a concept is particularly important to our understanding of the spectrality of the immigrant. As we have seen, as object of (verbal, written, mental, or graphic) representations, the Immigrant-Specter is never where and what it is thought to be. The reliance on a certain type of stereotypes or categorical representations based on the social and cultural background of those targeted is one of the many tactics used to not only construct, identify and categorize the *Other*—the Immigrant—but also to create ambiguity and ambivalence. Ambiguity, I assert, is one of the main fallacies of the politics of representation of the Immigrant, and it is mainly due to the role played by stereotypes. Hence, I can only agree with Homi K. Bhabha when he points out that, when it comes to the *Other question*, stereotype “as a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is already ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (66) finds its force in the confusion and ambivalence that it

¹³⁸ Jack Reynolds, “Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Consulted on July 23, 2013. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/derrida/#SH3b>>

generates.¹³⁹ Neither totally fiction nor fact, truth or lie, positive or negative, I posit that stereotype thrives on *differance* and *polarization*.

A good example of that polarizing effect can be found in the evolution of the visual representations of the terms *Beur* or *Jeune de banlieue*. As I was mentioning earlier, the figure of the *Beur* is a polarizing one. It is not surprising that, when it comes to the representational practices used to identify and categorize the *Beur*, we find the latter chained to a long series of stereotypical images and discourse, repeatedly more or less similar to the ones used by colonialism. The *Beur* (or *Jeune de banlieue*) is, according to me, both a symbol of rupture (with the previous generation) and newness; he is not only the symbol of a new problem, but also as a symbol of hope for the integration of an entire generation into the social, political and cultural fabric of French society. For Guy Lochard in “Le Jeune de banlieue est un autre,” “la personne du “beur” [joue le rôle] d’une figure “emblématisée” cristallisant les angoisses collectives face à une nouvelle situation pleines d’incertitudes” (141). Neither villain nor hero, throughout the years the *Beur* sees himself forced to play on both registers. Such a polarizing figure is perfectly embodied in Nacer Kettane’s *Le sourire de Brahim* by the eponymous character (Brahim) who, born in Algeria but educated in France, navigates between the role of the *lascar* and the more positive roles of the political activist, student and educator or “grand frère.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ See Homi K. Bhabha “The Other Question. Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” in *The Location of Culture* (1994): 66-84. According to Bhabha, ambivalence is “[...] one of the most significant discursive and psychological strategies of discriminatory power— whether racist or sexist [...]” (66).

¹⁴⁰ Typically, the *grand frère* is role model, a former and reformed delinquent who dedicates his life to helping other youngster in difficulty.

As a consequence, the *Beur* is the embodiment of that figure of the *neither nor*, for he is neither French nor Maghrebi, neither Lascar or *Beurgeois*, and neither good or evil.

This polarizing nature of the *Beur*'s condition (or of his representation), I suggest, is mostly due to the effects of the etymological and onomastic vacuum surrounding him when it comes to his self-identity. It is at least what is suggested by Albert Memmi's analysis of the *Beur* identity in *Decolonization and the Decolonized*¹⁴¹ when he stresses how, for the young North African immigrant, by "clinging to his ethnic and Muslim origins" and by "[referring] to himself as a *beur*, a slang anagram of the French 'arabe,' [it] mean[t] defining himself as a foreigner to the nation, French and Christian [...]." For Memmi,

Jeunes Maghrébins was hardly any better since it was still, in a sense, a form of exclusion, an insistence on difference. That is why the children of immigrants have been reduced simply to being young, or *jeunes*, in reference solely to their age, even though theirs was a very special kind of youth, which did not share the criteria, the concerns, and the future of other young [French] people. [...] And since they were not fated to remain young, a more general term was needed, so someone suggested *French Muslims*, without realizing just what those two words implied. (116)

In the end, the *Beur*, who is at the same time *same* and *other*, namely *differant*, finds himself in a perpetual liminal position, like a specter. Living in the shadows at the margins of French society, the *Beur*, as a spectral figure, can only make his presence known during untimely rowdy demonstrations that still haunt France's collective imagination. Thus, if we believe that a specter comes back to right a wrong—whether it

¹⁴¹ This quote is from the chapter entitled "THE IMMIGRANT" and precisely from the following subpart: "'The Zombie'= the son of immigrant= the *beur*."

is a debt or an omitted rite—then one can easily understand the political and symbolical significance of highly mediatized demonstrations like the “Marche des Beurs” of 1983.

Conclusion

At the end, one must admit that while a hypervisibility or hyper-mediatization might be perceived as a curse for the Immigrant, it is paradoxically by becoming visible that the Immigrant-Specter can finally (re)claim its/his place within society. It is not until it/he can speak for itself/himself as a *subject*, full of its/his agency (and in control of its/his visibility), that it/he can hope to right the wrongs not only of the mainstream media or of society, but also of History. It is by substituting the array of negative images used to represent it/him with more positive ones that are able to capture its/him real essence, that is, the true nature of its/his being, that the Immigrant-Specter may hope to change the politics of its/his representation and finally find peace as a person and no longer as an abstract figure. Throughout this entire chapter, my goal has been to work towards a better understanding the processes and other mechanisms leading to the birth of the Immigrant as a spectral and, therefore, a haunting figure. One of my first steps was to investigate the popular and scientific (or technological) origins of the word “specter,” which can both refer to the “living-dead”/ the *revenant* and to what is produced by a medium. This allowed me to highlight the close connection between the image and life and death, and to show how linked the idea of the “specter” is to the concept of vision, technology (the medium), and memory. Taking a closer look to the politics of representation of immigration, we note that one thing that stood out is the fact that the Immigrant, as a political, social and media figure, is inherently an “artifact” (Sayad Abdelmalek) or, one

might say, in the Derridean sense, “artifactual,” that is a product and the result of many timely projections, be they desires or fears.¹⁴² As we have shown, the word “immigrant” encompasses a multitude of meanings which conjure up, in the collective western imagination, a large range of more or less negative images.

These images (photographs, televisual, digital) undoubtedly leave an imprint in the public’s mind and are often responsible for shaping the ways society *sees* the Immigrant. Ungraspable, elusive, figures of disjuncture and of the uncanny, we know little about immigrants, except for what we are repeatedly told by politicians, authorities, and the media, and how unsettled (or threatening they make us feel. The Immigrant, I have argued, emerges at the end of that representational process as a pale copy of himself (the original) or, to be precise, as a disembodied figure, that is as a “corps sans corps” (Derrida) caught in the interstice of the real and virtual—like a specter. As the term “immigrant” encompasses a broad range of meanings—each term connoting something else than the original meaning—the Immigrant is always caught in a process of repetition and ambivalence. Such ambivalence is what I identify, like Derrida, as the “logic of the ghost,” which finds its roots in what I called the “flou sémantique.” Within that logic, the Immigrant ultimately emerges as a “figure of differance.” He is always condemned to be jointly the same and the other.

¹⁴² Indeed, the Immigrant belongs to the order of the “artifactuality” which, as reminded by Derrida in *Echographies of Television*, both “[...] signifies first of all that there is actuality—in the sense of “what is timely” [*ce qui est actuel*] or [...], in the sense of “what is broadcasted under the heading of the news [*sous le titre d’actualités*] on radio and television,” that is the “‘facts’ on which the ‘news’ or ‘information’ feeds” which are the product of decisions made within “a whole set of technical and political apparatuses” (Derrida 41-42).

Ultimately, with such a large array of negative verbal, visual and mental images aimed at identifying them, it is therefore, not surprising that immigrants are often described in political and other forms of “mediated” speech and are perceived by the public as a source of threats to national, social and cultural cohesion and security, which must be repressed (dealt with as such). It is also not a surprise that such negative representations have galvanized authors to take a political stance in their writings to denounce the many inequalities of the immigrant condition in an attempt to sort out fiction from reality. This positioning of authors is particularly important since, for Derrida, it is the duty of the *scholar* to represent them and provide them with the platform or medium (e.g. the novel) on which to voice their claim. Nothing illustrates this more poignantly than the case of literature and of the literary figure of the “burner,” an undocumented immigrant, the *clandestin*, known on both side of the Mediterranean as the “Harraga.” “L’immigré des immigrants,” in other words, the worst of his category, the *Harraga* emerges as another spectral presence that needs to be seen and, above all, heard.

Chapter 2: Covering Illegal Immigration: Literature, Media, and the Question of Death through Images

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the study of the “brûleur,” an undocumented emigrant¹⁴³ known as the *Harraga* in North Africa and *immigré clandestin* in France. I will especially focus on the spectralization of this figure, to which I also refer as a *Homo Mediaticus*, as a process contingent upon his representation in the mass media and in Francophone immigrant fictions referred to as “illiterature” by Hakim Abderrezak.¹⁴⁴ Born at the interstice of words and images, the *Harraga* is the perfect embodiment of the *Immigrant-Specter*.

Appearing in the 1980s-1990s, these fictions and non-fictions, mostly written by North African authors,¹⁴⁵ find their inspiration in the *real*, that is to say in real life experiences,¹⁴⁶ as they focus on the now highly mediatized tragic events taking place on

¹⁴³ In this chapter, I will use both “emigrant” and “immigrant” alternatively to refer either to the *Harraga*’s social condition in his home country or to his status in his host country. By doing that, I also hope to point out the constant back and forth movement or acts of departure and arrival that characterize this type of migration.

¹⁴⁴ See Abderrezak, Hakim, “Burning the Sea” (2009).¹⁴⁵ More recently there has also been a surge in published clandestine emigration novels by Sub-Saharan authors such as Omar Bâ, Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland, Abasse Ndione, or Fatou Diome. For more information, see Dominic Thomas, *Africa and France. Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism* (2013).

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¹⁴⁶ Most of these works, even the fictional ones, are based on real testimonies and news reports. Among them, one can cite *Clandestins en Méditerranée* (2000) by writer and journalist, Mellah Fawzi, in which he recalls his own experience of the crossing as an undercover journalist. For more information, see, for instance, Hakim Abderrezak’s recently published book, *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb, in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), Claudia Esposito’s *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb* (Lanham, MD: Lexington

both sides of the Mediterranean as the result of the emigration phenomenon known in Arabic as the *Hrig* or the *Harga*.¹⁴⁷ Doing the *Hrig*, which means to *burn* (*brûler*) or *to leave* in Arabic (Abderrezak), literally refers to the burning of identification papers by future emigrants before “burning the sea” (“*brûler la mer*”), which figuratively means to illegally cross the sea (i.e. the Straits of Gibraltar; the Atlantic Ocean) in a bid to reach the European Eldorado—a crossing which in many cases turns deadly. Indeed, in the last few decades, the Mediterranean has turned into the stage of human tragedy as the number of *Harragas* attempting the journey (to Europe) and falling victim to it continues to increase despite the joint efforts among emitting countries and receiving countries to control and stop the “flow” of new migrants. As a result, in the light of the constant reports of deaths or disappearances, the Mediterranean, formally known as the “*mare nostrum*,” can be said to have become literally and figuratively a “*mare mortis*” and, as such, a “traumatic [...] space” as argued by Claudia Esposito in *The Narrative Mediterranean* (119).

Henceforward, to say that the illegal im/emigrant is a specter or a living-dead is hardly an exaggeration, since by choosing to literally “burn,” that is to leave home and to conceal their true identity and citizenship, the *Harragas* become for society what author Salim Jay calls, in his short novel, *Tu ne traverseras pas le détroit*, “*fantômes administratifs*” (*administrative ghosts*). Symbols of alterity and exclusion, belonging neither *here* nor *there*, visibly invisible, these im/emigrants have become specters *par*

Books, 2014), or Najib Redouane (ed), *Clandestins dans le texte maghrébin de langue française* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008).

¹⁴⁷ Today, this migratory phenomenon is commonly referred to as the “Syrian refugee crisis” in reference to the recent increased arrivals of undocumented international migrants, mostly but not exclusively from Syria, fleeing their war-torn or poverty-stricken country.

excellence as their liminal state is responsible for their symbolical, biological/physical, social, spiritual/psychological death. It is a condition that is well represented in novels like *Tu ne traverseras pas le détroit* or Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir*. Mixing fiction and reality (news reports, historical narratives, anonymous testimonies) through a polyphonic narrative, both authors depict and protest in their own way the conditions (i.e. poverty, unemployment) and reasons (i.e. dream of a better life, social and economic incentives) leading to such a desperate act, as well as the human, psychological, economic and social consequences of this migratory phenomenon. For Esposito, novels like *Partir* constitute what she calls "dissonant narratives" that "enact practices of denunciation and deferral" (119). To this claim, I also want to argue that, as they account for the tragic events taking place in the symbolic space of the Mediterranean, most fictions such as Youssef Elalamy's *Les Clandestins* can be said to be literary cemeteries or haunted spaces. In this novel, the *Harraga* takes the form of a living-dead (like a zombie) or a ghostly presence who *comes back* to haunt the living, and by extension, the reader, through the space of the narrative and the imagination.

A polyphonic novel focusing on the tragic reasons and consequences of the *Hrig* in his homecountry of Morocco, Elalamy's *Les Clandestins* is, in effect, as much about exposing the somber aspects of emigration to Europe as it is about the return of the dead and their haunting of the living. In fact, this novel stages a double haunting as it is as much about the haunting of deceased persons as it is about the haunting presence of one particular image, a photograph taken by a Spanish photographer and capturing the dead bodies of the twelve *Harragas* washed up on a Moroccan beach. This picture, which

remains disturbingly physically absent from the text, is only made visible by the power of the words of the narrator who vividly depicts it. Its presence is the trigger of a double narration, one from the extradiegetic narrator and another from the dead themselves. It is my contention that the presence/absence of that image of dead *Harragas*, as a key element of the plot, is there to remind us how death is ineluctably the *sine qua non* condition through which the *Harraga* is finally made visible. It is literally by dying and being *on record*¹⁴⁸ that the *Harraga* finally exists in and for the world. Nothing can illustrate this paradox more than the media coverage of the immigrant phenomenon of the *Hrig*, which has been made more visible thanks to the constant dissemination of images of death. Dead men walking/crossing that is how we could sum up the way we envision these men, women and even children choosing to cross the Straits of Gibraltar or the Atlantic at their great risk. Images of corpses washed-up on shore or floating, of men about to drown, fighting for their lives, are what we have been accustomed to and what fills our imagination. For this reason, as Donna Wilkerson-Baker explains in *The space of the screen in Contemporary French and Francophone Fiction*, “[i]t comes as no surprise that death should figure as a central element in fiction written in the era of mediatization” (26). It is also not surprising that death or rather the sublimation and trivialization of the death of *Harragas* and its representation in the mass media, especially the press, is what motivated Youssef Elalamy to write *Les Clandestins*. It was effectively after reading an

¹⁴⁸ Ironically, the impossibility of tracking the exact number of emigrants dead at sea or still missing is making it difficult to keep reliable statistics (records) of this phenomenon, and this imprecision makes it all the more haunting.

article¹⁴⁹ from a local newspaper, tritely reporting the death of 12 castaways as if they were simple statistics, that this visual artist, journalist, writer and media studies professor imagined a narrative in which twelve *Harragas* would come back from beyond the grave to tell their stories. What is more interesting is that their return is triggered shortly after the brief report of their tragedy by local and international media, which, in the case of a French newspaper, chose to publish only one photograph (out of hundreds) of the discovery, and only to illustrate the damage done to the beach by the presence of the dead bodies. Divided into chapters, each one dedicated to a dead person, thanks to the power of the narration Elalamy allows another haunting to take place, as the ghostly/spectral image—born from the junction between text and (absent) image—is also producing, as Barthes would say, its own *specters*.

Thus, if, as claimed, the *Harraga* is a ghost, a specter, or a living dead that haunts the collective imagination, the photographic (or televisual) image, and the literary narrative, this chapter will attempt to answer the *why*, *where*, and *how* of this haunting. In other words, what is the modality of haunting in the virtual space of this novel? What constitutes in Elalamy's work an "esthétique de la hantise"? Finally, if the Specter always comes back for an unpaid debt, what is the literary, symbolical, social and political function of the spectral entity in the immigrant novel? In response to these questions, I argue that (this double) haunting, this case of *presentia in absentia* embodied by the spectral image and its object, the *Harraga*, is a narratological device used by

¹⁴⁹ For more information, see Valérie Orlando's article "*La littérature-monde* in 'the New Morocco': Literary Humanism for a Global Age" (2009) in which she refers to a 2007 interview given by Elalamy about this novel.

Elalamy to metaphorize, question and denounce the paradoxical absence of a certain type of media representation of this migratory phenomenon known in North Africa as the *Hrig*.¹⁵⁰ As I will show, the *Harraga* seems to have all the distinguishing features of a *living-dead* (neither dead nor alive) who, within the literary and virtual space of the novel is condemned to live and die *ad infinitum*, thus defying time and space. He has just enough time to tell his story, the one that the photographic, televisual or electronic image does not show or tell. The Immigrant-specter is, indeed, driven by the need to provide a narrative context to the image which lacks one (Susan Sontag).¹⁵¹

Now, by choosing the topos of haunting as a narrative device, Elalamy provides a story that, at the end, functions as a glitch, a point of disjuncture, or a “dissonance” (Esposito) that questions the official (historical) narratives or discourses on the *Hrig*. Hence, this case study will allow me to analyze through the tropes of the spectral image and ghost(s), the role played by the literary medium operating as “virtual spaces of spectrality” in the production of a collective counter-representation of the figure of the *Harraga*. The presence/absence of this image reminds us that visual media and literature, according to Derrida and Barthes, are spaces of haunting and of the production of specters. They are, I propose, what Derrida calls in *Specters of Marx* (1994) a “virtual space of spectrality” because of their ability to seize the intangible, the unspeakable. As Fiona Barclay puts it in *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (2011), literature becomes “[a] space in which the haunting elements which are

¹⁵⁰ This absence is effectively paradoxical given the hyper mediatization of this type of emigration, especially in recent years.

¹⁵¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977).

excluded from everyday discourse about lived experiences emerge and can be explored” (xi). With *Les Clandestins*, the space of the novel, thanks to the power of narration, does just that. It allows us to understand the unsaid and unseen, that is, the impenetrable aspects of this type of migration, and most importantly, to mourn the dead by putting them to rest.

I. **Specters at the Borders! Literature, Mass Media, Immigration and Death as Spectacle.**

A. **Close-up on a Living-dead: The *Harraga*, Epitome of a Specter.**

First and foremost, immigration novels depicting the plight of individuals known as *Harragas* attempting to illegally cross the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean in order to reach the European Eldorado have always been haunted by death and are thus replete with images of specters, ghosts and other eerie figures like “zombies” seemingly coming from another, exilic world. With such imagery, we could easily believe that more of these novels are part of what might be considered in popular culture as Gothic or Science fiction literature. Yet, we would be mistaken since, as said earlier, their stories and topics are deeply rooted in the reality of everyday life as experienced by many immigrant/emigrants in their home or host country. As pointed out by Chaib Yassine in *L’émigré et la mort: la mort musulmane en France* (2000), death is part of the everyday reality of im/emigration and consequently is inevitably constitutive of the myth of the *Harraga*. It is part of the “deal” when one decides to “brûler” and to *embark* on the difficult journey of the *Hrig*. After all, it is often through and after his death that we first encounter the *Harraga* as the mediatized symbol of this not so new phenomenon. As

mentioned earlier, *Harragas* are literally and figuratively living-dead, one step closer to being specters or *revenants* every time that they cross, are deported to their emitting or home country, and cross again, still with the hope of making it to Eldorado (or rather Fortress) Europe. Such back and forth movements globally characterize the migratory patterns taking place along the southern borders of Europe, which most immigrant narratives depict, whether it is in first generation North African immigrant novels, novels by the African diaspora, in *illiterature* or, to a lesser extent, Beur novels.

It must be effectively said that “revenge” (coming-back) is a recurrent theme in immigration or emigration fictions. It usually refers to the return of im/emigrants to their home country after a very long period of exile or absence. It is often a return during which the subject, and those who interact with him, realizes that he has become “other” and doubly foreign. He is a foreigner not only in the host country but also in his own country. He realizes that he is at once the same and a different person, almost a *pale* figure of what he was before his departure/return. As seen in chapter one, it is this alterity that creates, like a specter, his uncanniness as it highlights how familiar and strange he is at the same time, whether he lives abroad or comes back home. Usually motivated by reasons like vacation, nostalgia, homesickness or even his own death, the return to the home country remains often temporary and may include other reasons such as the subject returning by obligation or choice to take care of family business (e.g. a wedding or a funeral). In most cases, the Immigrant’s journey to the native land ends with the return to the host country where the immigrant works and resides permanently, or it may become permanent in the case of death, when his body is returned for burial. In fact, departures

and returns are part of a repetitive cycle that seems to characterize the fate of the Immigrant as a “revenant.” As mentioned above, this iterative situation is also characteristic of the journey of the *Harraga* who, often after a failed attempt to illegally emigrate, is arrested, jailed and then deported to his home country. It is a forced return which, in many cases, will be followed by another departure and another crossing, once the funding for another journey has been assured. But this journey to the European Eldorado may also result in the ultimate journey, as death, one of the risks of crossing, is never far away, reaping its share of victims before they ever reach the other side. This reality would explain why, for the *Harraga*, the question of “revenge” is inevitably linked to the imaginary of death and consequently to the notion of spectrality.

Death is a recurrent theme of immigrant fictions in which it serves as a correlate and a metaphor of the consequences of im/emigration itself. It can manifest physically, psychologically, socially, or spiritually. Death, whatever its forms, seems to be omnipresent wherever the *Harraga* goes even before becoming one. This is particularly well illustrated in *Les Clandestins* which stands out not only for the important imagery related to death but also for the fact that each protagonist’s story is like the promise of “chronicle of a death foretold.” It is a promise that is first announced by the return of the prodigal girl, Zaynab, whose brief life story opens the novel and immediately sets the tone by starting with the fairy tale formula (“il était une de ces fois” (9) but ending on a nightmarish note: “une drôle d’histoire. Étrange mais pas belle” (87). Having left her Moroccan village at a young age, Zaynab finds herself caught up in the world of prostitution in Spain until, impregnated by a Spanish man named Alvaro, she returns to

her village only to die after giving birth to a son named Omar. Her return is then described by the extradiegetic narrator as her last wish, which is the wish of any immigrant, namely to be buried in her native land : “Il faut se l’imaginer marcher lentement, comme si elle mesurait de ses pas la distance qui la séparait de sa tombe [...] peu avant l’aube, elle avait décidé de rentrer pour se laisser mourir auprès des siens, là-bas, parmi les souvenirs et les couleurs de son enfance” (16). Also noteworthy, she is also described as looking “pâle comme du lait” (*pale like milk*), like a ghost or *revenant* (16).

Like Zaynab, all of the protagonists appear to be shadows of themselves. They are physically, emotionally and psychologically trapped in a liminal state between two worlds, Spain and Morocco, as shown by the adult Omar’s coming and going between his village (Bnidar) and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Zones of transit for most candidates for the *Hrig*, these enclaves function as a liminal space between the Southern side of Europe, symbol of hope and life for them, and the Northern side of the Global South (i.e. Africa), symbol of despair and death. Thus, caught between two worlds, the characters, even when they are not trying to emigrate, are in a constant state of liminality, like zombies or specters, not knowing whether they are alive or dead or still exist. Such is the case of Momo, one of the (future) dead *Harragas* who declares: “je suis et je ne suis déjà plus” (61). Such is also the case of Louafi’s mother on her way to see the body of her son, who reflects : “le corps de Louafi sans Louafi [...], mettre les yeux dedans et mourir avec, et tous ces jours ensuite à faire semblant de respire, de vivre, les yeux ouverts, de nourrir ce corps qui est et qui n’est plus [...]” (46).

Dead men walking, most of the living persons in this novel seem to await the final moment when the line between life and death will be drawn, hoping that by crossing life will actually win in the end. In fact, “Partir ou mourir” is the actual motto of most *Harragas* for whom leaving for another land and even (the risk of) dying is synonymous with freedom and life. Indeed, according to Virginie Lydie in *Traversée interdite! Les Harragas face à l’Europe forteresse* (2011),

Vivre ou mourir [...]. Partir pour ne pas mourir[...]. Peu importe le prix à payer. Certains comparent la *harga* à une forme de suicide, mais ces jeunes n’ont pas la volonté de se donner la mort. Si le suicide peut être considéré comme une manière de crier son existence à travers la mort, la *harga* exprime avant tout une rage de vivre [...]. (Lydie 50)¹⁵²

Thus, their entire existence seems to lead inevitably to that point, like fate. It is at least what one of the protagonists, the smuggler, believes when he ominously declares: “Ces hommes-là, c’était écrit sur eux depuis toujours, cette envie de partir, de tout quitter [...] C’était écrit ; c’est juste qu’ils n’ont pas su le lire” (Elalamy 28). Doing the *Hrig* is also like test, a mysterious rite of passage that must be completed to finally *be*. It is at least what one of the characters, Louafi, seems to think before his death : “je me brûle pour voir si j’existe, je mets le feu à ma main pour vérifier si j’existe encore et, tu sais, maman, j’existe suffisamment encore pour partir” (46). *Brûler* (leaving/emigrating) is their only way to survive, that is to exist in a difficult socio-economic and political environment. Crossing the Straits is effectively not just a fantasy. It is also a liberating rite of passage in order to reclaim the freedom (of movement for workers; the right to provide for one’s

¹⁵² Virginie Lydie, *Traversée interdite ! Les Harragas face à l’Europe forteresse* (Le Pré Saint Gervais : Éditions le passager clandestin, 2011).

needs) that is refused to them by the richest and most powerful members of Moroccan and Western societies: “[...] arracher notre part, fût-elle empoisonnée, de cette liberté mythique qui semble si concrète parmi les privilèges des riches [...]” (Jay 11). Therefore, choosing to become a *Harraga* is not only a way to free oneself from an unproductive and hopeless life, it is also a way to regain the right to be treated and seen as a human being, with equal opportunities like any other person. It is ultimately to be free by escaping their social and existential limbo¹⁵³: “Mais peut être que c’est la faute de personnes [...]. Toutes ces années à l’étroit, à s’arracher la peau, l’ouvrir pour en sortir, se retrouver là-bas. Partir, partir tout simplement” (Elalamy 51).

As the foregoing shows, what Elalamy’s narrative foregrounds is that choosing to become an emigrant, and especially a *Harraga*, is not without consequence from a legal, social, and also existential point of view. Choosing to do the *Harga* is thus making the choice to become *other*. Indeed, becoming a *Harraga*, that is, giving up one’s identity and choosing anonymity, is not just about dying a physical or psychological death, it is also gaining a new identity, or rather a non-identity which, on its own terms, is synonymous with a social and symbolic death. Lydie reminds us that

Chaque année, dans les pays de départ ou de transit au Sud de l’Europe, des dizaines de milliers de migrants sont arrêtés, enfermés et refoulés, en dehors de tout cadre juridique. Certains se retrouvent bloqués, sans statut, condamnés à l’errance dans des pays qu’ils n’ont pas choisis et voient leurs droits élémentaires bafoués. D’autres enfin trouvent la mort sur cette route semée d’embûches [...]. (11-12)

¹⁵³ According to Jay, the dichotomy between rich and poor is causing the Moroccan youth to feel alienated, abandoned by the government, and thus deprived of their chance to socially exist as active members of society. Leaving, crossing the sea is therefore the only solution in a society in which systematically, “[o]n [leur] refuse l’existence.”

By deciding to *burn*, these candidates for immigration consciously (or not) sentence themselves to become anonymous, stateless persons (“sans-terre”), stuck in a life in exile marked by the perpetual movement (or tension from living) between two worlds. From the moment he chooses to illegally emigrate and embark in one of the *pateras*, or “death boat,” the *Harraga* has already become a legal “non-person” (Alessandro Dal Lago),¹⁵⁴ immediately condemned to the shadows in the margins of society, visibly invisible, stripped of what legitimizes him as a social being, if not as a human being. In other words, he becomes politically, legally and socially non-existent : “Ceux qui brûlent de partir, ceux qui brûlent leurs papiers d’identité afin de ne pouvoir être rendus à leurs pays d’origine comme bétail tatoué, deviennent, alors que la Marine royale les a sauvés du naufrage, des non-personnes. Des fantômes administratifs, des tenus pour morts [...]” (Jay 82).

As “administrative ghosts,” reduced to a “non-person” status, the *Harragas* have a social existence that is also liminal and spectral, between the world of the living and the dead, of the human and the non-human. Indeed, worse than sub-humans (sous-hommes), they are what I call, “non-humans” (non-hommes) who, in the collective imagination, are stripped of their humanness simply because their “absence de nom [les a fait] virer en parias” (Jay 22). This last point is particularly significant as being called a *Harraga* undoubtedly reinforces stereotypes about them and contributes to their marginalization within the host society or even their own country where they are either praised as heroes or “défaitistes” (deserters) (Jay). As a matter of fact, it is worth pointing out that each of

¹⁵⁴ Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-Persons: The Exclusion of Migrants in a Global Society*, trans. Marie Orton (Milan: IPOC Press, 2009).

the names used to label these immigrants usually connotes something “outside the law.” They inherently refer to an infringement of the rules set by society, thereby relegating the immigrant to an outcast position within the very same society in which (s)he aspires to live (fully). As we already said, this rule-breaking act is constituted by the conscious choice to illegally enter a country and attempt to find work without the proper documentation. By doing so, the immigrant loses his right to live in and benefit from the host society and consequently is treated as a criminal even when a crime has not been committed, which irremediably condemns him to be either removed from society (by being put in a detention center or in prison) or to live hidden, out of sight, in its margins. This legal situation explains why most of the characters in these novels are portrayed as social outcasts, misfits, at odds with (host) societies, and consequently as threats to them.

In *Tu ne traverseras pas le détroit* and *Les Clandestins*, the *Harragas*, as symbols of alterity and despair, are treated as if being “undocumented immigrants” was inherent to their identity and within host society see themselves automatically stripped of their basic human rights. As a consequence, they are often victims of xenophobia or racism from local¹⁵⁵ populations who treat them as criminals and perceive them as intruders, “des envahisseurs” (Jay). Negative stereotypes and representations, fueled by spectacular media images of “brûleurs” or illegal immigrants fleeing misery or war at the cost of their lives, or simply dead in the desert or on a Spanish or Italian shores, are what continues to

¹⁵⁵ In Jay’s novel the locals are Spanish, but we should also keep in mind the poor treatment that old immigration countries such as France or other former transit and now receiving countries like Italy and Greece, reserve for those types of migrants who, when not incarcerated and expelled are often vilified. The same can be said about new transit and emitting countries such as Algeria or Morocco where sub-Saharan migrants are the target of many bad treatments. For more information see, for instance, Catherine Mazauric’s *Mobilités d’Afrique en Europe : récits et figures de l’aventure* (2012) or Ali Bensaâd’s edited volume, *Le Maghreb à l’épreuve des migrations subsahariennes. Immigration sur émigration* (2009).

vividly dominate the collective imaginations of Europeans, Africans and Asians alike. It is also what continues to haunt most of the novels written on that subject. It is for example the case in Ben Jelloun's novel, *Partir*, in which Moroccans are often referred to as "Los Moros" (Les Maures) in Spain, in reference to the *Conquista*. One of the main protagonists, Azel, a Moroccan emigrant turned male prostitute in Spain, cynically denounces the xenophobia inherent in such outdated stereotypes attributed to Arab immigrants, perhaps out of fear of the threatening figure that the *Harragas* represent:

[...] des espaldas mojadas, voilà ce que nous sommes, avant, on traitait les italiens de ritals, les espagnols d'espingouins ou de youpin, je ne sais plus, et nous, ça n'a pas changé, nous sommes toujours los moros, les zarabes, des zarabes aux épaules mouillées, nous surgissons de la mer comme des monstres ou des fantômes ! (186)

Drawing on Dal Lago's arguments in *Non-Persons*, a study of the condition of illegal immigrants in Italy, Dominic Thomas argues in "The Global Mediterranean: Literature and Migration" that such treatment of illegal migrants effectively results from prejudices, racism and a "tautology of fear" (145-146) spread by hearsay and, as we will see below, by the media.¹⁵⁶ According to Dal Lago this type of fear and stigmatization can be compared to the anti-Semitic violence to which Jews have been subjected since the end of nineteenth century (71). Dal Lago argues that

[u]nlike the traditional internal and external enemies, nowadays migrants come into contact with society that is officially secularized and removed from collective myth. Now, however, the *imprenditori morali* are infinitely more effective than in the past, because they are capable not only of instantly communicating the fear of an enormous number of

¹⁵⁶ The tautology of fear basically marks the circularity of (mis)information, stereotypes and other myths about the immigrant or foreigner between politicians, public opinion (through hearsay) and the media (journalist) "Thanks to these, the foreigner is incessantly constructed and reconstructed as the enemy" (79). For more information on the "Tautology of Fear" see Dal Lago, pages 79-86.

people, but also feeding and even in some cases creating the fear. Hearsay, urban legends, prejudices, and fears circulating in local society via the mass media become first a symbolic resource and then social, objective truth resurrecting stereotypes that have lain dormant for centuries in the collective consciousness—the foreigner as “plague-spreader,” uncontrollable vagabond, monster, kidnapper, and rapist. These images enter into circulation thanks to the media and find confirmation in the reports on the crime pages, whether these stories are true or false [...]. (72-73)

Such anti-immigrant attitudes and particularly anti-*Harraga* rhetoric could come almost as a surprise if we did not remember that most migrants from the south come legally and that, in the case of Morocco, migrations from that country are also sanctioned by the RME (Résident Marocain à l'Étranger, status of an immigrant legally living abroad).¹⁵⁷ This contradiction does not affect only Moroccan migrants, since most international migrants legally enter their host country. Unfortunately, only one type of figure made famous by the media prevails in the collective imagination of most of these host countries, Italy, Spain and France the most prominent among them. Indeed, Virginie Lydie points out that

[m]arqué par les images chocs des médias, notre imaginaire collectif va jusqu'à associer les migrations à des hordes d'invasisseurs miséreux dont les corps sans vie s'étalent sur les plages d'Europe : des images bien plus spectaculaires, il est vrai, qu'un homme présentant son visa au guichet de l'aéroport. Pourtant, 90% des migrants en situation irrégulière—estimés par le gouvernement français entre 200 000 et 400 000 personnes pour 3,6 millions d'étrangers admis au séjour—sont entrés légalement avec un visa. Quant aux 10% de « sans visa », moins de la moitié arrivent en Europe par la mer (et parmi ces derniers, tous ne

¹⁵⁷ For more information on the figure of the RME and the difference of treatment between him and the *Harraga*, see Nasri Foued's DESS thesis, "Les projets migratoires des Jeunes marocains," 2008.

viennent pas du Maghreb). C'est en tout cas ce que laisse apparaître le nombre d'interpellations relevées par l'agence Frontex (l'agence pour la gestion de la coopération opérationnelle aux frontières extérieures). (17-18)

The role of the media in spreading such stereotypes and morbid images, which, consequently, dehumanize the emigrant, is among some of the critical issues commonly evoked in the illegal emigration novels. Through the fictionalization of reality, these novels open up a critical space of reflection on the nature, the effects, and also the political and ethical dimension of this type of media representation of the *Hrig*. Thriving on the morbid, the media are accused of having turned the death and plight of many into an entertaining spectacle.

B. Immigration and Death as Spectacle?

Maybe one of the most striking examples of this *spectacularization* can be found in the many recent pictures showing swarms of journalists flashing their cameras as boats of exhausted *clandestins* finally make it to dry land. Another one may be a death picture taken by Spanish photographer and journalist, Javier Bauluz in September 2000.¹⁵⁸ While I agree that thousands or even millions of pictures exist that might have better illustrated or documented this issue, I found the surreal quality of this photograph particularly as disturbing as it is fascinating. This photograph was first published in October 2000 in *El Magazine del Lavanguardia*, a Spanish newspaper. According to Bauluz, this picture was taken on one of the beaches of Tarifa, a small Andalusian village known for attracting

¹⁵⁸ I came across this picture while I was conducting research in 2010 on the *Hrig* phenomenon and the emergence of a new category of immigrant narratives depicting the crossing of the Mediterranean.

tourists and located on the Costa de la Luz, in the extreme south of Spain.¹⁵⁹ In the foreground, we see a young couple, perhaps locals or tourists, peacefully taking shelter from the sun under a beach umbrella. In the background, a dead body lies nearby, maybe a man, half naked, rejected by the sea, a clandestine who, according to Bauluz, had attempted to cross the Mediterranean from Morocco and instead fell victim to it. And yet, even the presence of this corpse does not seem to disturb the tranquility of the nearby couple who, unmoved by this spectacle, does its best to ignore it by looking away, and focusing their attention on the sea. Oddly, this photograph echoed another one, depicted in one of the key chapters of Elalamy's novel, *Les Clandestins*. This chapter centers on the description of a tragic scene shot by Alvaro, a Spanish photographer, of the disfigured bodies of twelve men and women who tried to cross the Straits of Gibraltar in order to reach Spain. Although entirely fictitious, the scene photographed, like in Javier Bauluz's picture, was shot near the sea, on the beach of Bnidar, a small Moroccan village.

Now, such display of the macabre, as in the case of Bauluz, certainly calls into question the hidden motivation and undisclosed intent behind it, that is, behind the choice of the topic that is covered and conveyed to the reader or the choice of images shown (or described) to the viewer. More generally, in the case of visual media, one can wonder, for instance, what truly motivates the choice of certain images over others. Beyond obvious editorial reasons, we still wonder why Bauluz¹⁶⁰ or the fictional journalist, Alvaro, chose

¹⁵⁹ Tarifa is also considered as the most southern point of Europe.

¹⁶⁰ As a matter of fact, after publishing this picture, Bauluz was suspected of staging the scene for sensationalist effects. Such a possible motivation is not to be ignored. However, upon analyzing the composition of the image, it remains difficult to deny the journalistic nature of this work as it documented at the time an unknown and morbid aspect of the reality of the immigrant question that Spain and its people experienced and that the immigrants experienced as well.

to publish this one particular shot or image. Why death? What effects or reactions were expected? And what are the consequences when it comes to our analysis and understanding of the figure of the Immigrant as a specter? One obvious reason is that despite their differences, in their own way, both of these shocking images sought to draw the attention to the human tragedy that has been taking place on both side of the Mediterranean, between Africa and southern Europe. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, such horrific images also draw attention to the nature and modalities of the coverage by the news media of these tragedies, as the mediatized plight of the *Harragas* and the rising death toll this type of emigration generates has literally turned the deaths associated with it into a media spectacle.

One must say that, although making its appearance in the 1980s, im/emigration as it occurs in the Mediterranean between Europe, North and West Africa, only truly caught the attention of the media in the 1990s-2000s as the attempts by individuals to illegally reach the southern borders of Europe increased in in response to the closing of the borders and the difficulty of getting a visa. It is during that later period that the first cases of this type of immigration were made known to the public by the media and then politicized. It is at that time that the first images of the “boat people” from the Mediterranean surfaced in Europe, proving that this phenomenon until now designated as Asian or American was also happening closer to home, on Europe’s southern borders. Nevertheless, it seems that in the early 2000s (and now more than ever), with an increase of this migratory phenomenon and its appropriation as a political theme, European audiences became more *visually* aware of this phenomenon and the existence of the

Harragas, also called “Sans-Papiers,”¹⁶¹ “Clandestini,” or “Illegales” in Europe. In 2015 alone, in the context of one of the worst migrant crises of our time, the media on both coasts of the Western and Eastern Mediterranean have increasingly circulated with a certain enthusiasm images of state actors (border patrols, police, army) rescuing or arresting men, women, and children waiting for their fate to be settled (asylum or deportation). Also made famous are images of off-course *pateras* or *cayucos* (fishing boats), and of floating corpses, later fished out by fishermen or national coast guards. Brought to us by both professional and amateur journalists, these images are sensationalist, due to their object and gruesome details, as the media count on the shock factor to increase more viewership and awareness of the issue. It is not surprising that these morbid and sensationalist reports have drawn criticism. By the same token, north African and sub-Saharan African countries, like their European counterparts, have been accused of showing more or less interest in documenting this crisis in objective ways, and also of thriving on the public thirst for the macabre and giving in to a tendency to *spectacularize* or *trivialize* these issues in their own local coverage (Lydie; Abderrezak).

As said earlier, such questions and criticisms are also echoed in most of the literary works that constitute the corpus of this present chapter. Indeed, the ambiguous role and hidden agenda of local media outlets controlled by government constitute an

¹⁶¹ Let us note here that the use of the phrase “Sans-papiers” also specifically refers to the “Sans-Papiers” movement, which in the 1990s, thanks to the “l’affaire de l’église Saint Bernard,” brought to light the case of sub-Saharan immigrants whose work permits and visas have not been renewed by the French government. Their case became even more famous thanks to the intense media coverage when a group of “sans-papiers,” supported in their fight by celebrities and over political figures, sought refuge and occupied the church of Saint Bernard during the summer of 1996. Their stay came to an end when the church was taken by force by the police and its occupants forcefully removed and, in most cases, finally deported. Only a few were regularized. For more information, see for instance Mireille Rosello’s article “Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From Clandestins to L’affaire des Sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard” (1998).

important underlying theme in the works of Francophone writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun, Salim Jay and Youssef Elalamy. In their novels, media outlets are represented as feeding on death like vultures,¹⁶² as they generate good stories and eye-catching photos through the constant reports of the numbers of victims, often in the hundreds and thousands, and thus profit from a human tragedy. A good example can be found in *Tu ne traverseras pas le Détroit* in which Salim Jay vehemently criticizes sensationalist journalism in Morocco as those media fascinated by the “Kamikazes” seem to be awaiting the moment the *Harragas* will dramatically end their life: “On parlait de nous avec une gravité croissante dans les éditoriaux de la *Gazette du Maroc*. On nous y appelait « les nouveaux kamikazes ». Carrément. Nos barques, comme des avions-suicides ? ” (Jay 77). Another good example of this media obsession is when one of the characters cynically notices the perverse habit of the Moroccan media with keeping track of the number of victims of the crossing: “L’actualité continuera de vomir d’amples rations de victimes [...]” (Jay 61).

Likewise, in the aforementioned chapter of *Les Clandestins*, Elalamy evokes this morbid fascination with death images in the Spanish and French media. While the novel does not contain any pictures, the force of the narrative comes from the powerful “photographic” writing of the author, which allows the reader to vividly envision the series of photographs captured by Alvaro (the Spanish journalist) of the morbid scene that has attracted a crowd of onlookers gathered to witness the spectacle. As in a film sequence, we, the readers, later become witnesses to the analysis and dissection, through

¹⁶² As we will see in chapter 3, this comparison of the media with vultures can also be found in a Beur novel like Nacer Kettane’s *Le sourire de Brahim* (1983).

every angle, of the scene and of the dead bodies by the photographer, whose main concern is only the quality of the one hundred and thirty-eight shots taken on that beach. Despite its morbidity and under Alvaro's gaze, it is as if the scene was a work of art and the bodies reduced to simple objects:

Un autre angle : portrait d'un monstre marin, moitié femme moitié plante. Le soleil toujours bas donne le relief nécessaire. Le contraste entre les différentes textures est particulièrement réussi. [...] Photographier un mort présente, disons-le un avantage : on a affaire à un sujet inactif et qui, de ce fait, reste toujours inactif et qui de ce fait, reste toujours dans le champ de la caméra. L'inconvénient [...] est que le mort ne pose pas. [...] La présence des corps sur le rivage nuit à l'ensemble de la composition. D'un point de vue *purement esthétique* : ils sont de trop. (96-99)

What seems to matter most to this photographer is the pure aesthetic and, inevitably, market value of those photographic *objects* which, emptied of their humanness, are now just anonymous corpses whose life story no longer matters. In the passage above, it is as if the *Harragas* are more entertaining dead than alive and, as such, more newsworthy. Their death, in a twisted turn, is thus trivialized under the objective gaze of the photographer and his insensitive handling of, or lack of reaction to, the event being captured.

As far as the trivialization of these human tragedies is concerned,¹⁶³ it is also brought to light in *Les Clandestins* through the brief coverage of the event by a French Newspapers which chooses to publish only one of the one hundred and thirty-eight pictures taken by the Spanish photographer. To make things worse, this picture is then

¹⁶³ The question of the political and media's trivialization of this migratory phenomenon is a recurrent theme in *illiterature*. It is present in Ben Jelloun's *Partir* and Jay's *Tu ne traverseras pas le Détroit*.

preceded by a headline deploring the fate of the beach whose beauty has been destroyed by the presence of twelve bodies: “Le mercredi suivant, au-dessus de l’un des cent trente huit-clichés pris ce jour-là, un hebdomadaire français titrait à la une: UNE SI JOLIE PETITE PLAGE !” (100, capitalization in original). Another example can be found later in the narrative, when a Moroccan newspaper presents the same event as a simple case of beachgoers drowning, which the narrator laconically notices: “Deux baigneurs imprudents se sont noyés près de la localité de Bnidar’. C’est tout” (42).

It is clear from those examples that Elalamy is also pinpointing the fact that when they are not focusing on the macabre and the spectacular, national and local media are busy minimizing the facts, reducing them to simple current events stories. Background information about the immigrants’ pre-*harg* existence rarely makes the front-page. In *Partir*, Ben Jelloun points out the extent of the hypocrisy of government and the media censorship,¹⁶⁴ which deliberately leaves out the many difficulties facing the emigrants prior to their departure in order to silence the truth about the real reasons that compel so many young people to attempt the *Hrig*:

[Mora] s’empara d’un journal posé sur la table, demanda un briquet au garçon, regarda fixement deux hommes à l’air hébété à force d’avoir fumé, agita le journal puis le brûla. Moi aussi je brûle, je brûle comme ce journal qui ne raconte pas la vérité, il dit que tout va bien, que le gouvernement fait tout ce qu’il peut pour donner du travail aux jeunes, il dit que ceux qui brûlent le détroit sont des égarés, des désespérés, oui, il y a de quoi être vidé de tout espoir, mais la vie, elle passe et nous laisse sur le bord [...]. Tenez,

¹⁶⁴ These forms of censorship involving the collusion of the press with government have the effect of minimizing the real economic and political reasons for this type of emigration/immigration.

ramassez les cendres des nouvelles que j'ai brûlées, il y en a plein,
de fausses nouvelles [...]. (176-177).

Notwithstanding the above, what interests me the most in the way that Elalamy foregrounds Bauluz's shot is the fact that this passage calls into question not only the power of images and, therefore, of media representation, but also their ontological effects along with the ethical responsibility behind any representation of human death. They unveil not only a general insensitivity toward the plight of illegal immigrants on both sides of the Mediterranean, they also highlight their dehumanization and what I see as their *spectralization*, as they are subjected to a second death through images in a context where their images have become stereotypically and thus systematically synonymous with death and despair. These images are the ones that haunt the collective imagination around the Mediterranean. More than ever, the figure of the *Harraga* has become the epitome of the Specter and, as a consequence, synonymous with death.

II. Spectralizing the *Harraga*: Images of Death and Death through Images.

In both of these works, the imagery of death is so prevalent that we—as spectators and readers—are urged to reflect on the ontological effect and ethical responsibility behind any media representation of human death. Furthermore, we should start by asking what it is about photographing or filming a person, and especially a dead or dying person, that makes it so compelling. Why are we taking such pictures? Is it only for the show or for humanistic reasons? What happens in our mind when we look at the image of a dead or a dying person on television, in a newspaper, online or in a movie? What or whom do we *see*? What or whom don't we see? What does it tell us or not? What story(ies) are they concealing from our knowledge? Finally, what happens symbolically to that

“person,” particularly when this person is a *Harraga*, after the images have been captured and viewed? These are the questions that Bauluz’ death photograph raises and which are also echoed in Elalamy’s *Les Clandestins*.

A. **Imagi(ni)ng Death in the Information Age.**

The link between death and images has been the subject of much commentary. As André Bazin shows in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1960) or Régis Debray in *Vie et mort de l’image* (1992), since the birth of mankind, death has always been considered in close relationship with the image. Debray points out that a quick etymological analysis of key Latin and Greek terms commonly used in Semiology, Mediology and Media studies, is enough to prove the mortuary and sacred origins of the image as representation:

Simulacrum? Le spectre. *Imago?* Le moulage en cire du visage des morts, que le magistrat portait aux funérailles et qu’il plaçait chez lui dans les niches de l’atrium, à l’abri sur l’étagère. Une religion, fondée sur le culte des ancêtres exigeait qu’ils survivent par l’image. [...] *Figura?* D’abord fantôme, ensuite figure. [Du grec], *idole* vient d’*eidolon*, qui signifie fantôme des morts, spectre et ensuite image, portrait. (19)

We could all agree that death remains the ultimate and unimaginable experience for most men; for it is true that no one can truly grasp the mystery of death unless one dies. However, nobody has ever come back from the dead and testified about his or her experience, except in cases of so-called near-death experiences, which still need to be scientifically proven. So far, one experiences death only indirectly, through the death of others. Faced with the unknown and the uncertainty of an afterlife, and seeking to beat death on its own ground in order to control our irrational fear of it, mankind has had to

rely on many methods, among them, images to escape or explain it. Images have long been used as a way to cheat death, but also to glorify it and respect it. According to Debray, in ancient civilizations, “ [l]’image attesterait alors le triomphe de la vie, mais un triomphe conquis sur, et mérité par, la mort” (20). From the Antiquity to the late medieval period, it was, for instance, through the mystical mediating power of the *imago mortis*, and of the “representation” of the dead,¹⁶⁵ that another life was conferred on the dead person until or even after the funeral. Iconic and other visual representations have always played a role in our desire to cope with the reality of death and to make it more familiar, more real and even more experiential. They are, like in photography, what Roland Barthes describes in *Camera Lucida* as “micro-expérience de la mort.” Indeed, as Ashby Kinch reminds us in *Imago Mortis, Mediating Images of death in Late Medieval Culture*, “[w]e die in images. As the event of death cannot be experienced directly, death is mediated by the images through which we experience the death of others and, in turn, anticipate our own. To say that death is mediated by images is not to deny the reality of death, but to simply emphasize that death’s reality is inaccessible. In place of a direct experience of death we have images” (Kinch 1). Sculptures, paintings, and other images representing death, dead persons or people dying have all served the purpose of reminding mankind of the inevitability of death as in the Christian tradition of *memento mori*; but they also played the role of mediator, medium of communication between the world of the living and the dead, life and death, and the world of the men

¹⁶⁵ According to Debray, “ [u]n des sens original du mot ‘représentation’ désigne un cercueil vide sur lequel on étend un drap mortuaire pour une cérémonie funèbre ” (21).

and the world of the gods (Baudrillard 30, 51). They are meant to help us experience death before the fact.

Beyond their sacred and religious functions, images of death have also come to be considered as art which irremediably conferred on them an esthetic dimension. The creation in the nineteenth century of the daguerreotype and the development of what would be called post-mortem photography¹⁶⁶ reminds us not only of the esthetic dimensions but also the utilitarian and cultural functions of the photographic image. While some might have seen beauty in such pictures and considered them as works of art, most people in the nineteenth century considered them as a way to remember their deceased loved ones in a positive light, not as corpses soon to be the object of a horrifying process of putrefaction. They also suggest that graphic, painted and photographic images have the power to freeze time, blurring the lines between past, present and future.

Photographs, Barthes tells us in *Camera Lucida*, are *spectrographs*; they are capable of producing specters.¹⁶⁷ Thanks to its capture and inscription by light on a piece of paper (as a result of emanation), the photographic object seemingly defies time and death through its everlasting presence. For theorists like Barthes and Susan Sontag,¹⁶⁸ the embalming qualities inherent to photographs are what make them *memento mori*, reminders of our mortality. In effect, comparing photography to other plastic arts, Bazin suggests that “[i]f the plastic arts were to put under psychoanalysis, the practice of

¹⁶⁶ Post-mortem photography was a popular western cultural and social practice which consisted in taking portraits of recently deceased people.

¹⁶⁷ We will come back to that idea later.

¹⁶⁸ Sontag, *On Photography* 15.

embalming the Dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation” (4). Furthermore, as *memento mori*, photographs are *traces* of what was at the time they were taken. They are the *rémanence* (afterglow) or traces of a “ça a été” (Barthes), of an absent presence.¹⁶⁹ As such they inherently have a documentary and memorial function. Images, like the ones in the case of post-mortem photography, were to be kept, cherished, respected and most importantly—like any image—to be looked at. It might seem commonsensical to assert this fact, but it is also important to highlight, like Debray, that “l’histoire du regard n’est peut-être qu’un chapitre, une annexe de l’histoire de la mort en Occident ” (Debray 38). As seen, the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries have not been outdone and both centuries have contributed to that history.

Notwithstanding, one should note that in our (post)modern and contemporary society, while there is a general fear of and discomfort regarding death, there is also a fascination surrounding death captured in images. Often spectators find themselves looking with one eye closed, full of disgust, while the other one takes pleasure in glancing at the images. Since the advent of the first cemeteries outside of cities, of hospitals, or of the first vaccines and other scientific and medical advances prolonging life, much effort has been put toward concealing from the public view the reality of death and thus excluding it from the social and symbolic sphere (Wilkerson-Baker; Debray). Today, death in the Western world is, for the most part, a taboo subject, but it is a taboo that is constantly broken due to its omnipresence in our everyday life thanks to mass media and communication technologies. Death and its representations, one can admit,

¹⁶⁹ In *On Photography*, Sontag talks about the photograph as “both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (16).

have become part of the visual media landscape. People are constantly surrounded by death images whether through live TV reports, print media (newspapers, magazine), films or videos, which ultimately feed a certain voyeuristic penchant in them. This can be explained by the fact that we live in a society of spectacle (Guy Debord) and in which everything is cause for entertainment. At the risk of oversimplifying things, one can genuinely posit that in the twenty-first century death has become an image more than ever. One could go even further by saying that in this visual age, everything can be an image in that anything, any event, can be captured, pictured, framed, represented, and exhibited, that is, made visually accessible and, therefore, consumable just to quench our eyes' thirst. For Donna Wilkerson-Baker, "[t]he disappearance of the reality of death and its replacement by the consumer (entertainment/ military) image is specific to the processes of Western modernity" (26). Regardless of space and time, in today's consumerist world and age of globalization, anything, even death, could become a *spectacle*, that is to say made to visually excite our senses, to satisfy our voyeuristic urge to "look," in other words, our *curiositas*. As suggested previously, this spectacularization is one of the premises on which could be built any interpretation of Bauluz' picture as well Elalamy's novel as Alvaro, the Spanish photograph, cannot help but feel a deep pleasure and satisfaction while scrutinizing his multiple shots of the victims.

Nonetheless, because in our society death has become an enjoyable spectacle, death-related representations are in excess; and as with any excess, its effects are rarely positive. Images are meant to be looked at, but they can also be overlooked and fail to achieve their own purposes. Images call out to be looked at, and they are also expected to

somehow trigger emotions in us, to familiarize us and sensitize us to what they represent. Looking at death, be it people dying or their corpses, can trigger a complex set of emotions and reactions ranging from fear, anxiety, and uneasiness to faith, love, and joy. Thus, photographs of war scenes or of ecologic or human disasters are intended to move us, to leave an imprint in our mind that is capable of modifying our mode of perception, of seeing the world and ourselves. This mental imprint and molding of our perception can be achieved when those types of images are being repeatedly recreated, reproduced, and redistributed at precise and strategic moments. They somehow feed on our emotions, which are constantly being tested. More than ever, people whom we do not know from far away have become strangely familiar to us despite their distance from us, all due to their presence on our screens or in our newspapers, that is to say, through images (Sontag).¹⁷⁰ Without knowing them on a personal level, we can still feel attracted to or sympathetic towards them and their fate. Nevertheless, the opposite can occur, and numbness and apathy can also be the end result as death, according to Wilkerson-Baker, due to the separation of life and death, “[is relegated] to the domain of the un-real (it becomes Other)” (28).

B. Looking is not Being but Being is Seeing When Seeing is Feeling: Of the Fallacies of our Visual Era.

Nothing illustrates more this paradoxal emotional state than Bauluz’ picture and the events following the moment when Alvaro captures the gruesome scene. First, with Bauluz’ picture, we are immediately struck by the fact that the presence of this (alleged)

¹⁷⁰ We could somehow link that argument to Benedict Anderson’s idea in *Imagined Communities* (1983), in which he evokes the role of mass media, especially print media, in the construction of a national identity, or shared nationalist feeling among people who, living in different places of a given country, have never met.

immigrant's corpse does not seem to disturb the tranquility of the nearby (living) couple. Although materially present and visible, a man's dead body has become invisible and, an object among other objects, it has become "other." There is no doubt that what this scene shows can be considered at first sight as a tragedy; it is the death of a man. However, it also shows an important degree of indifference or insensitivity of part of the (Spanish and international) public represented by the couple toward the fate of these immigrants, for there is no doubt that is what Bauluz intended to reveal through this shot.¹⁷¹ This shot was/is also symbolical as it calls into question the effects of our relationship with death in an age in which media coverage of tragedies and other calamities constitute the majority of titles in news outlets in the twenty-first century.

One paradoxical aspect of this relationship is that, far from being sensitized, the more we look at pictures of death on our screens or in our newspapers, the more accustomed and less sensitive we get, and the more distant and surreal these images and dead persons appear to us. This couple's reaction is far from being an isolated phenomenon and reminds us, as shown by Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, how much daily exposure to disturbing images (of death, killings, human misery), can affect negatively our capacity for empathy by making us more desensitized. As stated earlier, pictures of death, violence and human tragedy have become a part of our everyday life; therefore, as Sontag explains, "[a]s one becomes habituated to horror in real life, one can become habituated to the horror on certain images [...]" (82). The daily

¹⁷¹ I am aware that there is a difference between what the image captures and what actually took place. We must still ask: Is it that the couple truly could care less or were they aware there was a body and were still indifferent?

exposure to images of death and other forms of violence normalizes them and makes watching news programs almost equal to watching any other show; such spectacles thus lose the ability to touch us. One has become more distant, more insensitive, and more *blind* to the fate of others. For, what (images) we cannot *see* cannot really touch us in any heartfelt way. This is why, according to Wilkerson-Baker, “[i]t comes as no surprise that [...] audiences are led by the sheer number of violent images to a certain indifference toward pain since with the production of death-as-spectacle, the body becomes a mere simulacrum thereby obliterating suffering” (26). For instance, photographic and televisual images, including online videos of immigrants, caught in different situations are supposed to help readers/viewers visualize their plights; these images have become part of our daily life. However, in a weird twist of fate, our over-exposure to these images and the discourse surrounding them has produced the opposite effect: in the end, we do not even notice them or *see* them anymore (Susan Sontag).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the questions of obliteration and its correlative, blindness, are particularly important in my study. Bauluz’ and Elalamy’s works remind us that, even in our visual media-saturated world, what is visible can also be inherently invisible, as (eye)sight does not necessarily guarantee vision. As a visual artist,¹⁷² Elalamy certainly understands the interconnection and tension between the visual¹⁷³ and

¹⁷² In addition to being a writer, Elalamy is also a media studies and stylistics professor who has published on topics as varied as photography, the image, and fashion. He is also known for having led musical and art projects such as the exhibition entitled “Miniatures.”

¹⁷³ I draw here on the work of cultural theorist Rey Chow, who herself, in *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (2006), uses Martin Heidegger’s concept of a “world picture” in his famous essay “The Age of the World Picture” (1977) to foreground her own concept of *visuality*. As she reminds us, “[b]y this, [Heidegger] means that the process of (visual) objectification has become so indispensable in the age of modern scientific research that understanding—“conceiving” and

the avisual¹⁷⁴ (what is pictorialized—made into an image/picture—and can be shown), the visible and the invisible (what is seen or unseen), which he transcribes very well in his work. One thing that effectively strikes us when reading *Les Clandestins* is that looking seems to be the only thing that all the characters do when they are not talking or busy doing something else. In fact, looking and death seem to be among the most important motifs throughout the novel. For example, when they are not busy staring at the sea, the characters are caught looking at the dead bodies found on the beach near their small Moroccan village or dissecting the hundreds of photographs shot following the discovery of the bodies. And yet, even when looking at those dead bodies, they cannot really *see* them; deceived by their vision, all they see are dead “fish,” “birds,” or “monsters” but not human corpses. Some of the villagers cannot even recognize at first glance their own family members because of their disfigurement. Also worth nothing is the absence of eyes in the corpses, symbol of this blindness, which prompts the villager Omar, the son of Alvaro and Zaynab and a witness, to conclude that “[m]ourir, ce n’est plus voir le monde” (23).

grasping” the world—is now an act inseparable from the act of seeing—from a certain form of “picturing.” (Rey Chow “The Age of the World Target” in Paul Bowman, *The Rey Chow Reader*, 7). According to Heidegger, whom she cites, “World picture, when understood, essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture.” (Heidegger qtd in Rey Chow, *ibid*). In this world marked by terrible events like World War II and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Chow equates the act of seeing to war and to destruction (“seeing-as-destruction”).

¹⁷⁴ I refer here to the concept of *avisuality* as developed by Akira Mizuta Lippit in *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (2006), in which, drawing on Jacques Derrida’s work on regimes of invisibility in *The Gift of Death*, he refers to the *avisual* as the visualization of the invisible, “a system of visibility that shows nothing” (33). According to Lippit, *avisuality* can be described “not as a form of invisibility in the sense of an absent or negated visibility: not as antithesis of the visible but as a specific mode of impossible, unimaginable visibility. Presented to vision, there to be seen, the avisual remains, in a profoundly irreducible manner, unseen. Or rather, it determines an experience of seeing, a sense of the visual, without ever offering an image. A visibility without images, an unimaginable visibility, and images without visibility, avisuality. All signs lead to a view, but at its destination, nothing is seen. What is seen is this absence, the materiality of an avisual form or body” (32).

What this passage suggests is that too much visibility (imaging) can be awfully close to avisuality since we can look at the (visual) object without necessarily seeing it. Too much visibility can actually destroy it. Reminiscent of Plato's myth of the cave, the reliance on this organ of perception that is the eye and also on images proves to be fallacious or unreliable in *Les Clandestins*. This could come as a surprise since visibility or visibility are what matter in our society and define our time. Like the Christian apostle Thomas, we usually need to see to believe. Thus, we have become more dependent than ever on one particular sense, our visual perception, to provide us with knowledge. This is what characterizes our era and differentiates it from any other periods in the history of mankind. We are witnessing what Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish)* identifies as a new "régime de visibilité." As Jean-Pierre Montier reminds us, a "régime de visibilité" is produced when "une époque déclare regardable et représentable ce qu'elle *peut* voir, ce qu'elle *veut* voir et ce qu'elle croit *digne* d'être vu. Le premier facteur est *technique* ; le second, fondé sur le désir et l'imaginaire [...] peut être qualifié de pragmatique dans la mesure où il résulte d'un dialogue entre l'homme et le monde extérieur ; le troisième est *symbolique* au sens actuel du terme, puisqu'il renvoie à un ensemble de valeurs rendant digne d'observation, de représentation et de communication telle ou telle partie du visible" (Jean-Pierre Montier et al., *Littérature et photographie* 28). In sum, it is a "visibilité construite" (26).

Furthermore, in a visual media saturated world, or "ère du visuel" (Régis Debray), images (mental, photographic, cinematic, televisual) have become the way we construct, represent, understand, define, but also domesticate and control our surrounding world, or

should we say “reality.” “Regarder,” says Régis Debray in *Vie et mort de l’image*, “n’est pas recevoir mais ordonner le visible, organiser l’expérience” (40). This point is particularly important if we remember, as noted by Mary B. Vogl in *Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography, (Re)Presentation* (2003), that images have profound effects in the way we perceive ourselves (our identities) and represent the world around us. News media, such as television or newspapers, as gatekeepers,¹⁷⁵ can also have either a positive or negative impact on identity constructions as well as on shaping mentalities and the collective imagination. To make things more complicated, representational media like television, cinema, and photography are believed to be able to capture reality (Montier; Sontag; Derrida; Bazin), a capacity that Barthes identifies as the “reality effect”; they can also defy time and space and make the invisible visible to the naked eye. As a result, they are also believed to push the boundaries of what is real and what is fictional, what is factual and what is virtual. As Montier puts it, “[o]n a à faire désormais à ce qu’une époque dit et voit, et à la façon dont ce “dit” et ce “vu” conditionnent la ligne de partage entre le vrai et le faux, l’énonçable et le non-énonçable.”¹⁷⁶ According to John B. Thompson in “La nouvelle visibilité,” specific to our society and time is a “nouvelle visibilité,” that is, a visibility made possible by the power of visual and communication media (teletechnologies), and as such it is a “visibilité médiatisée.”¹⁷⁷ It is a visibilité that

¹⁷⁵ As gatekeepers, the mass media can be used to convey ideological messages through their images and discourses.

¹⁷⁶ J.P. Moutier et al., 26.

¹⁷⁷ J.B Thompson, “La nouvelle visibilité,” trans. Olivier Voirol, *Réseaux* 129-130 (2009): 59-87.

is constructed, “déspatialisée” and no longer depends on “la pure vision,” namely on being there to *see* (66-68).¹⁷⁸

This idea of a constructed visibility is even more significant since it reminds us, as has been argued, that the visual media, and television particularly, are not only criticized for mediating reality, but also for their ambition to substitute themselves for reality. They are supposed to create a hyperreality (Baudrillard, Sontag), and manage to make us forget their constructedness and artifactuality (Derrida) by blurring the lines between the real and the virtual, as well as right from wrong. Indeed, we live in a society and time in which those who control the means of representation are guaranteed a position of power. In our age, seeing and showing is power. Nothing can escape the gaze,¹⁷⁹ and the gaze seems always to be right, for as Neils Postman suggests, “[t]ruth is in the seeing, not in the thinking.”¹⁸⁰ We are supposed to believe what we see, what the screens are showing, or what the televisual, cinematic or photographic images are depicting. Things exist because we see them. However, the opposite is also true, what we do *not* see does *not* exist, although it can very much be *present*. This is particularly well exemplified by the fact that the picture published by the French newspapers in *Les Clandestins* does not really *show* what needs to be *seen*, that is, the dead men and

¹⁷⁸ For Thompson “visibilité médiatisée” results from the media’s conscious efforts to produce a “mise en visibilité d’actions et d’évènements” that defies time and space, the here-and-now (“*l’ici et maintenant*”), whence the idea of a visibility that is characterized by “une simultanéité déspatialisée” (66;70). With this new visibility, Thompson adds, “le voir ne relève [plus] de la « pure vision » because “[l]es images sont accompagnées par des mots qui informent la manière dont elles sont vues et comprises” (68).

¹⁷⁹ It is also true that “in a culture ruled by technologies of hypervisibility” due the proliferation of visual media technologies going beyond television and photography to include the internet, videos, and smartphones, all visual activities such as looking, seeing, staring, glancing have become among our most important daily social practices (Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* 15). It is as if we cannot escape the tyranny of the eye.

¹⁸⁰ Cited in David Croteau and William Hoynes, *Media Society: Industries, Images and Audiences*, 3rd ed., (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2003) 309.

woman, but instead hides the truth from the public¹⁸¹ by focusing attention on the disfigurement of the beach. As a result, this newspaper creates an alternate version of reality in which those *Harragas* do not exist to us. Therefore, in Elalamy's novel, vision and its corollary, the image, does become one of the preconditions of being or not being.

C. Can the Media Kill? On the Ontological Power of Images.

In contrast, by choosing to cover (veil) the truth, by not publishing the right pictures with the right headlines, it is as if media outlets in *Les Clandestins* were condemning the twelve victims to another death. It is a death that is more symbolical than actual, and that is almost reminiscent of the ancient roman practice of *damnatio memoriae* (lat. "damnation of memory").¹⁸² Indeed, while we can generally recognize the role of the visual media in increasing awareness about the plight of undocumented immigrants by documenting their life and death journey and enlightening the public about it, we should also point out, like Debray, that "[m]ontrer un fait ou un homme, c'est le faire exister, mais l'envers de la certification, c'est l'anéantissement social de ce qu'on choisit de ne pas montrer," (DeBray, *Vie et mort* 377). By declaring this, Debray highlights the dual effects, positive and negative, of images as well as of their political, cultural, ideological and ultimately ontological power as instruments of oppression and symbolic violence. Indeed, photographic and televisual images, Mary B. Vogl notes, can be very persuasive and can be leveraged with specific goals such as "[transmitting]

¹⁸¹ We should also remark that without knowing it, we, the readers, find ourselves visualizing, that is picturing in our mind, the same corpses as if we had been direct eyewitnesses, despite the fact that those images are invisible because not materially *present*.

¹⁸² In ancient Rome, the *damnatio memoriae* was an official condemnation of a member of the elite after his death. It was the erasure from historical records and, therefore, from collective memory, of any type of mention of the individual. To be precise, it consisted essentially in the destruction or modification of any form of public representations made in his honor (statues, monuments, documents, etc.) during his life.

historical, social, and political messages and embed[ding] impressions in our consciousness,” thus exerting power over the viewer (195). Hence, photography can be dangerous when wrongly used. It can exert a symbolic violence which, for Sontag in *On Photography* and *Regarding the pain of Others*, is inherent in the fact that those who are photographed become objects which can be symbolically possessed: “Photographs objectify: they turn an event or person into something that can be possessed. And photographs are a species of alchemy; for all that they are prized as a transparent account of reality” (Sontag, *Regarding the pain of Others* 91).

This “anéantissement social,” the destruction of man through and by images, is also illustrated in *Les Clandestins* as Elalamy opens up a space of reflection on the negative ontological effects of media representation of human tragedy whether it is through discourses or through images. To my mind, what this novel reveals is that as “l’immigré des immigrants,” “the outsiders of the outsiders” (Rosello), the *Clandestin*, is the most illustrative of this oppression and ultimately death through images. We cannot help but think that the televisual broadcasting of images or the publication in European newspapers of photographs showing brutal arrests or macabre scenes of bodies fished out of the sea by Italian, Spanish or Moroccan coast guards at the borders of Europe are more political in nature than humanistic as they are often claimed to be. Behind the images successively relayed by European or North and West African media outlets in order to alert public opinions to the tragedies taking place in the Strait of Gibraltar and at the border of Europe, lie often hidden political motives. This aspect has been highlighted by Abderrezak, who recalls the fact that “[a] number of media outlets, such as Moroccan

television (especially *RTM*) or the dailies *Al Alam* and *L'Opinion* have, more than others, adopted the official anti-hrig [harraga] discourse” (466). It is worth noting that Morocco, in collaboration with Western host countries like Spain, continuously tries to discourage new candidates from attempting the journey as part of a joint effort to combat illegal immigration. These images, whether published in Europe or North Africa, are mostly used to support anti-immigration policies, as their primary goal is to deter future *Hrig* candidates from leaving their country and, ultimately, to control the influx of migrants toward Europe. Thus, making immigrants visible and recognizable seems to be second only to the imperative to create new laws and policies to control their movements. From the digital passport to the tight European surveillance system, *SIVE*,¹⁸³ immigrants seem at first incapable of escaping the panoptic power of these modern day surveillance systems used to limit their freedom of movement in an increasingly globalized world.

For Régis Debray, such means of controlling the representation of migrants coming from the South and the nature of this representation is concrete proof of neocolonial practices. This is mainly due to former colonial powers still exerting undue influence on their former colonies. According to Debray, it is important to understand that in a postcolonial and global context marked by the hegemony of western media in the era of the *videosphère*, even if “[l]a décolonisation a enlevé à l’Occident le monopole de la représentation politique du genre humain, [...] l’industrialisation de l’image et du son confère aux pays surdéveloppés le monopole des représentations culturelles de

¹⁸³ *SIVE*, also known as “Système Intégré de Vigilance Extérieure” or “Système Intégré de Vigilance Électronique,” is a surveillance system used by European countries like Spain or Italy in the fight against illegal migration in the Mediterranean.

l'humanité, en sorte que le Nord a regagné d'une main l'exclusivité qu'il a perdue de l'autre" (*Vie et mort* 369-370). In countries where emigration has become a cultural practice on a par with traditional rites of passage, the control of former colonized populations' movements, of their thoughts, and of the way they represent themselves, is what really is at stake in what Debray calls a "nouvelle écologie du regard." It is a new "ecology" that, in my sense, has another finality: an ontological one. This new ecology is particularly violent as it exerts a "symbolic violence" on its objects, as shown by Pierre Bourdieu in *On Television* (1996;1998). Although not a real physical violence such as what is inflicted during a battle, this "symbolic violence"¹⁸⁴ is often the product of politics and the media. It is effected by subjecting immigrants to their stigmatizing and hegemonic gaze and by subsequently denying them the right to exist independently and outside all (visual) representations.¹⁸⁵ Such a monopoly on the representation of immigrants and their relegation to the perpetual role of subalterns prevent the general public from seeing them for what they are, namely human beings, equal to their western counterparts.

¹⁸⁴ We shall come back to that concept in chapter 3.

¹⁸⁵ Indeed, as Claudio Colaguori reminds us in his article "Symbolic Violence and the Violation of Human Rights: Continuing the Sociological Critique of Domination," "[w]hile the definition of "symbolic violence" may seem self-evident, it is important to note that media representations of violence, although symbolic in their mode of signification, do not correspond to the concept of symbolic violence offered by Bourdieu. His conception of symbolic violence refers to the subordinating effects on people of hidden structures that reproduce and maintain social domination in covert ways. This involves the numerous mechanisms through which overall social domination is achieved from institutions to ideologies. Symbolic control may involve the moral imposition of irrational beliefs on others that work against their own capacity for freedom of thought, as in the ideologies of a group, a religion or a cult as extreme examples, but certainly includes the normal dissemination of ideologies that is required for "the reproduction of the conditions of production" as Althusser explained (1971: 127)" (389).

The representations of immigrants by western or even local media¹⁸⁶ are the manifestations of a “droit de regard” from which those subjected to it (the Gaze) are excluded because they often do not control the tools or the terms of their representation, and therefore of the conditions of their media and social existence. While the existence of immigrants seems to be ineluctably linked to misfortune, and as such always associated with bad news in the eye of the public, their visibility depends on being caught on camera or judged news-worthy.¹⁸⁷ As a result of these editorial choices, the immigrants are often imprisoned or stuck in a negative image from which they cannot escape. Misrepresented, under-represented (as exemplified by the relatively low number of minority newsmen whether in front of or behind the camera), or simply absent from the media industry and representation, immigrants generally find it difficult to escape stereotypes especially fashioned for consumption by an ill-informed public.

As a consequence, through the process of stereotyping, media representations create a *hyperreal* image by replacing altogether the *real* object (the original referent) with its *virtual* double (or simulacra) which claims to be more real and natural than the previous one. An image-being, the Immigrant, in the end, becomes a specter, namely a “body without a body” (“un corps sans corps,” Derrida)—a shadow.

At the end, although different in nature, both the photograph by Bauluz and Elalamy’s novel, each in with its own capacity to capture and record death, touch upon

¹⁸⁶ Media outlets in North Africa are often owned by the government which exerts a tight control over them through a widespread censorship.

¹⁸⁷ Also, another effect of the media representation of the Immigrant is the fact that too often immigrants are objects of the news and not considered as full subjects, active agents and a potential audience for these same reports, as shown by Alain Battégay (1993).

the dichotomy between life and death, presence/absence, visibility and invisibility (the unseen), and the visible and invisible. They also force us to reflect on the power of images and by extension, the media. Elalamy, by using the trope of the haunting ghost and by superposing text and image, also opens up a space of critical reflection on the power of literary representation to resurrect the dead and make the invisible visible or the inaudible audible. This novel both directly and indirectly exposes the fallacies of our visual media in an image-obsessed era while challenging us to *see* things that are not always visible in a different light. In this case, it is the *Harraga* that readers are invited to see for what or who he really is beyond the screen of the simulacrum.

III. Other Ways of Seeing, Saying and Being: *Illiterature* as the “Virtual Space of Spectrality.”

A. The Place of *Illiterature* and the Omission of the Signifying Rite.

As we have seen so far, the trope of haunting is a particularly important one in *les Clandestins* as it is not only linked to the theme of death (corporeal or symbolical) but also because it brings to light the negative effects of a certain type of media representation which have made immigrants into media figures. As we demonstrated earlier in this chapter or in chapter one, the word “immigrant” is enough to conjure up a spectrum of images, be they visual representations or mental images, each replete with negative connotations. Along with being a social and media figure, the *Harraga*, “ready-made for haunting” (McKinney), has become this figure whose uncanny presence and even absence keep having a disquieting and disturbing effect in the collective

imagination. In *Les Clandestins* this ghostly or spectral presence is embodied in the post-mortem return of twelve *Harragas*.

As shown above, due to certain types of images seen on television, in the print media, or the internet, immigrants find themselves caught in an image as well as an identity that is often far from (their) reality. Of who the *Harragas* really are, we know little, except what we are repeatedly told by politicians, authorities, and the media. As a result, the *Harraga* or *clandestin* is either represented as a dead body or an outlaw. In the context of immigration, the result of such power contained in the rhetoric of words and images, and also of their diffraction due to their infinite mechanical reproduction by the media *dispositif*, is ultimately the disembodiment and the depersonalization which are responsible for the objectification, and, therefore, spectralization of the immigrant subject. As such, this disembodiment, and the spectralization that it produces, is the main reason why the *Harraga* has become a simple visibly invisible image-being, a virtual being whose existence depends on being seen even when visibly present.

It is because of the proliferation of such negative representations, understood well as the lack of positive or more accurate and human representations of the immigrant communities in the mainstream media and collective mentalities, and also because of the non-respect of their human rights, that many West African and Maghrebi authors like Elalamy have decided in recent decades to write about the “Harragas.” Indeed, in the case of Moroccan Francophone immigrant literature, Abderrezak notes that “[w]riters have rushed to fill the void in state-suppressed Moroccan accounts of *hrig*, and to react to

Western television reports that focus on the macabre effects of the clandestine passages” (467).

The reference to a “void” is particularly crucial here since, if we take into account that by definition and according to popular belief, specters, as threatening as they can be, are believed to come back to life because a signifying act or rite was forgotten or omitted. Referring to Lacan’s work on *Hamlet* (1977), David Ratmoko argues, in *On Spectrality*¹⁸⁸, that “specters appear from a failure of signification or symbolization.” Indeed, for Lacan, the “appearance of the ghosts and specters” is made possible “in the gap left by the omission of the significant rite.”¹⁸⁹ In the same fashion, Colin Davis, referring to the work of Keith Thomas on ghosts and fairies, explains in *Haunted Subjects* that “[t]he ghost’s appearance is the sign of a disturbance in the symbolic, moral or epistemological order. Once that disturbance has been corrected, the ghost will depart again [...]” (Davis 2).¹⁹⁰ Specters, ghosts come back, visit the living, and haunt them because of unfinished business or to settle a debt, because there was not a proper burial or no burial at all, or even because the process of mourning (them) remains unfinished. They can also come back to warn the living about past, present or future events.

Those ideas are crucial to our analysis as it is a void, a lack, otherwise an act of omission in the system of representation, that is, the failure of a local newspaper to give a detailed and accurate account of the story of the twelve victims that inspired Elalamy to write his novel as a way to honor the dead and the missing. As suggested, this failure of

¹⁸⁸ David Ratmoko, *On Spectrality: Fantasies of Redemption in the Western Canon* (New-York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸⁹ Lacan 39, 1977, qtd in Ratmoko 9

¹⁹⁰ Colin Davis, 2007.

representation is also echoed in the novel when two local and international media outlets failed to properly report the tragedy on the beach of Bnidar by trivializing it as any random current affair. What we can draw from this example is that spectralization and haunting in *Les Clandestins* are the direct consequences of a crisis of representation surrounding the figure of the *Harragas*.

This representational void is symbolized by the textual absence but yet spectral and haunting presence of the series of pictures taken by Alvaro, especially the one shot chosen for publication, and meticulously described by Elalamy. Based on her analysis of Hervé Guibert's *L'image fantôme*, Wilkerson-Baker defines the spectral images as the "the fictionalized photo," an "image [that] bears no relation to any *concrete* reality [...]. It is a body/ text created in response to the désespoir de l'image" (104).¹⁹¹ These pictures constitute a case of *praesentia in absentia*, another fundamental characteristic of the specter and a symbol of the social and media existence of the *Harraga*. They are also a key element of the haunting taking place within the space of the fiction at a diegetic, narratological and textual level. Textually and narratologically, these photographs, although materially invisible, become visible thanks to the power of e(in)vocation contained in Elalamy's photographic writing. As such, the narrative along with the photographic image becomes another space of production of specters. As we will see, they are the reason why the specters of the dead *Harragas*, the very same photographic objects shot and captured by the photographic dispositive, come back to "haunt" the world of the living, and even the reader.

¹⁹¹ She argues that "the spectral image [is] an image born of the intersections and interchangeability of life (reality), death (images) and writing" (104).

Although fictional, these photographs constitute proof, a trace of what “has been,” of what happened to them: “Quelques morceaux de papiers pour garder un œil sur le monde. Ne pas le laisser s’échapper. Quelques photos pour dire les choses, dire qu’elles ont été” (Elalamy 101). This point is particularly important if we understand the why and wherefore of any act of haunting, that is to say, the fact that according to Avery F. Gordon, “[h]aunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence [...]”; and also that “[it] is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (Gordon, 8). Consequently, haunting in *Les Clandestins* is about both the failure and the need to accomplish the signifying rite, that is, the chance of a better representation, through the recollection of past events: “The appearance of the ghost calls for the revision of the past” (Derrida). It is linked, according to Derrida, to a politics of memory (*Specters of Marx*, “Spectrographie”).

Elalamy, as a visual artist, clearly understands the aesthetic value of any pictures; however, he also recognizes the documentary and memorial value of any photograph that can not only record the trace of those who are no more but also help shape history and collective memory. Images, even gruesome ones, can also serve positive purposes, hence the detailed description of the photographs and their objects, the dead. By re-appropriating the same type of images seen on television, on the internet or in the print media, and by allowing the reader to witness the horror of the scene through the gaze of Alvaro, Omar, and the other characters, Elalamy permits us to *see* what has been so far invisible, hidden from sight in spite of its being visible and silenced due to censorship:

“Donner à voir et à manger, par petites bouchées. Jusqu’à l’indigestion.”¹⁹² By doing so, it becomes a way for him to bring more awareness about this type of immigration no matter how uncomfortable the topic is (even to the point of suffering from “indigestion”). In effect, Francophone studies specialist, Mary Vogl agrees that images “can be used to mobilize people, if they can be used as a catalyst for activism [...] [I]mages can be reappropriated and read in fresh ways that validate the Maghreb and the people” (198). In the same fashion, Sontag already reminded us that “[f]or pictures to accuse, and possibly alter conduct, they must shock” (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain* 81).

Nevertheless, although understanding the mobilizing effect or shock value of death photographs, Elalamy also seems to realize their limits and that without any narrative context, such mobilizing effects can be null. This characteristic of the photograph is, for Régis Debray, the irony of modern day visual media. In “S’informer n’est pas savoir,” Debray argues that, when it comes to visual media such as photography or television, it is important to remember that what matters the most is to show not to tell: “On peut tout dire, mais on ne peut pas tout montrer” (3). Photographs, and any other pictures for that matter, are problematic because limited to only what they record in the moment. They only *denote* and do not *connote*. Photographs are not nuanced. One photograph is not enough to *tell* the *before* and *after* behind the scenes. That the photograph and its photographic object(s) remain *mute* and consequently always a bit invisible is also pointed out by one of the narrators in the novel: “[...] ils [those looking at the pictures] ignorent encore tout ce qui restera à jamais étouffé derrière ces images,

¹⁹² Elalamy 101.

muet [the photographic object, the specter] parce que invisible, invisible parce que insaisissable” (102). This is the regret of the specters for, captured by the photograph, the *Harragas* are condemned to always play dead: “Rester là. Faire le mort, Sans bouger. Pour toujours. Etre là quand il le faut.”¹⁹³ In the end, despite their claim to truth (the camera never lies), photographic and televisual images cannot talk and, as a result, need a narrative context (Sontag).

B. Putting the Dead to Rest: Analyzing the Sepulchral Dimension of *Les Clandestins*.

In order to address this shortcoming, the failure to make the invisible visible and the inaudible audible, that is, to allow the photographic object to break its silence, get its voice back, and regain its subjectivity, Elalamy opts for a double narratological mode—both mimetic and diegetic—in which the narrative supplements the (missing or spectral) image which works as a “pretext for the narrative itself” (Baker 105). In this novel, when *seeing* is no longer enough, *saying* takes over.¹⁹⁴ Words replace vision, and the visual representation is completed by a verbal representation. And yet, even with verbal representation, when the aural is no longer enough, writing (and by extension reading), becomes the ultimate tool to inscribe and transmit their stories. Language, in both its spoken and written forms, becomes the medium through which the ghosts of the *Harragas* in *Les Clandestins* can finally express themselves, say what happened and possibly claim justice: the right to be correctly buried, mourned and remembered.

¹⁹³ Elalamy 102.

¹⁹⁴Orality plays an important role in the novel, from a narratological and diegetic perspective in that it begins as a tale whose characters are the storytellers or messengers. One example is the dissemination of the news regarding the death by drowning of the 12 *Harragas*: “Ils se sont noyés,” which circulates from the first witness on the scene to the villagers, and finally to the media.

Henceforth, by allowing the ghost to come back and tell their stories, Elalamy signals the potential of literature, and especially the power of narrative, in finally accomplishing the signifying rite longed for by the specters and symbolized by their return. Thus, like photography, which by its ability to freeze time “[a] exaucé le voeu du poète: fixer ce qui fuit, péreniser l’instant” (Debray, *Vie et mort* 371), literature can open up a space that also captures the intangible and invisible: death. As a matter of fact, this is, according to David Ratmoko who quotes Derrida (1992), one of the inherent qualities of literature which, more than just being a “mirror of society,” is defined as a “strange institution that allows one to say everything” (Derrida qtd in Ratmoko 4) and which “has often been praised for articulating the ‘unspeakable.’”¹⁹⁵ According to Derrida, what we need to understand is that when it comes to haunting and spectrality, the role of literature and the “Scholar” is crucial in its capacity to give voice to the specter and his claim for justice (*Specters of Marx*). Likewise, Wilkerson-Bake reminds us, while citing Blanchot’s work in *The Space of Literature*, that “[t]he writer is the one who writes in order to be able to die, and he is one whose power to write comes from an anticipated relation to death.”¹⁹⁶ In our case, the “scholar” is the writer whose creative power conjures the specter and allows him, like the character of the smuggler reminiscent of the Greek mythological figure of the ferryman of the dead, Kharon (Charon), to cross from one shore to another, from life to death and virtuality to reality and vice-versa.

¹⁹⁵ Ratmoko 4.

¹⁹⁶ Blanchot, qtd in Wilkerson-Baker 29.

In opposition or in addition to the death-conferring or death-defying power of images (“pouvoir mortifère et sidérant” according to Laurence Petit¹⁹⁷), the space of literary fiction becomes a “space of resurrection” (Wilkerson-Baker). Precisely, the space of the narrative, through the act of writing and reading gives birth to new beings as it resuscitates them (Laurence Petit). The novel thus becomes a “space of virtual spectrality” where the dead can come back to the world of the living in order to fill the narratological void left by the image with testimonies.

As has been noted, the narrative effectively allows each of the twelve victims to relive, recollect and tell their last moments as well as the reasons behind their choice to become *Harragas*. Each chapter is dedicated to a particular camera shot and to a deceased person, which makes the haunting both diegetic and textual. Indeed, the narrative distinguishes itself textually not only with its lack of linear chronology but also by its fragmentation into a series of chapters linked only by a strange echo. This echo is made possible thanks to the almost systematic presence of epanaphoras (repetition of specific sentences or paragraphs at the beginning of each chapter) as well as the recourse to analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flashforward) which contribute to an eerie echo between chapters.

Such sequential organization, with the multiplicity of spectral voices and the polyphonic effect it creates, is especially interesting because it is a way for Elalamy to illustrate the different experiences, situations, and motives experienced by those who choose this type of im/emigration by interweaving the castaways’ individual memories

¹⁹⁷ Laurence Petit, ‘Spectres de Kath’ : La photographie ‘au négatif’ de Penelope Lively,” in Montier et als (eds), *Photographie et Littérature* 233.

with the larger fabric of collective memory (represented to some extent in the narrative point of view). Similar to the footsteps followed by Omar, these testimonies function as traces that allow the extradiegetic narrator to retrace and document the events and the mystery of their death, like a historian-archivist reconstituting and writing history. As a consequence, I could not agree more with Gordon who argues that “[t]o write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories” (17); these are “stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory is produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future” (22). If we concede like André Bazin that “[n]o one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death” (6), in the case of *Les Clandestins*, the act of writing and telling in this novel become a way to protect the dead from a third death, that is, oblivion. It is at least what the narrator seems to imply when he declares the following: “Pour ne pas oublier. Ils [the fishermen of the village] tisseront une histoire, les larmes dans la voix, avec les mots qu’ils auront pêchés. L’histoire de ces hommes et de cette femme qui ont trouvé la mort, là où ils croyaient trouver la vie” (86). As a consequence, as the act of writing allows for the signifying rite, the burial, to finally take place, the space of the novel becomes a literary cemetery, and the novel itself a funeral monument—a sepulcher. These stories, as they hold an exegetic and testimonial value, constitute the legacy that the living family members, the community as well as the reader inherit and what they need to finally mourn and put the dead to rest.

More than just the description of the dangerous journey (from beginning to end) or of a shocking image, Elalamy's text and others allow for the rehabilitation of the Immigrant's image and identity by exposing what has been *covered* (hidden), made invisible, and rendered inaudible by a particular type of media coverage (Abderrezak). What seems to matter most to Elalamy as well as to Jay and Ben Jelloun (who, like Elalamy, dedicates a chapter each character in *Partir*), is to re-humanize these "strange fish" by giving them back their (hi)story, their name, and their voice. By reappropriating media discourses and images, their texts become the space and the instrument of a counter-discourse and counter-representation that not only aims to resist, deconstruct, and question the media and politicians' negative representations of these immigrants, but also allows the latter to regain their voice (and subjectivity), to be seen as they really are, and not only as they are shown. Hence, one might suggest, like Wilkerson-Baker, that "personal experiences of and with death produce a space of critical reflection which, in turn, allows for alternative readings of dominant cultural representations. [...] The way this is accomplished is through the contradictory powers of the image" (28).

Finally, more than just the construction of a counter-memory or counter-representation, Elalamy's *Les Clandestins* opens up a space that favors a critical reflection on the life and death power as well as effectiveness of any type of representation whether visual, aural, or written to capture and represent the *real*. By doing an "arrêt sur image" (169), by analyzing each shot and showing what happens out of camera range, and also by continuously addressing and interacting with the reader during the narration, Elalamy constantly reminds us that this work is still pure fiction:

“[v]ous êtes dans un livre et pas dans la vie et pas au cinéma” (52 italics in original). He also appears to acknowledge the limit of literary fiction, and of any medium’s ability to accurately represent or substitute itself to reality. Whether through the photograph taken by Alvaro or its repetitive interjections in the narrative, Elalamy reminds us that all images, whether graphic or mental, are per definition re-presentations; they are constructs and rest on a specific interpretation of the real. As such, they must be taken with a grain of salt.

Conclusion

In 1955, in *The Space of Literature (L’espace littéraire)*, Blanchot declared that “[t]he image does not at first glance, resemble the corpse, but the cadaver’s strangeness is perhaps also of that of the image [...]. The cadaverous resemblance haunts us.” This declaration, I believe, encapsulates the core idea of our spectral analysis or reading devoted to the figure of the Immigrant and to the phenomenon of haunting which, according to Avery F. Gordon, “is a constituent element of modern social life” (7). Figure of the uncanny, social, media or literary figure, the Harraga whether alive or dead disturbs and fascinates at the same time. A case of presence and non-presence, his existence springs us at the junction of visuality and avisuality, virtuality and reality, death and life, image and text. Image-being, the Immigrant suffers from being unseizable, intangible, a simple abstraction, as his essence and being, caught in the simulacrum of the visual media, is perpetually diffracted and disseminated through words and images. Only the space of literature seems to be able to open up the way for the Immigrant-specter to

become more tangible and more readable as he regains power over his image and subjectivity. After all, for Elalamy, when it comes to comparing the power of the novel to the power of photography or cinema in representing or mirroring life, the former is more advantageous, for as the narrator declares, “on ne triche pas avec les livres, ce qui est écrit est écrit” (169).

Hence, in *Les Clandestins*, the presence of the Specter exhorts a retelling, rewriting and therefore a re-reading of collective memory as already shaped by the media and officials. The reader is forced to recognize that, as Gordon notes, “[t]he ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and [that] investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (8). What *Les Clandestins* offers is not just the springboard for a critique of media representation of immigration, nor for just the elaboration of a counter-representation or counter-memory, but an altogether new grid of reading and interpretation of the figure of the Immigrant as a specter.

As I have tried to show, Youssef Elalamy’s *Les Clandestins* constitutes in its own way a “chronicle of deaths foretold” as it introduces us to the story of several protagonists whose obsession with leaving their country in the hope of a better life in Europe leads them to a tragic and inevitable fate: death. Regardless of the dangers of crossing, “partir ou mourir” is the only choice, the only way out of a world in which they already wondered whether or not they are dead or alive, as their economic and social status condemns them to invisibility on the margins and in the shadows of society in their country of origin as well as host country.

More specifically, the metaphor of the Specter that I use to represent the *Harraga* is not just simple word play. The *Harraga*, whether he be fictional or real, is like the Specter or the Ghost which, according to Derrida, “is just not one figure among others. It is perhaps the figure of all figures” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 120). As we have seen through our discussion of McKinney’s article in chapter one, in the collective imagination and public discourse, such an analogy is not new and appears to be almost inevitable when it comes to the extreme case that is the *Hrig* and the incredible death toll that it exacts. As stated earlier, this metaphor of the Specter can be found in many novels dedicated to this type of immigration as a way to symbolize the liminal existence of most migrants, but it also highlights the deadly nature of their journey. Be they portrayed as heroic or undesirable figures, *Harragas* are literally living-dead, neither from a here nor from a there, neither visible nor invisible, having all the characteristics of a ghostlike figure, be it called a specter, ghost, or *revenant*. As such, they have become haunting figures whose presence and even absence have a disquieting effect. Indeed, McKinney reminds us that the word *clandestin* is already, by anticipation, a “ready-made for haunting” (53), a pure cultural construct, because of what the word (*clandestin*) itself already means and connotes, and the circumstances from which it stems. Without doing anything an *immigré clandestin* is already judged, categorized and stereotyped only because of what his legal and social status inherently evoke in the western collective imagination and everyday discourses in the host country. His reputation¹⁹⁸ precedes him and causes him to be perceived and represented negatively almost repeatedly, caught in “clandestinité” *ad infinitum*. This is at least the fate awaiting the twelve *Harragas* washed

¹⁹⁸ We will see in chapter 3 that this “condition” also afflicts the *Beur* or *Jeune de banlieue*.

up on the shore of Bnidar and caught on film by a photographer: prisoners of that picture, they are destined to be (seen as) *clandestins* forever.

By allowing each spectral voice to finally give his or her own personal account of the before and after the dramatic event in addition to the extradiegetic narrator's own rendition, Elalamy demonstrate the power of words in a "picture world." Each of these testimonies constitutes in its own way a dissonance in the fabric of official narratives about the *Harga* by saying what is usually untold. Most importantly, as underlined by Claudia Esposito, "[t]hese narratives bring depth and perspective to the silenced subjectivities of a Mediterranean at the mercy of neo-imperialist practices and political puppetry" (119). By questioning and denouncing a certain type of media representation, *Les Clandestins*, along with *Partir* and *Tu ne traverseras pas le Détroit*, through a polyphonic narration, manages to bring out the human dimension of a tragedy too often trivialized, forgotten, or ignored. The art of fiction becomes, thus, the only "way to circumvent the social constraints that do not permit the unsightliness of naked truths. These texts [then] act as a stage for what is too difficult to say directly, for the disquiet and anxiety that characterizes confronting one's own mortality when one is willing to risk it all" (Esposito 132). Thanks to the space of the novel, the twelve *Harragas* that Elalamy one day encountered in a newspaper can finally be put to rest; their haunting allowing them to finally be visible and reminding us that "the ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposed well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us" (Gordon 8).

Chapter 3: Television as the Evil Eye? Media H(a)unting of Immigrants in *Beur* and *Banlieue* Novels

Introduction

In one of the many comical passages of Youssouf Elalamy's third novel, *Paris, mon bled* (2002), the main character and narrator, Abdelkhalek (Khalek), a so-called "jeune de banlieue" of Moroccan descent, recalls the following scene that he one day witnessed in his family's home during a TV interview led by French journalists following the death of a North African teenager:

L'autre fois y a la télé qu'est venue filmer à la maison, avec le matos et les câbles qui mordaient dans le mur. Y en avait un avec un micro plein de poils, et un autre derrière une caméra qui tenait toute seule sur ses pieds. Y avait même des lumières pour faire le jour sur nous et sur la journaliste qui tirait tout le temps sur sa jupe. Pour ce qu'il y avait à voir franchement. [...] M'man a fait brûler de l'encens devant la caméra et elle a dit du Coran. Le caméraman il faisait comme ça avec la main pour chasser la fumée. Et M'man a dit : "Y'a pas à discuter, c'est ça ou rien, t'imagines, avec tous les yeux de la France qui regardent !" Elle a mis la main de Fatma autour de la caméra comme ça le mauvais œil il se barre fissa."
(13-14)

Although not central to the storyline, I find this scene particularly appealing for two main reasons. First, it immediately draws one's attention for its anecdotal dimension and the light tone that Elalamy chooses to use as he allows us to share a glimpse into the little quirks of everyday life in a typical North African family living in a French *banlieue*. Secondly, it is significant for what it reveals regarding the strange relationship between the protagonists and the televisual media. Indeed, after reading this anecdotal passage, it

would be especially hard not to point out how much it is reminiscent of a situation comedy—this, despite the fact that the reasons behind this interview and its topic are more somber and serious than comical (the death of a young man). Obviously, its comic potential relies mainly on the mother’s unexpected (at least for the reader) reaction in the presence of the TV crew and camera as she decides to perform quickly a strange ritual. This ritual consists in the burning of incense, the reading of verses from the Quran, and the use of an *apotropaic* or prophylactic talisman, known as the “Hand of Fatima.” This talisman and the incense are, according to the mother, supposed to ward off the *Evil Eye* (“le mauvais oeil”) by breaking the curse that the TV camera could bring upon them and their household. If we believe the mother, this curse, that is to say the invisible and ominous power of the Evil Eye, would radiate directly through the lens of the TV camera as it is focusing on or, rather, one should say, staring at them. We (the readers) quickly understand, thereafter, that it is all the watching eyes of the French spectators present on the other side of the lens or screen, “tous les yeux de la France qui regardent” (14), that represent for the mother the malignity of this disembodied *Gaze*. Her belief in the malevolent power of the Evil Eye or collective gaze (evil eyes) of the French spectators is so strong that she immediately feels compelled to take concrete action and preventive measures to protect her family against it/them. In fact, based on what she says later, we are also led to believe that such ritualistic practices are normal and part of a cultural system specific to her native country, Morocco, and are automatically reproduced in exile in the North African community living in France.

Known as le *mauvais oeil* in France, *malojo* in Spain, *maloccio* (or *jettatura*) in Italy, *Ayin Ha'ra* in Hebrew or as *Ain (ayn)*¹⁹⁹ accross North Africa, the traditional belief in the Evil Eye, the dread of the ominous and often destructive powers or negative influence attributed to the eyes, is actually as universal and old as it is widespread, whether it is in Asia, in the Americas, in Europe, and especially around the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. This superstition has existed since Ancient Egypt and Antiquity and that is alive and well in modern times, not only among populations in these regions, but also among their diasporic groups. These diasporic groups have indeed managed to keep it (and other beliefs) alive and to transmit it to younger generations more or less successfully in their new found home in the Western world. Thus, what makes this particular passage all the more interesting for us is the fact that, by exposing this superstition, it goes beyond the usual questions (and those most often discussed by literary critics and social scientists) of how native language, religion, or national identity are transmitted in a diasporic setting among members of the same community but of different generations.²⁰⁰ At first sight, this scene from *Paris mon Bled* undeniably brings into question the persistence of traditional beliefs pertaining to the folklore of the home country, Morocco, as well as the longevity of the cultural heritage as

¹⁹⁹ We also find the following translations in Arabic: *Al' ayin or Ayin Harsha*.

²⁰⁰ Rather, it focuses on one particular and less studied aspect of this question, which is the transmission of superstitions in general and the traditional belief in the "Evil Eye" in particular within the North African community in France. For Slimane Touhami in the article "La peur en héritage: L'exemple de la transmission de la croyance au mauvais œil dans le contexte maghrébin de France," studying such beliefs is highly important particularly in immigrant milieus where those beliefs remain strong and are transmitted to younger generations. It is at least what was demonstrated in a study carried out in the suburbs of Toulouse where "l'adhésion à une croyance, comme celle relative au mauvais œil reste largement répandue. [...] Cultivée par les mères de famille dans un espace domestique en partie protégé des influences de l'extérieur, la croyance au mauvais œil tient par conséquent une place privilégiée dans la sphère de la tradition conservée en exil" (Touhami 107).

it is transmitted from parents (first-generation immigrants) to their children and grandchildren (second and third-generation immigrants).

Moreover, while we cannot yet talk about a complete adherence to this belief in this particular literary example, this scene, and all the comic elements that it brings together, significantly betrays the narrating character's own position with regard to what a Westerner, a modern European or any rational mind would consider as purely irrational thinking or behavior based on superstition. By highlighting his mother's naivety, which stems from her unfamiliarity with modern technology, and her seemingly backwards belief in the invisible power of the camera²⁰¹ (all of this reinforced and illustrated by her lack of mastery of the French language), Khalek indirectly points out the differences²⁰² between his generation and his mother's, particularly when it comes to traditional culture and beliefs.

And yet, notwithstanding the importance of this topic and theme for this dissertation and the many questions that it raises from an anthropological, sociological and literary point of view, what principally interests me in this particular chapter and scene is the characters' reaction. To be exact it is the mother's reaction to the presence of the TV camera (and crew), and especially the strong belief that it (they) could bring upon her entire household a curse that might haunt and ultimately harm them. Hence, it is the comparison of the televisual camera (and the television apparatus as a whole) to the Evil

²⁰¹ See the analysis of Susan Sontag (*On Photography*) and Mary Vogl (*Picturing the Maghreb*) of the mystical and lethal power attributed to the photographic camera by indigenous people in countries such as in the Maghreb (Vogl) and their reaction when coming face to face with it.

²⁰² This difference or generational gap between him and his parents is also often made clear throughout the novel.

Eye, the universal belief in the power of the eyes to inflict harm out of envy or jealousy that will form the core of my argument for this present chapter. To be precise, I propose to further explore and develop the metaphor of television as the Evil Eye in an interdisciplinary framework drawing from anthropology, history, as well as literary, media, psychoanalytical and postcolonial theories. Beyond its anthropological and sociological components, it is the symbolic and psychological dimensions involved in the relationship between a media like television and the Immigrant, represented here by the *Beur* (son or daughter of North African immigrants) or *Jeune de banlieue* character,²⁰³ that makes this comparison to the Evil Eye so compelling. From a critical literary point of view, by focusing on an unusual theme (the Evil Eye) and motif (television), this comparison also offers another angle of analysis both when it comes to the study of the literary representation of the immigrant experience in a postcolonial, postmodern and media saturated era. This study aims to contribute to the larger socio-critical and literary debates surrounding the relationship between the Immigrant and the media by focusing on the psychological, ontological and symbolical dimensions of that relationship, instead of the historical, linguistic, economic or cultural dimensions which have been favored in traditional approaches.

Although seemingly trivial in all appearances, this scene of *Paris mon Bled*, through a more careful analysis, does reveal the deeply anchored anxiety and stress that the televisual apparatus in particular and the mass media in general cause in the

²⁰³ The label *Jeune de banlieue* indifferently refers to ethnic youth from immigrant origins living in the French suburban projects. It is often used as a proxy for young men of North African or sub-Saharan origins.

immigrant subject—the object of their attention. As previously underlined, while Khalek highlights the ridiculousness of the situation, his choice of words to depict the presence of the media representatives (the journalists) and their equipment is more or less equivocal: “le matos et les câbles qui mordaient dans le mur. Y en avait un avec un micro plein de poils, et un autre derrière une caméra qui tenait toute seule sur ses pieds” (13). The way in which he (the narrator) describes this scene—the *othering*²⁰⁴ of the media that is taking place—underlines not only its strangeness but also the lack of trust that the media inspires in him, all of which leads me to the conclusion that Khalek also shares, more unconsciously than consciously, this belief in the Evil Eye and the danger of television. Khalek’s case is, therefore, the perfect illustration of what Touhami points out in his article when he stresses the fact that, more often than not, this belief in the Evil Eye is internalized unconsciously and ultimately becomes part of the suburban youth’s identity.

Hence, it is that internalization of the Evil Eye, the penetration and control of the mind by the Other’s gaze (one of the powerful effects of the Evil Eye), and the power of (tele)vision and its potential effect on the subject’s sense of self, identity and agency, that I am investigating throughout this study. It appears that these reactions are both directly triggered by the uncanniness and overbearing presence of the artificial eye directed at them, as well as by the characters sudden and overwhelming awareness of their own media exposure (as objects) and hypervisibility. Thus, through the metaphor of television

²⁰⁴ In this reversed situation, in the eyes of Khalek and of his mother, the French natives become the *Other* not only in relation to (or opposition with) the North African selves but also because their presence, represented here by the TV camera and the journalists, is somewhat of the order of the uncanny.

as the Evil Eye and the use of Elalamy's novel as a springboard, my goal in this chapter will be to flesh out the significance of the lived experience of a hypervisibility or mediatization as witnessed by the characters in the four Beur and *banlieue* novels that are the actual focus of my analysis: Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Les raisins de la galère*, Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade*, Rachid Djaïdani's *Boumkoeur* and Nacer Kettane's *Le sourire de Brahim*.

Often inspired by current events (*les actualités*), each of these Beur and *banlieue*²⁰⁵ novels depicts, to varying degrees, the relationship between the "jeune de banlieue" and the French media, especially television, either as a tense, conflictual or ambiguous one. Such a description also regularly serves as an underlying motif to symbolize the social and cultural "Fracture"²⁰⁶ (Blanchard et al.) between their community and the dominant French society. As we have seen in chapter 1, such tensions are mostly due to the fact that the news media are often accused among the immigrant community of being untrustworthy, misleading and focusing too much on the spectacular when it comes to media representations of minority groups, considered too negative and stereotypical. My objective, however, is not to simply draw up a list of stereotypes about the suburban youth or North African immigrant so often found in the French media.

Rather, I propose to analyze the nature and aftermath of his "encounters" with this Evil

²⁰⁵ Set in an all urban environment and focusing on the plight of suburban youths (the *jeunes de banlieue*), *banlieue* novels are usually considered an offspring of the Beur novel.

²⁰⁶ As seen in chapter 1, this "fracture" also known as the "colonial fracture," a term coined by researchers Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire (2005), can be said to be the result of a "colonial unconscious," legacy of the French colonial project and persisting in French political, social, cultural and discursive practices. Such practices (i.e. racial discriminations) not only have led to these ethnic minorities' systematic exclusion from or marginalization in French society, but also to the differentiation between two Frances: The real French (*les français de souche*) and the French of foreign origins.

Eye, symbolized variously in the Other's gaze,²⁰⁷ the television camera, televisual images and other media representations. Also a point of interest is the nature of the modalities of that "scoptophilic game" of seeing and being seen and the psychological, personal and social outcomes of this interplay.

As seen in chapter 1, that moment of encounter—the moment of mediatization—is the one that essentially gives birth to *Homo Mediativus* through a process of spectralization. The camera lens, that is, the mechanical eye reproducing and, therefore, mediating the gaze of the *Other*, is the site of an unfathomable "symbolic violence" (Pierre Bourdieu) experienced psychically by the Immigrant. I contend that this precise moment of intense visibility and recognition, that is to say, that moment of encounter when the *object* of attention realizes that he is being seen, watched, observed and somehow *acknowledged* by an exterior and distant televisual eye, the gaze of the French Native (*le natif*), is a determining moment in the formation of the immigrant or Beur subject. It is also significant in the development of his social and personal identity and agency. These moments of visibility depicted in each of these Beur and *banlieue* novels are also significant because they remind us that what we have called the Immigrant-Specter in chapters 1 and 2, and now embodied by the *Beur* or suburban youth in this chapter, is also a *seer*, an agent and a subject with its own sense of self and identity. This sense of self and identity is unavoidably problematized by his encounter with the media as he finds himself caught up and forced to maneuver in a constant virtual space of

²⁰⁷ As already been mentioned, I am using the term *Other* in this chapter to essentially refer to the *Français de souche*. I also use the term to highlight the antagonistic and uncanny relationship between the suburban youths, the French natives and the media.

disjuncture (the *neither-nor* state) in an attempt to escape the power of that omnipotent gaze whose powers can radiate from any type of screen, image and text. For it is precisely at that moment of high visibility, or of becoming “visible,” that the suburban youth or *Beur* suddenly becomes aware of his split self, of the disjuncture between his self-image and his distorted image in the media, and, finally, of his own alienation. This intense moment of alienation truly represents what we could identify, by referring to Jacques Lacan’s concept of the “mirror stage,” as a “failed” or “reverse mirror stage” (Kelly Oliver) with deep ontological, existential and psychological effects. This happens when the immigrant or *Beur* subject does not recognize himself in the mirror of the media represented either by a television screen or a photograph in a newspaper. In fact, as they become objects of scrutiny under the disembodied collective gaze of a malicious (French) Other,²⁰⁸ the whole encounter with the Evil Eye of society and the media, as described in *Paris mon bled* and the other novels of my corpus, is experienced as an invasion of the Immigrant’s private world (the domestic sphere) and an aggression of their “psychic space” (Oliver).

Henceforward, my goal in the first section of this chapter, “Understanding the Myth of the Evil Eye in the Age of Technology,” is to trace, first, the origins of this myth and to examine its persistence from Antiquity to the Age of Technology in order to demonstrate the validity of such a comparison. Described by Frederick Thomas Elworthy

²⁰⁸ As mentioned earlier, this *Other* is symbolized by the artificial eye (the lens) of the TV camera and other media (embodiments of French society).

in his seminal study, *The Evil Eye*²⁰⁹ (1895), as a “blighting power of influencing other persons and of controlling events injuriously to others” (3), we will see how the Evil Eye, a widespread belief around the Mediterranean (where it is supposed to have originated) and throughout Europe, has been defined and combatted. Far from belonging only to the domain of folklore, I will show that the myth of the Evil Eye, often associated with the myth of Medusa, can also be found as an important object of inquiry in the field of optical science, psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan) and media theory. In the last part of that first section, I will specifically focus on the analogy between television as the Evil Eye through a reflection on the power of media technology and images by referring in particular to Foucault’s notions of *surveillance* and panopticism. Throughout what will ultimately lead to a literary analysis, I will allude, enough to sustain my argument, to concepts such as identity, subjectivity and objectification, as well as to terms such as gaze, vision, visibility.²¹⁰ More precisely, my focus on the psychoanalytical gaze which, as Stephen Frosh points out, is “a central element in psychoanalytic thinking” (*Hauntings: Psychonalaysis and Ghostly Transmission* 70), will be a key component of my analysis of those four novels. I will attempt to trace the link between television, gaze/vision, haunting, subjectivity and oppression. As we will discover in the following pages, that gaze in question, the gaze of society mediated by the visual media apparatus is, in many ways, similar to Lacan’s *Gaze*, Sartre’s “Look” (*regard*), Fanon’s colonial gaze depicted in *Black Skin, White Masks*, as well as to the Foucauldian panoptic gaze.

²⁰⁹ Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *The Evil Eye: An Account of this Ancient and Widespread Superstition*, 1895.

²¹⁰ These concepts are fundamental elements in postcolonial theory and media studies; they also belong to a long psychoanalytical and philosophical tradition going from Plato to Lacan.

Each of these gazes, in their own way, is treacherous for the subject/object of their attention, for their goal is to maintain the Subaltern—the Immigrant, the suburban youth—under surveillance in order to subjugate him. Thus, it is no surprise that in the literary works analyzed in this chapter²¹¹ the (unconscious) fear of or the discomfort generated by televisual media equipment or images and mass media discourses on/about the immigrant, are quite tangible. My goal in the second and third sections of this chapter, respectively entitled “Encountering the Evil Eye in the *Beur* and *Banlieue* Novel” and “From Eye to *I*: Violent Postcolonial Encounters and the Warding off the Evil Eye,” is to retrace the different instances when, in these novels, the television camera or images, the Other’s gaze, is explicitly or implicitly referred to as the “mauvais oeil,” or simply believed to be the cause of a curse,²¹² which the main characters must ward off by protecting themselves by freeing themselves from its power. Prime witnesses and objects of the hyper-mediatization of immigration, the *Beur* protagonists, without knowing it, find themselves blindsided by their own mediatization and stigmatization by the media obsessed by them. Indeed, their public reputation, fed by those same negative stereotypical images and discourses, somehow always precedes them and forces upon them an essential identity that they do not recognize. Whether we call it an obsessive fascination or *reverse haunting*, this mediatization and the stereotypes that it produces is the site and symptom of an oppression and subjugation with profound and especially

²¹¹ Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *Les raisins de la galère*, Leila Sebbar’s *Shérazade*, Rachid Djaidani’s *Boumkoeur* and Nacer Kettane’s *Le Sourire de Brahim*.

²¹² It appears to me that this curse unleashed by the media apparatus and feared by the Immigrant is somewhat similar to what Jacques Lacan called the ‘imagined gaze,’ in the “The Split between the Eye and the Gaze” (1964), in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*—hence, the importance of partly adopting a psychoanalytic framework in this chapter. It is a gaze that always precedes us; it is the awareness of always being in that position of “to-be-seen.”

alienating effects on its subject/object, as the media manage to inhabit or “colonize” their “psychic space” (Oliver). No longer recognizing themselves in the mirror of television or a newspaper, they become psychologically and emotionally distressed to the point that they develop psychological and emotional symptoms ranging from anger, shame, to anxiety or case of scopophobia, and even worse such as delusion of persecution, and alienation. However, even though media images inherently hinder the characters’ sense of self, identity and self-image due to their alienating powers, they still serve as a catalysis for their agency, an essential step towards their (the characters) own recovery and freedom.

I. Understanding and Theorizing the Myth of the Evil Eye in the Age of Technology: Origins, Survival, and Manifestation.

A. In the Beginning was the Eye.

“He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall.”

--Proverbs 10:10, NKJ.

This Bible quotation serves two goals: first, to remind us first that the myth of the Evil Eye has a long history and, secondly, how ominous and deceptive eyes, sight and vision have traditionally been thought to be by the Ancients²¹³ and even, as we will see, by the Modern peoples in an age marked by the hegemony of vision or *ocularcentrism*.

The myth of the Evil Eye is, according to Alan Dundes in *The Evil Eye: A Casebook* (1981), a perennial and widespread folk belief that has existed from Antiquity

²¹³ This statement can appear in a way as a paradox since, according to Jay Martin in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought* (1993), vision was widely considered by Ancient philosophers as the “noblest of senses.”

to modern times and that remains strongly anchored in Asian, Indo-European and Semitic cultures. According to Dundes,

[t]he evil eye is a widespread but by no means universal folk belief complex according to which the gaze or praise of one individual at or for another may cause illness or even death to the second individual or to an object belonging to that individual, e.g. a fruit, a tree or cow. This idea that a malign glance can do grievous harm to person or property is of great antiquity. It is mentioned in the Bible as well as in Sumerian and in other ancient near-eastern texts, which would make it more than five thousand years old at the very least. Widely reported from India to Ireland, the evil eye seems to be common among Indo-European and Semitic cultures past and present. Immigrants to the new world from circum-Mediterranean countries, e.g., Italians, Greeks, Arabs and Spanish, brought their evil-eye belief system with them, and to this day some of their descendants continue to fear the consequences of exposure to someone with the evil eye. (Dundes, Preface, vii)

Indeed, whether it is in Jewish culture²¹⁴ or around the Mediterranean, the Evil Eye is still commonly thought of as the malicious look or “glance” capable of inflicting bad luck, any kind of harm or even death to the person or animal it is cast upon. In fact, according to Frederick Thomas Elworthy, in a now classic study devoted to the Evil Eye, in ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome, the belief was deeply anchored. It was commonly believed that the Evil Eye, often associated with sorcery and black magic, sprung up from envy or jealousy and was therefore linked to the power of *fascination*.²¹⁵ A loving, jealous or envious eye was, willingly or not, capable of *fascinating*, that is, of casting a spell on its

²¹⁴ For more information about the Evil Eye in Jewish culture, see Rivka Ulmer’s book, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature*, 1994.

²¹⁵ *Fascination*—from the latin *fascinare*, “to bewitch, enchant.” Elworthy notes that: “Among the Greeks, who got their art and many of their customs from Egypt, the belief was so universal that they had a special word to express this mysterious power, βασκανία, whence, all authorities say, comes the latin word, *fascinatio*. This latter word Cicero himself discusses, and explains as *invidere*, to look closely at: hence *invidia*, envy, or Evil Eye, the instigator of most deadly sins—the vice which is even now most frequently named in connection with its sequences, ‘hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness.’” (7)

victim. Anyone or anything could fall victim to it, especially babies, women, cattle, or even crops. Further, in both the Bible and the Talmud²¹⁶, the eye is depicted as an organ responsible for sinful behavior.

Interestingly, this belief in the power of a distant and exterior gaze as source of physical or mental pain continued from Antiquity into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.²¹⁷ As shown by Max Caisson in “La Science du mauvais œil,” throughout the centuries, this belief inherited from the Ancients was so strong in countries such as Italy, that it gave birth to a new field of inquiry, an offspring of the optical sciences which until “la révolution scientifique et idéologique du XVIIe Européen,” (1) was very much a mix between “croyances populaires” and “sciences.”²¹⁸ Based on his research, Caisson demonstrates that during the Italian Renaissance there were two major approaches to understanding the origin and manifestations of the Evil Eye: a physico-natural approach (*conception physico-naturelle*) and a psychologically-based one, both of which contrasted and highlighted the conjoined role of the physical organ (eye) and sight, that is, body and mind, in the manifestation of the Evil Eye.²¹⁹ Despite the superstitious origins of these beliefs, Ancient and Renaissance thinkers relentlessly sought to find a logical and rational explanation for such cases by borrowing core ideas from the Ancients’ optical theory of vision.

²¹⁶ According to Rivka Ulmer in *The Evil Eye in the Bible and in Rabbinic Literature*, “[i]n Jewish mysticism, the eye is viewed as a part of the ‘right side of justice’” and “an expression of the power of Justice emanating from God” (80). Often, activities linked to the eye, such as gazing or staring, were considered to be the worst of the seven sins based on *Proverbs* 26:25 (68)

²¹⁷ We should see that some of these ideas were also to be found in modern and contemporary philosophy.

²¹⁸ Caisson 1.

²¹⁹ Within the confines and purposes of this project as a whole, and because it is not the real focus of our attention, we will allude to such a contrast or rather opposition only in a very succinct way.

According to the first (physico-natural) approach, the Evil Eye was thus envisioned as a penetrating force that not only violated the body but contaminated the air through which its poisoned darts travelled.²²⁰ Falling victim of the Evil Eye would have thus been the result of a sort of contagion which itself was the result of a transmission of invisible negative radiation emanating from someone else's eyes. For Caisson, this theory was based on the ancient Greek optical theory²²¹ of vision and concept of visual rays (11) as well as on ancient Greek doctors' and philosophers' belief in the circulation and transmission of "effluves corpusculaires, électriques, magnétiques" (2). According to Shadi Bartsch in *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-knowledge and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire* (2006), Romans believed that "[a] powerful gaze [could] either emit the noxious rays that give the Evil Eye its particular power, or it [could] assault its victims by figuratively eating or consuming them" (151-152).²²² Thus, as Bartsch suggests, Ancient Greek and Romans perceived the eyes as a "locus for hostile agency" and the gaze as *a weapon*, a "common trope used in Greek poetry" (Shadi Bartsch 148-149, emphasis added). The myth of Medusa is but one example: Perseus and the goddess

²²⁰ It was widely thought that an exterior gaze could do physical harm to one's body thanks to invisible emanations from the eyes of the perpetrator. According to Elworthy, "it was firmly believed by all ancients, that some malignant influence *darted* from the eyes of envious or angry persons, and so *infected the air* as to *penetrate* and *corrupt* the bodies of both living creatures and inanimate objects" (my emphasis, 8).

²²¹ According to Martin Jay (1993), optics were "one of the most developed of the Greek sciences" and "it continued to have pride of place among its medieval successors" (38).

²²² The Ancients' belief in the evil potency of the eyes finds its rational and physical explanation in a "prominent optical theory in antiquity" (Bartsch; Caisson; Elworthy). According to Bartsch, this theory "explained vision as a form of ocular penetration by minuscule bodies sent out by the object under view; another, as the result of rays transmitted by the eyes and making contact with what is 'seen.'" Thus, "the ill effects of the Evil Eye [were supposed to be] caused by *eidola* emanating from the eyes of an envious viewer (even without his own knowledge or consent); these particles penetrate the body of the victim through his pores, and especially through his eyes [...] and throw into disarray the body's internal balance (Bartsch 145).

Pallas Athena (Minerva) used the Gorgon Medusa's decapitated head, Evil Eyes and petrifying gaze to vanquish their enemies.

This physiological explanation thrived in parallel with the second, a more psychological approach, which highlighted the power of the imagination and its physical and material manifestations. Following Ernesto de Martino's work²²³ on Nicola Valletta's classic *Cicalata sul fascino*, Caisson shows, for instance, how both conceptions of the Evil Eye are at work in the case of the *Jettatura*.²²⁴ "La jettatura (qui est un peu plus que le mauvais œil: elle en est comme l'amplification) y est « tantôt considérée comme fièvre de l'imagination, tantôt comme effluves et émanations matériels provenant du corps fascinateur et que celui-ci propagerait par son regard, sa parole, son souffle, son contact et autres choses analogues: le point de vue psychologique est donc éclectiquement mêlé au point de vue plus proprement physico-naturel et cosmologique [...]»."²²⁵ According to Caisson this theory of the imaginative origin of the Evil Eye is part of a general theory of the gaze (*théorie du regard*) (12) and the mechanisms of vision. Part of this approach emphasized the link between vision and the emission of simulacra (*eidola*), that is of images, but also the link between the subject which sees and the object that is seen.

According to the Ancients, vision was the result of a reciprocal transmission of visual rays between the subject (the seer) and object of the gaze (the seen). This notion of

²²³ Ernesto de Martino, *Italie du Sud et magie*, 1963.

²²⁴ The phrase 'Jettatura' is specific to the southern region of Italy, especially to Naples. There, according to Thomas Elworthy, it is not uncommon to hear a person being referred to as a *Jettatore*, under the assumption that he is bearer of the Evil Eye. Still according to Elworthy, the most feared *Jettatore* is the *Jettatore di bambini* against which parents are quick to take measures to protect their offspring (Elworthy 18).

²²⁵ De Martino (1963: 186) qtd in Caisson 5.

reciprocity is an essential component in the understanding of the Ancients theory of optics and of the gaze as well as of the power of the Evil Eye. It is also linked to the idea of reflection and as such to the metaphor comparing the eyes to a mirror. Indeed, the motif of the mirror is an important element for understanding the myth of the Evil Eye. Among the most famous examples of the negative power of the eye-mirror are those of Narcissus and Medusa, who both fell victim to their own reflections. According to the legend, Narcissus was so enamored and fascinated with his own reflection that he drowned in the pool of his image. As for Medusa, “figure extrême du mauvais oeil” (Caisson 35), the Gorgon celebrated for her fascinating beauty died petrified by the power of her own eyes²²⁶ reflected in the shield given to Perseus by Pallas Athena (Minerva).

Conversely, it is generally believed that mirrors are effective ways to ward off the Evil Eye. Since eyes are supposed to be like mirrors, in many countries, especially around the Mediterranean, eye-shaped symbols or talismans such as glass beads the color of blue eyes are used and praised by locals as effective prophylactic tools. According to Caisson : “ Il est clair, en effet, que la défense contre le mauvais œil est très souvent un œil, et un œil qui tend à reproduire le mauvais œil lui-même, comme dans un miroir, lorsqu'il ne s'agit pas précisément déjà d'un miroir” (40). This could explain the widespread use in Antiquity of apotropaic symbols, talismans or masks representing the

²²⁶ According to the legend, it was Minerva who changed Medusa into that terrifying creature, replacing her hair by snakes and making her eyes a deadly weapon capable of turning to stone whomever dared to look into her eyes. To learn more about the myth of Medusa, read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or the *Bibliothèque (Bibliotheca)* of Apollodorus.

Gorgon, Medusa, or the use of the “Hand of Fatima.”²²⁷ At the end, regardless of their specific shape or posology, the widespread belief in the power of each of these prophylactic objects from generation to generation is enough to highlight how deeply anchored in the collective imagination this superstition is. Most importantly, and to come back to the psychological perspective, what this belief reveals is the fundamental and symbolical role the Other’s gaze plays in the constitution of the subject as shown by modern theories of subjectivity.

B. The Modern Psychoanalytical Perspective: Freud, Lacan, and the Evil Eye.

Evil Eye, gaze, mirror, imagination, imaginary, image, self, identification are, in effect, terms all too common to psychoanalysis and especially to Lacanian psychoanalysis.²²⁸ As with the Ancients who perceived the eyes as a “locus for hostile agency” and the gaze as a destructive weapon (Bartsch, 148-149), modern psychoanalysts have also focused on the deceptiveness of vision and the danger of an exterior gaze for the subject’s sense of self in an age characterized by its occularcentrism or hegemony of vision and images. Two of the most prominent psychoanalysts of our time, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, were well aware of the myth of the Evil Eye and even mentioned it in their respective works: Freud in *The Uncanny* and Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Seminar XI)*. In *The Uncanny*, Freud comes

²²⁷ Today in the Mediterranean region on the whole, and in particular in North African cultures and in the Middle East, one of the most popular powerful talismans is the well-known “hand of Fatima” or Hamsa, a five finger symbol with an eye in the middle, which is supposed to break the power of the evil look by reflecting it and attracting good luck to its bearer.

²²⁸ They are all present in Lacan’s theory on (mis) recognition and desire and especially, as we will see in the third section of this chapter, in his most famous theory known as the ‘mirror phase’ (*stade du miroir*).

across the superstitious belief of the Evil Eye after listing various known cases, psychoanalytic experiences attributed to the uncanny (“animism, magic, sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, unintended repetition and the castration complex” 148). Following the lead of the Ancients and popular knowledge, he recognizes that the nefarious power of the Evil Eye is linked to a manifestation of desire, and precisely of envy.

Nevertheless, for Freud, contrary to general assumptions, it is not the gaze of others that is responsible for casting the spell on the “victim”; rather, the Evil Eye is self-inflicted, as the victim unconsciously projects his own envy, or desire of being desired, onto someone else. Thus, the recipient of the Evil Eye is the victim of his own reflection in that he imagines himself reflected in the eyes of another person or in any reflecting surface. For Freud, such cases illustrate the “omnipotence of thoughts” (147). Indeed, such thoughts are so powerful that the “victim” ends up thinking that they are true and are threats to his being:

Anyone who possesses something precious, but fragile, is afraid of the envy of others, to the extent that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. Such emotions are betrayed by looks, even if they are denied verbal expression and when a person is prominent owing to certain striking characteristics, especially if there are of an undesirable kind, people are ready to believe that his envy will reach a particular intensity and then convert this intensity into effective action. What is feared thus is a covert intention to harm [...]. (146-147)²²⁹

For Freud, the pathological fear of being looked at can be so strong that it creates a serious disorder with real psychosomatic symptoms in the victim and which Freud

²²⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, transl. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Press, 2003).

identifies as scopophobia, that is, “the dread of the Evil Eye.” Interesting enough, this observation comes after Freud gives an account of the different literary (such as Hoffman’s figure of the Sand Man) or psychoanalytical experiences in which a subject expresses his fear of losing his sight or “being robbed of one’s eyes” (138). Freud links this fear/desire of being robbed to the fear of castration (a symbolic threat but experienced here as a real bodily threat) present in the Oedipus complex (139).²³⁰ For Freud, the oedipal tragedy and complex are the symbolization of our deepest unconscious and most ambivalent desires.²³¹

Like Freud, Lacan evokes the destructive and sometimes lethal potency of that visual desire expressed and transmitted by the eyes, along with the presence of conscious and unconscious desires provoked by the excitement of the eyes by an object. In a short passage found in the eleventh seminar of the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, he highlights the difference between Eye and Gaze, and Eye and I.²³² As in ancient Greek and Roman literatures, we find expressed in Lacan’s work “the notion that the evil eye involves the penetration of the body by a visually directed force from the exterior” (Bartsch 147), that is the gaze of the Other. As Oliver remarks, “with Lacan, the evil eye becomes the essence of the gaze” (*Witnessing beyond Recognition* 188).

²³⁰ As we all know, the Oedipus complex was inspired by the myth of Oedipus, based on the Greek tragedy by Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus unknowingly kills his father, the king, and weds his own mother, becoming the new King as a result.

²³¹ Such ambivalence, according to Freud, can be found in a child’s love-hate relationship with his parents, namely a hate for the parent of the same sex and love (in Oedipus’ case, the father), or sexual desires toward the parent of the opposite sex (the mother). According to Sean Homer in *Jacques Lacan* (2005), “[w]hat is important about the Oedipus complex is how the child learns to negotiate and resolve its ambivalent feeling towards its parents” (52). This process is supposed to take place between the age of 3 and 5, then disappears to reappear later “during puberty as adolescent sexuality” (ibid).

²³² Lacan, “The Split between the Eye and the Gaze” in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.

Reflecting on the “hypnotic value of painting” and its relationship with the organic eye, Lacan states that it is the result of the “appetite of the eye that must be fed” (115), an idea which brings us back to that notion of desire or consumption mentioned earlier.²³³ He goes on to say that in order to understand the hypnotic value of painting, one must consider the “true function of the organ of the eye, the eye filled with voracity, [that is] “the Evil Eye.”²³⁴ This voracious Evil Eye has “a fatal function,” which is “a power to separate”; according to Oliver, this power of separation “is what causes the subject’s alienation, condemnation, and even damnation.”²³⁵

Lacan also recognizes that this power finds its source in *invidia* (envy) which, as we have already seen, “comes from *videre*,” “to see.” Nevertheless, for Lacan, *invidia*, “in its function as gaze,” should not be confused with jealousy or a jealous look or gaze (116), for it is something that cannot be controlled and is not even conscious. Hanjo Berressem sums it up well in “The ‘Evil Eye’ of Painting: Jacques Lacan and Witold Gombrowicz on the Gaze”:²³⁶ “In Seminar XI, Lacan develops his distinction between the eye and the gaze, the eye standing for the geometrical, visual grammar, and the gaze for the subject’s position within this visual syntax. Whereas the eye represents the *cogito*—the conscious, self-reflexive subject and the subject of knowledge—the gaze represents the *desidero*: the subject of the unconscious and of desire” (175). Desire and the unconscious, as with Freud, also play a crucial role in Lacan’s description of the Evil Eye. Nevertheless, Oliver underscores, as “[he describes] the relation between the gaze

²³³ For the link between the Evil Eye and the idea of consumption, see Bartsch (2006) as well.

²³⁴ Oliver 115.

²³⁵ Oliver 189.

²³⁶ Hanjo Berressem in Richard Feldstein et al. in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Paris Seminar in English* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994).

and the eye,” Lacan also seems to suggest that the Evil Eye, contrary to what we might think, “is not an individual evil eye controlled by its bearer. Rather, it is a universal evil eye [...],” and “[i]n this paranoid universe the subject ‘operates by remote control’ in response to the evil eye of the gaze” (Kelly 188). In Lacan’s theory, that gaze is outside of us, outside of the subject and object of the gaze, and it involves a second and even third party. Although recognizing the role of the other in the development of negative affects in the subject, for Lacan the Evil Eye belongs not so much to the order of the other, but rather to the order of the *Other*, an Other that precedes the I and individual others.²³⁷

The Lacanian understanding of the Evil Eye is in contradiction to the concept of the *look (le regard)* developed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* and Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*: the look of the Other is debilitating and alienating for the subject. To explain briefly, with Sartre or in Fanon’s psychopathological analysis of the effects and affects of racism on the colonized, the encounter with the gaze of the Other is source of anxiety and shame from the moment the subject becomes aware of being looked at and most importantly aware of his being in the world. In a specular moment that is at the same time an act of (self) voyeurism, shame erupts as he is confronted with his own gaze through the eyes and gaze of the Other. As Oliver summarizes, “[f]or Sartre, the look of the Other catches me in the act [of looking] and turns my

²³⁷This idea is part of a complex theory on Vision as product of the mind (the mind’s Eye) and the imagination (vs vision as sight), the Gaze (vs. the eye) and recognition. Also, to use Lacan’s own terms, the Evil Eye would belong as much as to the realm of the imaginary (due to the specularity of the mirror-image) as to the realm of the symbolic, the realm of meaning (see Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 186).

consciousness back on itself to confront the dialectic of being and nothingness at my core [...]” (185).

As we can see, whether it be the ancient Greeks or Romans, Freud, Lacan, or Sartre we irremediably come back to the motif of the mirror, self-reflection, self-consciousness and the power of the imagination, and how it translates the subject’s sense of self and attitude towards others. Regardless of the field of inquiry, whether it be religious, philosophical, medical or psychoanalytical, it seems clear that what is at stake in the myth of the Evil Eye is fundamentally our relationship with others/the Other and how this Other through his gaze influences or even controls us as we struggle to emerge as subjects and autonomous agents. From Antiquity to the early twentieth century, from its organic origin (an organ of sight) the Evil Eye has come to be seen as a disembodied form that derives its power through its manifestation as a mental (Vision) or imaginary (product of the unconscious) construct.

Yet, while it seems that we have covered every general conception of the Evil Eye, one conception still remains to be discussed as it directly touches upon the problematic of this entire chapter, namely the technological origin of the Evil Eye. Whereas, traditionally, the Evil Eye is said to originate from the power of vision and sight, in our age of technology nothing seems to illustrate this more than the technology of vision that is known as *television*. Just like the nineteenth-century’s revolutionary inventions, like the *cinématographe* or daguerreotype, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have brought with them their share of new technological developments that have also redefined vision itself. By pretending to be extensions of this noble sense

(vision) and organ (the eye), technological advancements such as television (along with other inventions such as video cameras, digital photography, the Google glass) have indeed reshaped not only the way we interact with others, but also the way we *see* them, ourselves, and the world in general. Television, whether as a technology or apparatus, has pervaded our lives. Television screens have become part of our domestic landscapes; we cannot avoid them. However, several questions remain to be asked: what is *television* exactly? And why would such a comparison with the Evil Eye be relevant nowadays and in a context such as the one depicted in Elalamy's *banlieue* novel? After all, is television not just a simple a piece of equipment in the living room of this fictitious immigrant family? How can it be the Evil Eye? In the case of Khalek's mother, is this comparison just a superstitious response aiming at hiding her own technological illiteracy? What would be the technological origins of the modern day myth of the Evil Eye?

C. Television as the Evil Eye? The Technological Approach.

According to the Ancients, the power of the Evil Eye consisted in the projection, circulation and transmission of nefarious invisible rays from one person's eye to another person in order to inflict harm. Interestingly, television is also a system of transmission of rays. To be exact, according to the definition found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, television is "an electronic system of transmitting transient images of fixed or moving objects together with sound over a wire or through space by an apparatus that converts light and sound into electrical waves and reconverts them into visible light rays and

audible sound.”²³⁸ Furthermore, there is a second correlation with television in that many also believe that what generates the Evil Eye is envy or fascination, understood as bewitchment. While we are not talking about sorcery here, one thing that is sure is that since its creation in the 1920s²³⁹ to its establishment as an instrument of mass “consumption” in the 1950s, television, as a technology, has always exerted a fascination on the public. Nevertheless, like any successful technology, television as a medium polarizes opinion, pitting those who venerate it against those who denigrate it. While my goal here is not to render a complete history of television, it is worth noting, as does Michell Stephens in “History of television,”²⁴⁰ that “[f]ew inventions have had as much effect on contemporary [...] society as television.” Since its creation, television has revolutionized and re-defined the way we see, make sense of, and relate to ourselves and the world around. Most importantly, television has projected us from a logo-centric world to an occularcentric world. It is a new turn in the history of civilization, an age dominated by images and identified as the “pictorial turn” (W.J. Mitchell) or “l’ère du visuel” (Debray). As Samuel Weber remarks in *Mass-Media Auras*, one should not forget the “*distinctive specificity of the medium*” (108, italics in original), that the name *tele*-vision suggests a vision from afar; it literally means “seeing at a distance” (113) or “farsightedness.”²⁴¹ This spatial dimension intrinsic to television, this vision from afar,

²³⁸ “Television.” Merriam-Webster dictionary. Consulted on May, 8 2015, <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/television>>.

²³⁹ Digitalized television as we know it today has come a long way, from the 1920s with the invention of the mechanic television by John Baird in England, and the success of Philo Taylor Farnsworth with the all-electronic television to the 1950s-1960s (1947 in the US, 1960s in Europe) with full-scale commercial television broadcasting.

²⁴⁰ Michell Stephens, “History of television” in *Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*, 2000. Consulted online, May 18, 2015. <<https://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/History%20of%20Television%20page.htm>>.

²⁴¹ Weber 108.

which involves seeing right in front of you images of things or people that are not at the same place as you, is not insignificant.²⁴² Television has undeniably redefined vision, with its cameras staring at the world and its objects all the while recording them for someone else to see or, rather, watch. Thus, operating as an artificial substitute for the naked eye, television has come to symbolize for many “the eyes of a generation.”²⁴³ As we will see in chapter 4, television is often compared to a “window onto the world,” a mirror reflecting reality; it is viewed by many as a medium of communication and information, a cultural artifact, or a site of knowledge and socialization. On the other side of the spectrum, television is often considered as the epitome of evil due to its content (e.g. its focus on entertainment programming) and mode of operation (e.g. its pretention to *present* and not *represent* reality).²⁴⁴ While not opposing such views on television, it is my opinion, however, that the evil in the medium of television also primarily resides in its uncanniness as it can appear uncannily both *in* the world (live) and *out of* this world (spectral, supernatural). In many ways, television is the perfect medium or manifestation of a powerful and threatening disembodied gaze.

²⁴² Weber states that, “[t]elevision does not merely allow the viewer to ‘see at a distance’ things that otherwise would be invisible. It *transports vision as such* and *sets* it immediately *before* the viewer. It entails not merely a heightening of the naturally limited powers of sight with respect to certain distant *objects*; it involves a transmission or transportation of vision itself. The televisual spectator can see things from places—and hence, from perspectives and point of view [...] where his or her body is not (and often never can be) situated” (116).

²⁴³ The term “eyes of a generation” is in direct reference to the namesake website “eyesofageneration,” which is dedicated to the history of television in the United States and includes a large collection of texts and images linked to that history and more specifically to the history of television cameras, focusing on the way they captured the world and how the world saw itself in the images projected. A brief description of the website by Associate Professor of Journalism, David Hazinski, introduces it as follows: “*This site about TV cameras is really about the history of television and the society it portrayed. The site doesn't just show you cameras, it shows you what they captured and how they did it.*”

< <http://www.eyesofageneration.com/> >

²⁴⁴ As we will see below, critics of television such as Pierre Bourdieu, Neil Postman, Samuel Weber or Jean Baudrillard have repeatedly pointed out in their works the deceptive nature and negative impact of this medium on viewers.

In *Haunted Media. Electronic presence from Telegraphy to Television* (2000), Jeffrey Sconce, through the depiction of a series of uncanny episodes, relates how the television medium, since its introduction into American household in the 1950s, became progressively linked to mysterious events and strange reactions related to its presence or its content. American daily newspapers as reputable as the *New York Times* soon began reporting stories about extreme reactions such as a family man driven by its noise to shoot at his television set or a man stabbing “a CBS cameraman and [smashing] a pitcher of water over an actor’s head before finally being apprehended” and confessing his hatred for television “because its shows were ‘scandalous,’” and because “he felt he was being personally ‘slandered by the programs’” (1). But it was another type of witness account that most unsettled America, stories about television coming to life or being haunted by a mysterious and evil force capable of harming its owners. In one case, the Travers’ family claimed that their television set, even turned off, terrorized them when the face of woman would appear on the screen. The seemingly supernatural phenomenon, Sconces points out, was observed by many and particularly by “newspapermen, magazine writers, and TV engineers” (2). For Sconce such reactions, which still prevail, are “examples of a common convention in representating television and other electronic media”²⁴⁵; they are part of a “cultural mythology,” or system of representation in which this type of technology is endowed with supernatural powers based on its perceived “liveness,” “suggesting, in this case, that television is “*alive*...living, real, not dead” (even if it sometimes serves as a medium *of the dead*).”²⁴⁶ Furthermore, in trying to explain the

²⁴⁵ Sconce 2.

²⁴⁶ Sconce 2.

reason why, in the Travers' case, a seemingly technical problem turned into a poltergeist case—transforming the TV set into “a haunted apparatus”—Sconces locates the cause in the fact that “[s]ound and images without material substance, the electronically mediated worlds of telecommunications often evoke the supernatural by creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form” (4). Nonetheless, this aliveness, according to Sconce, would mean that “electronic media technologies are [believed to be] animate and perhaps even sentient” (2), a faculty which, in our case, would corroborate our argument and validate the belief in the “Evil Eye” of television.

As briefly mentioned hereinabove, the analogy between television and the Evil Eye might actually find its source in the fact that, as a transmitter of images, the medium of television, which constantly mediates our vision and experience of the world, is often believed to be deceitful, pretending not to do what it is actually destined to do: “What television transmits is not so much *images*, as is almost always argued. It does not transmit *representations* but rather *the semblance of presentation as such* [...]” (Weber 117). One can understand why such a mode of functioning can be perceived as deceitful in that it perverts vision itself, for what is presented as *reality-as-is*, thanks to its synchronous transmission of images, is essentially fabricated and altered from the original—most likely as the result of conscious editing. From a theoretical point of view, postmodern media theorists have described at length how the mass media and especially television, have managed to create a “hyperreality,” a world of “simulation” (Baudrillard) more real than reality itself by substituting *presentation* for *re-presentation*. According to Baudrillard, this hyperreality is the result of “the dissolution of TV into life, the

dissolution of life into TV.”²⁴⁷ Indeed, as Sconce underscores, “[f]or critics of postmodernity ranging in temperament from Jean Baudrillard to Frederic Jameson, television’s constant transmission of instantaneous representations makes the medium both the prime catalyst and most pervasive symptom of an age marked by the increased dissolution of referentiality” (5).²⁴⁸

This postmodern theoretical perspective is quite engaging if we agree with the idea that teletechnology misleads us by controlling our minds and bodies. Indeed, and this is my second point, given the powerful fascination that the flow of images passing before their eyes exerts on television viewers, one can see why the metaphor of television as the Evil Eye is justified. Television’s control over viewers is supposedly manifested in the negative effects of addiction to television watching such as mind numbness, passivity, and lack of political or social consciousness. It has supposedly turned us into zombies or passive agents controlled by our own desires (or those projected on us) and pleasures: “Zombified cola drinkers, Bobo-punching kindergartners, and clueless Susan Lucci fans have [...], in their time, all been depicted by social scientists and journalists alike as slaves to a particularly persuasive electronic master, an almost malevolent entity whose powers of control are somehow believed to eclipse those of all previous nonelectronic media.”²⁴⁹ It is no wonder why, then, television has been accused by media theorists such as Guy Debord, Baudrillard, or Postman, of “amusing [us] to death.”²⁵⁰ It is that mind-

²⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 55, qtd in Sconce 169.

²⁴⁸ Sconce also points out that this standpoint has been criticized by scholars in “the field of cyberculture and virtual subjectivity [which] frequently embraces these phantom landscapes and synthetic identities” (5).

²⁴⁹ Sconce 5.

²⁵⁰ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking 1985).

penetrating and controlling power that mainly confers on television its malevolent and even deadly powers.

Moreover, as a medium that sees—and allows us to do so—from a distance, there is no doubt that television (and metonymically the television apparatus altogether) or simply the television camera could easily be compared to the psychoanalytical gaze, the gaze of the Other (French society), situated outside of the subject and the self. As we will see in more detail further down, in a postcolonial perspective television as a media apparatus would thus stand in for the gaze of the Other, as one of the preferred tools for those who are in position of power. In his analysis of the correlation and mediation between broadcasting and power in “Media Power: The Double Bind” (1974), Stuart Hall reminds us that, “The ruling elites [...] have a direct interest in monopolizing the channels for consensus-formation for their preferred accounts and interpretations, thereby extending their hegemony [...]” (26). More than ever, in the case of formerly subjugated peoples like North or West Africans living among their former colonial oppressors, this visual and ideological domination has never been so omnipresent and omnipotent. Like exotic postcards, an orientalist painting or cinema of the colonial era, television, as a popular medium of the postcolonial era, is undoubtedly one of the most powerful ideological weapons used by hegemonic powers to carry out their agendas. As such, it has become the perfect producer and purveyor of *myths* (in a Barthesian sense) used by the elites to shape the mind of the masses (immigrants included) and to subjugate them at the same time. In the age of surveillance, television has become an inescapable *all-seeing Eye* or *Gaze*. Similar to the panoptic gaze described by Foucault in his description of the

eighteenth-century carceral system, television has managed to control our imagination and unconscious thanks to its penetrating gaze, to the point that it exerts, as we will see later, a sort of “symbolic violence” (Pierre Bourdieu) that can produce paranoid behaviors such as anxiety, masochism, and delusions of persecution.

Henceforth, seen from that angle, it is easy to understand the fragility and tension that characterizes the relationship between any member of an oppressed or underrepresented group, like North African immigrants in France, and its host society and media. It is an unequal relationship that, in the case of North African immigrants in France, has often been mediated and mediatized by television and other media, but also has resulted in a mutual mistrust. In recalling the quotation from *Paris Mon Bled* (Elalamy) in our introduction, we could therefore argue that the reaction of Khalek’s mother is more than a matter of pure superstition, naivety or ignorance. Her reaction is definitely the expression of uncanny feeling and also a genuine fear of (or unfamiliarity with) the technological apparatus whose potentially destructive powers could equal those normally attributed to the Evil Eye. In fact, we find depicted in other *banlieue* or Beur novels similar uncanny feelings towards the media apparatus. In novels by Kettane, Ben Jelloun, Djaïdani, and Sebbar, the presence of the mass media, and especially of the televisual media, is felt, or can be read, as an unexplainable threat for the oppressed and underrepresented immigrant characters. While more visibility in the public sphere and the ultimate recognition that follows might be perceived as a step forward for underrepresented group, the nature and origins of the mediatization and hypervisibility that are depicted in *Le Sourire de Brahim*, *Les Raisins de la Galère*, *Shérazade* and

Boumkoeur are experienced by the North African protagonists more as a curse than a gateway to freedom. It is a curse that is experienced by the characters who are incapable of escaping the collective gaze represented by the media which finds in them not only the perfect object of its fascination but also in the *banlieues* its favorite h(a)unting ground. Nevertheless, while we would be tempted to perceive that oppressive relationship as unilateral, I want to show that it is inherently bilateral and dialectical as those oppressed are also able to *gaze* back.

II. Of Mediatization and Hypervisibility: Encountering the Evil Eye of Television and Other Media in *Beur* and *Banlieue* Novels.

A. **All Eyes on Them: The Media H(a)unting of the Banlieue, a Case of the Evil Eye?**

As we have seen with the quote from *Paris mon bled*, being in presence of the mass media and a disembodied gaze—whether it is human or technological—is enough to create an uncanny feeling that, consciously or not, troubles the main characters. It is to the point that they feel the irremediable need to protect themselves from whatever invisible rays, negative influence or predicament they (the media and its disembodied gaze) can cause.²⁵¹ As I established in the introduction to this chapter, the simple presence of television cameras and crews, and the visibility or exposure it confers, is enough to trigger in the characters the ancestral fear of *drawing the attention* of the Evil Eye (or any ill intent), manifesting itself via the artificial eye of the camera.

²⁵¹ As already shown, the uncanniness of the television apparatus is clearly evident in Khalek's recollection of the interview. Furthermore, in what constitutes an interesting reversal of the gaze and othering of the media, the narrator cannot help but highlight the strangeness, borderline monstrosity, and alterity of the TV crew and its equipment (i.e. the microphone), which betrays his own unease in its presence.

Nevertheless, in most of the novels studied, the televisual camera is not the only purveyor of the Evil Eye, believed to be caused by the collective gaze of the French spectators present on the other side of the screen. In these novels, this curse can be triggered as much by a newspaper article as by a photograph. It is generally the case when the characters find themselves in a situation in which all eyes (the media's, their spectators and readers) are literally and figuratively on them. It is a situation which they experience as the prime victims (or prey) of a deliberate hunting/haunting game by the media with the *banlieues* providing the perfect h(a)unting ground for sensation-hungry journalists. In effect, this dread of the media/Evil eye, which I find similar to a case of haunting, is caused by and materializes, first and foremost, through the mass media's obsessive attention or rather *fascination* with the *Beur* or *Jeune de banlieue* and his urban environment.

A symbolic space of social marginalization, exclusion, alterity and, for some spectators, of barbarity, the *banlieue* has become a focal point for an entire nation as well as the stage of highly mediatized events ever since the entrance of the Immigrant and the *Beur* generation on the French public scene and in the collective imagination.²⁵² Emblematic of the so-called *crise des banlieues*, the *Beur* and the *Jeune de Banlieue* have literarily and figuratively been turned into objects of spectacle for the sole pleasure and scopific drive of French media and society. One must effectively point out that with the advent of the *Beur* generation²⁵³ in the public sphere since the 1980s also corresponded

²⁵² See the general introduction to the thesis for a more detailed explanation.

²⁵³ This advent of the *Beurs* was marked, among other things, by the reclaiming at the national level of that social movement (le mouvement *beur*) into a fashion, cultural or literary movement (i.e. la mode *beur*, le

the emergence of the *banlieues*, along with its inhabitants, as a symbol of the “new immigrant problem,” and as a focal point for the media. For a generation that was kept in the shadows and which, according to Alain Battegay²⁵⁴ constantly “se voyait privée de toute expression publique [...]” and “restait le plus souvent un aspect des fait divers traités par la presse locale, tandis que pour la presse nationale, [elle relevait] de la rubrique ‘sociale’” (Battegay 55), tragic or spectacular events highly mediatized by the local and national press were to increase their visibility.

As a result, the *banlieue* and its inhabitants have become a fascinating and favorite news topic for the French media, especially the printed and televisual media, which has regularly published stories covering the *crise des banlieues*. Historically and symbolically linked to the immigrant presence, the marginal space known as the *banlieue* is generally perceived as a site of exclusion and social dysfunction in perpetual crisis. Worse, in contrast to the more quiet, peaceful and civilized urban centers of the French nation, the *banlieue* is at times described in the media as a no-go or no-law zone,²⁵⁵ too violent and terrifying for outsiders.

And yet, although it is a stereotype that is deeply ingrained in the French collective memory and imagination, what has often been labeled as the “question urbaine” is not exclusive to our contemporary *banlieues*. According to Guy Lochard in “Le jeune de banlieue est un autre ? ” the *banlieue* has always been an unstable element

cinéma *beur* or le théâtre *beur*) as well as by its use as a political tool by political parties from both the left and right (far-right and far-left included) parts of the French political spectrum.

²⁵⁴ Alain Battegay, *Les images publiques de l’immigration* (1993).

²⁵⁵ This imagery was recently used by the US broadcasting news channel, Fox, and as one would expected, was quickly criticized and rejected. Nonetheless, one of the general beliefs is that even the police is often too scared or reluctant to venture inside the *cités*.

of the urban landscape ; unfortunately, “[elle] ne nous apparait [sic] « en crise » [...] maintenant que sous les effets d’un oubli, celui de son instabilité chronique” (136). Furthermore, as shown by Lochard, the “question urbaine” or *banlieue* problem can be linked to a long genealogy and traced back to a time even preceding the European Industrial Revolution. The *banlieues* have always been a “territoire expérimental” for social and political changes that preceded the arrival of today’s North or West African immigrants or other “visible” minorities. Quoting the work of Annie Fourcaut, Lochard insists on reminding us how in the collective imaginary and the representations associated with this urban territory “les zoulous et les beurs [ont] succédé aux apaches, aux bolcheviks, et aux blousons noirs, [et que] le drame des lycées et les risques de ghetto [ont succédé] aux crises des lotissements défectueux [...]”²⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, Lochard argues, “[c]et imaginaire urbain, sociocentrique dans ses fondements, intervient dès l’origine comme lieu de construction et de différenciation des identités sociales” (137). A good example of that process of differentiation is probably the fact that in recent years the *banlieues*, now home of substantial immigrant populations mostly originating from France’s former colonies of the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, have become, through the conjugated action of a certain kind of rhetoric and visual representations, the media symbol of an urban jungle and, as such, of an “Other France.”²⁵⁷

It is true that events like the “rodéos des Minguettes” in 1983 or the 2005 riots have left a deep imprint in memories and especially the medias which often compared the

²⁵⁶ Annie Fourcaut, *Banlieue rouge 1920-1940*, 34, qtd in Lochard 136.

²⁵⁷ Unfortunately, this othering, as we will see later, rooted in and justified by the alleged social, cultural and physical difference of these populations, has resulted in the reproduction of the old dichotomies of center/periphery and civilization/barbarity, and of a rhetoric of images and discourses reminiscent of the colonial era.

banlieue to a “jungle urbaine” modeled on the American ghettos (Lochard). Events like these are among the reasons behind the hyper-mediatization and hypervisibility of the *banlieue* and of its inhabitants, as they have become the most sought after shots or scoops for journalists.²⁵⁸ For Pierre Bourdieu in *On Television*, one thing that must be remembered is that “[l]a télévision appelle à la dramatisation, au double sens: elle met en scène, en images, un évènement et elle en exagère l’importance, la gravité, et le caractère dramatique, tragique. Pour les banlieues, ce qui intéressera ce sont les émeutes. C’est déjà un grand mot [...]” (19). It is, at least, what is suggested in two similar scenes from the Beur novel *Le sourire de Brahim* and in the *banlieue* novel, *Boumkoeur* by Djaïdani²⁵⁹ in which the main characters, Brahim and Yaz, both witness similar hunting scenes exposing the media’s preying on, and obsession with, the *banlieue* and its youths.

In these scenes, the media are literally and figuratively caught *en train de faire leur beur(re)*.²⁶⁰ For example, in *Boumkoeur*, Yaz, the main character and narrator, a

²⁵⁸ One could argue that if the *banlieue* appears to us as being in perpetual crisis, it may be due to the fact that this amnesia feeds on the constant scrutiny to which the *banlieue* is subjected (its hypervisibility), whether for surveillance purposes (by the authorities) or entertainment purposes (by the media).

²⁵⁹ Although separated by a decade, both novels, *Le Sourire de Brahim* and *Boumkoeur*, are quite similar despite Kettane’s third-person narrative and Djaïdani’s choice of an introspective first-person narrative in the epistolary or personal diary genre. Both authors chose to situate their narrative in the urban fabric of the *banlieues*, where both characters, Yaz in *Boumkoeur* and Brahim in the eponymous novel, are of North African origin and struggle to define their personal, cultural and social identity. Also important to note is the fact that they have two different educational backgrounds and professional situations: while Brahim becomes a medical student and activist, Yaz is unemployed, a high-school dropout, delinquent, and aspiring writer and film director.

²⁶⁰ “Faire son beurre” usually means to make money, but by removing the last two letters of “Beurre,” we also end up with “Beur,” hence my typographical emphasis “faire son beur(re)” to highlight the economic and financial pressure hidden behind every media coverage of the Banlieue as well as its ontological and sociological significance when reminded that the *Beur* is also a product of the media.

typical “jeune de banlieue,” witnesses the following scene—in many ways reminiscent of another one from Mathieu Kassovitz’s movie *La Haine* (1995):²⁶¹

La semaine dernière, un cameraman de la TV est venu demander aux jeunes qui tiennent les murs s’il pouvait leur poser des questions. Bien sûr, qu’ils ont répondu, enchantés. Le décor choisi n’était pas très original, l’interrogatoire se déroula dans les entrailles d’une tour. Les jeunes, pour soigner leur image, étaient dissimulés sous des cagoules afin de ne laisser paraître que leur regard, comme s’ils s’étaient métamorphosés en affiche de LA HAINE. La mise en scène ne serait rien sans les oinjs au bec et les gros plans des seringues contaminantes, tous les clichés miséreux rassemblés pour le scoop. Le cameraman de la TV a même pensé à distribuer quelques 8/6 pour les bouches les plus pâteuses, l’alcool crache mieux que le verlan. (20-21)²⁶²

This example of a classic “montage d’attraction”²⁶³ is interesting for many reasons. First, what we find particularly relevant in this quote is, beyond its ironical stance, the author’s clear emphasis on the artificiality, lack of authenticity, and the opportunistic nature of the situations caught on camera. The scene effectively pinpoints the degree of manipulation of the event being reported and, most importantly, the mode of production of the media’s narrative on the *banlieue*.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, throughout this scene, Djaïdani successfully

²⁶¹ In that memorable scene from Mathieu Kassovitz’s *La Haine* (1995), the three main characters (Vinz, Saïd and Hubert), following a night of protests and riots by youngsters against police brutality, violently lash out at a television crew by accusing them of turning their *cité* into a zoo.

²⁶² 8/6 refers to a Euro lager beer brewed by the dutch company Bavaria Brouwerij N.V.

²⁶³ Based on the “theory of montage” or “theory of attractions” developed by film director, Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), the “montage d’attraction,” initially a theater technique, refers to a film technique which consists in the montage of different pictures taken at different moment or place and edited together. According to Eisenstein this type of montage aimed at drawing the attention of spectators by shocking them or awakening their deepest desires. Its impact was supposed to be on the physical and psychological level. Hence we can see why, once again, a medium like television can be perceived as the cause of the Evil Eye which, as we have seen, is caused by the envy or fascination that is generated in its bearer by the sight of a desired object. See Tom Gunning, “Le cinéma d’attraction. Le film des premiers temps, son spectateur, et l’avant-garde,” trans. Franc LeGac, *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze 50*, 1996: 55-65.

²⁶⁴ It reminds us that television, more than being a simple recording instrument, is also “un instrument de creation de réalité” (Bourdieu) which always pretends to *present* what it actually re-presents, mediates, frames and produces. In other words, what we find at stake here is the *artifactuality* (Derrida) and,

denounces not only the media's use of the *cit * as their preferred hunting field, but also its obsession with issues such as delinquency or violence, and its desperate attempts at creating the perfect scoop by taking the perfect and (st r e)typical, hence caricatural, *banlieue* scene shots with, at their center, the typical "bandes ethniques" (Loch 143). Scoop driven, the journalist character depicted in this scene does not hesitate to push and blur the boundaries between fiction and reality when it comes to represent the *Jeune de banlieue*.²⁶⁵

Likewise, in *Le Sourire de Brahim*, the media's thirst for a good story, that is, a story ideally strewn with dead bodies and accompanied by spectacular images, is also highlighted in an important passage depicting the climate full of tension following the racist murder of a young Beur, Larbi, one of Brahim's cousins. According to the narrator, shortly after the murder of Larbi, the entire *cit * is quickly swamped by a flood of journalists with their cameras in quest of the perfect "scoop" or a prize-winning shot: "La presse aussi  tait l . Les journalistes en qu te de scoop et d'informations sensationnelles essayaient de s'incruster chez les jeunes [...]. Les appareils photo cliquetaient, une cam ra  tait en train de tourner [...]" (Kettane 134-35).

therefore, the constructedness of the figure of the *Beur* under the media spotlight. See chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation of Derrida's concept of *artificiality*.

²⁶⁵ Ultimately, what this scene questions is the role of the media not only in the manipulation of information (through distortion, exaggeration or omission), but also in the misrepresentation of immigrant populations in the public eye through the creation and propagation of false images—false because misleading, exaggerated and stereotyped. Nevertheless, upon further analysis of this particular scene, we cannot help but wonder if the manipulation is due only to the media. This scene, although funny, also draws our attention to a double reality that still remains taboo among scholars: the complicity between the media, thirsty for sensationalism and good ratings, and the playfulness of these manipulating youths who, avid consumers of television, are also well aware, in some cases, of the way they are seen (Lochard 139), the part they have to "play" in order to satisfy the media, and the public's voyeuristic gazes in order to gain access to a greater visibility. According to Lochard, one should remember that the "question des banlieues" is as much the fruit of the media as it is the fruit of the locals; it should be treated as the "production sociale et m diatique au centre d'un jeu de n gociations entre diff rents acteurs collectifs" (141).

It is clear that both of these scenes represent intense moments of visibility or hypervisibility for the protagonists, more used to their own invisibility and, therefore, to be left in the shadow of their *cit  *. As all eyes are on them thanks to the media, they truly become the center of attention and, as such, ideal pawns in a hunting game which goes back to the first generation—the generation of the Fathers. Thus, for Brahim : “Alors que, dans le pass  , ils allaient filmer leurs parents dans les bidonvilles, parqu  s comme des b  tes, maintenant ils venaient les filmer dans leurs cit  s. Trop de journalistes se servaient de leur outil comme des pi  ges    rats” (Kettane 134). The use of phrases such as “pi  ges    rats,” “parquer comme des b  tes,” to describe both the media and the government’s treatment of the locals is obviously a way for the Kettane and Dja  dani to highlight the dehumanization,²⁶⁶ reification and victimization processes to which they—the *jeunes de banlieue* and the other residents of the *cit  s* (most of them of immigrant descent)—are subjected when put in the spotlight. Thus, while Dja  dani uses humour and irony to convey Yaz’s discontent, Kettane’s portrayal of Brahim’s reaction is more violent as illustrated by his choice of words to express the protagonist’s disgust for the “mouches    merde” (journalists), which he also compares to vultures: “ils r  daient comes des vautours.”²⁶⁷ With such a view of the state of journalism, it is understandable why, in most of the fictions that are the object of this study, the way in which the media focus on their neighborhood and propel them onto the public stage often become for the characters ominously synonymous with harm and misfortune.

²⁶⁶ They are indeed being hunted like animals. As I will show later, these scenes not only highlight the degree of symbolic violence to which the characters are exposed, they also reveal their level of distrust and hostility toward the journalists and the media because of the way their community is being represented.

²⁶⁷ Kettane 134.

Good examples of the ominous power of the media or negative consequences of a sudden mediatization or lack thereof can be found in several Beur novels. Although not part of this corpus and despite its focus on the reaction of the first generation, we find a good illustration of this belief in Azouz Begag's novel, *Le gone du Chaâba*. Indeed, we might all remember that scene in which Azouz' father becomes enraged after reading a newspaper article linking him to the criminal activity of his brother, arrested for running an illegal butchery in the Chaâba, their shantytown. Not only is he enraged because of the shame²⁶⁸ this arrest and the subsequent newspaper article brought upon him and his family (his reputation as an honorable man was destroyed), but he clearly understands the significance and aftermath of such mediatization for his entire community. With all eyes on them, Azouz' father cannot stand the idea that his beloved Chaâba is now the center of attention of the entire French nation, which means that the life as they knew before might soon be part of the past. Because of this article and unwanted publicity, the Chaâba, located physically and symbolically in the shadows and on the margins of Lyon, would later cease to provide a shield of protection or cloak of invisibility that had protected them until then. For the father, this mediatization clearly meant the beginning of their misfortune, as if the Chaâba and all of its inhabitants were cursed by the Evil Eye.²⁶⁹

Likewise, we can observe another case of misfortune brought upon a family by external forces in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Les raisins de la galère*, although not directly linked to the power of the press and of mass media in general. Actually, we find depicted

²⁶⁸ We shall return to the question of the emotional aftermath provoked by the encounter between the Immigrant, *Jeune de banlieue* and the Evil Eye of the media.

²⁶⁹ The publication of this article will constitute the death-knell and a new beginning for the tiny community which, progressively, will be emptied of its members.

in this typical *Bildungsroman* the power of an ill-intended gaze in a passage in which the character-narrator, Nadia, a French woman of Algerian descent, recalls the moment that sealed the fate of her family and the beginning of their misfortune—the “galère” of the title. Brought up in a family where the mother was also the keeper of traditions and as such a living encyclopedia on matters of superstition (“elle voyait partout des sources de malheurs” 10),²⁷⁰ Nadia describes the moment the newly built family house, “notre pavillon,” drew the attention of the ill-intended mayor and the jealousy of their neighbor:

La mairie la considérait d’un *sale oeil*. Les voisins des HLM étaient jaloux, mais aimaient bien nous rendre visite [...].

Il y avait là quelqu’un qui ne supportait pas l’idée qu’une famille d’Algériens puisse s’installer en centre-ville ; à ses yeux, un immigré devait habiter la zone, au mieux une cité de transit ou un ‘ logement social’. (16, my emphasis)

In this passage it is clear that, without being aware of it, Nadia is attributing the origin of their misfortune to an Evil Eye which she calls here a “sale oeil” and to the jealousy aroused by the beauty of their house and their pride as homeowners²⁷¹: “Notre maison était belle et insolite. [...] Nous étions des privilégiés” (17).²⁷² As a result of the controversy, their house is destroyed and, along with it, Nadia’s family.²⁷³ To make

²⁷⁰ In a passage that mirrors the scene in *Paris mon Bled*, Nadia describes the following ritual commonly performed in her household : “[...] il y avait des mots à éviter à tout prix : si on les prononçait, elle brûlait de l’encens et implorait des anges imaginaires d’éloigner le mauvais œil de la maison” (11).

²⁷¹ All the very same reasons usually identified as being at the source of the Evil Eye.

²⁷² Notwithstanding, one may point out in passing that, in the above sentence, the addition of the adjective “insolite” by Ben Jelloun is also a way to imply that it is their difference and alterity that are the real reasons behind their targeting by the state’s representative and the cause of their misfortune. Their house is ‘insolite’ not just because it surprises everyone that they are homeowners, but also because of its particular design, which does not conform to the architectural and urban rules imposed by the city and, by extension, to the national norm. With their house, they do not fit the image of *Frenchness*, nor do they fit the mold which society envisions for them and in which it wants to keep them.

²⁷³ This moment was to mark the beginning of the end for Nadia’s family, and especially her father who, shortly after the destruction of their house and their relocation to a high rise apartment (*cité*), dies following a period of long and deep depression: “Mon père déprimait. C’était un homme brisé” (32-33).

matters worse, their personal tragedy is condemned to oblivion as their plight is subsequently ignored by the national media which do not deem it to be spectacular or sensational enough to make the headlines or to *créer l'évènement* as the other dramas taking place in the *banlieue*.²⁷⁴

Another striking example of the consequence of falling into oblivion can be found in the following passage in which Nadia denounces the press' unique fascination for drama and tragedies in the immigrant community and the ease with which they can put them in the spotlight. While no major newspapers or television channel, except her Middle school's newspaper, take interest in their personal tragedy, Nadia bitterly recalls how the story of two young girls found dead in captivity in Algeria set off a media frenzy. Faced with such hypocrisy, Nadia cannot help but conclude that

[...] il faut un crime raciste, une bagarre dans un bistrot entre bandes rivales de délinquants parmi lesquels on trouve aussi bien des Français de souche que des Maghrébins, il faut un drame comme le suicide d'une gamine ou la mort d'une petite Malienne des suites d'une excision; il faut le braquage d'une station-service ou un contrôle d'identité se concluant par une balle tirée dans le dos d'un Arabe pour que nous devenions des sujets dignes d'intérêt pour la télé et autres médias. (86)

Only those matching the stereotypes of the good or bad immigrant are “des sujets dignes d'intérêt.” As seen in the above examples, these same stereotypes or biased gazes keep the characters and their community relevant in the media and public eye and, in this capacity, as the reluctant objects of their fascination— cause of their torment. In effect,

²⁷⁴ Whatever event constitutes the news and is made visible has to be out of the ordinary and to answer to that “logic of the spectacular” (Battegay; Bourdieu), regardless of whether it is within the limits of normalcy (daily life) or within the limits of the sensational. Like in the case of television, behind every news media outlets' “principe de sélection,” Bourdieu argues, “c'est la recherche du spectaculaire” (1) which is prioritized. Everything else judged not newsworthy or *headline-worthy* is, consequently, forced into invisibility and relegated to the realm of oblivion which we find symbolized in the current events.

this is the main feeling (of being tormented/haunted) shared by most of the Beur characters who, often confronted with racism and ignorance, find themselves the target of constant gazing or surveillance by the natives (the French) and their media. In most cases, they are the victims of a ready-made “reputation,” that is, a negative public image based on highly mediatized and pervasive stereotypes with undeniable colonial undertones.

**B. Media *Stereo-Profiling* of the Beurs and the Power of the Gaze:
Unveiling a Reversed Case of Haunting.**

Like the American man who felt slandered by television programs, the family who accused their television set of haunting them, or the mother who felt the “gaze” of the entire French nation through a television camera, Beur characters often find themselves in similar eerie situations caused by the Media’s fascination or obsession with them. As we shall see later in this chapter, whether it is Brahim, Nadia, Yaz or Sherazade, such treatment by the media traps the characters in a vicious cycle, or worse puts them under a curse from which they cannot escape: “Quelle est cette malédiction qui s’acharne sur nous? Comment échapper à ses méfaits?” (Ben Jelloun 123).

This curse of the Evil Eye, I posit, as it manifests itself in these narratives, is the direct result of the mass media’s systematic profiling and obsession with a number of pre-fabricated, stereotypical images. Activated through the media or social exposure of the Beurs, stereotypes in these novels act as both the trigger and site of the materialization of a nation’s scopic drive and of a disturbingly haunting deeply rooted in a not so remote past: the colonial era.

Wherever the Beur characters go, whatever they do, whomever they encounter, there is a prejudice and a stereotype. It is as if they cannot escape the stereotype, and especially their sociotype, which Petri Hottola defines in “Real–and-Imagined Women: Goddess America Meets the World”²⁷⁵ (2013) as “a social stereotype,” that is, “an essentially powerful perception that may develop into an archetype, an image thought to truthfully reflect the inherent characteristic of a group of people” (227). For Dominic Wolton, in “From Colonial Stereotypes to the Postcolonial gaze”²⁷⁶, in a postcolonial context, such impossibility to escape stereotypes and in particular the (post)colonial stereotype can be explained by the fact that the stereotype is paradoxically a “normal” and “necessary” representational practice which defines our relationship to others, in this case, the immigrants and the Beurs.²⁷⁷ Still according to him, “[t]here exists no communication without a representation of the Other, because the Other is never a “reality” but a virtuality. [...] There exists no relationship with the Other without representation, as indeed there exists no communication with the Other without stereotypes.” (536). Prejudice, stereotypes and *clichés*, Pierre André Taguieff points out, are “des schémas cognitifs et affectifs anticipés, préexistant dans l’opinion publique’ avant que tel individu ne les fasse siens [...]”. Les préjugés remplissent une fonction

²⁷⁵ Petri Hottola, “Real –and-Imagined Women: Goddess America Meets the World,” *The Host Gaze in Global Tourism*. Eds, Omar Moufakkir and Yvette Reisinger, (Wallingford: CABI, 2013).

²⁷⁶ Dominic Wolton, “From Colonial Stereotypes to the Postcolonial gaze. The need for an Evolution of the Imaginary” in *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*. Eds. Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, Dominic Thomas. Trans. Alexis Pernsteiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

²⁷⁷ It should be noticed once again that, in a postcolonial context, these marginalized populations coming from France’s former colonies play the role of the postcolonial Other formerly played by the colonized (the *indigène*).

d'accommodation dans la société [...]”.²⁷⁸ Thus, for Wolton, “we cannot approach the Other without stereotyping him or her. This is a fact.”²⁷⁹ In the case of postcolonial subject like the Immigrant or the *Beur*, there is nothing that he can do to really escape them, “inasmuch as it is external focus. It is the product of a colonial system and a gaze, of popular culture-which can be “colonial” of publicly or privately produced images [...]”²⁸⁰

This last point is particularly important since the role of mass media, and in our case visual media, in the (re)production of such representational practices from another time²⁸¹ is now a recognized fact that cannot be ignored. As seen in chapter 1, mass media remain powerful political and ideological tools at the service of those in power and used to subjugate minority and disempowered groups like immigrants. In addition, and as noted by Atangana Kouna, “Les préjugés apparaissent [...] comme des canvas de jugement préétablis sur autrui, dont la fonction est de l'enfermer dans son étrangeté, de lui nier les valeurs de la société d'accueil (cas des immigrés). Au sujet de ces derniers, il

²⁷⁸ Pierre André Taguieff, *La Force du Préjugé. Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles*, 243, qtd in Christophe D. Atangana Kouna, *La Symbolique de l'immigré* :166. Christophe D. Atangana Kouna, *La Symbolique de l'immigré dans le roman francophone contemporain*, (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2016).

²⁷⁹ Wolton 536.

²⁸⁰ Wolton 536.

²⁸¹ As a matter of fact, the role of print or visual media (i.e. newspapers, books, postcards, cinema) in the construction of a negative representation of the colonized, as the ultimate Other during colonization has long been studied by postcolonial scholars, theorists, critics and writers such as Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), Malek Alloula in *The Colonial Harem* (1986), or Elizabeth Ezra's *The Colonial Unconscious. Race and Culture in Interwar France* (2000). In their collective work, *L'autre et nous* (1995), Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Stéphane Blanchoin, Gilles Boetsch, and Hubert Gerbeay (eds.) remind us that visual representations of the colonized Other, in comparison with verbal images (written or oral) were crucial tools for the colonial propaganda and particularly in the construction of the figure of the “indigène” or in the construction of what would be known as the East (l'Orient). Thus, thanks to development and use of media like literature, photography, cinema, or radio, the propagation of these verbal or visual images contributed to the construction of an imaginary through the normalization and acceptance of stereotypes as well as the discourse on the African or oriental Other seen as the antithesis of the Westerners. These images also played an important role in colonial propaganda that promoted the subjugation and control of these populations. They helped to tame the “savage” in the collective imagination in the metropole, by conveying discourses and stereotypes that aim to make him more real.

apparaît que le préjugé est au centre du regard et du discours sur eux [...]”²⁸² More than half a century after the “official” end of colonization, it appears that a lot remains to be done in decolonizing the mind along with the gaze when it comes to those labeled as “ethnic minorities” having migrated from the ex-colonies of the Maghreb and West Africa. Political discourses such as former president Nicolas Sarkozy’s in Dakar (2007)²⁸³ or the comparison of Minister of Justice, Christiane Taubira, to an ape by a Far-right newspaper in 2013, are crude examples of the obstinacy of stereotypes and the manifestation of what some have called the “specter of colonization,” or of a “colonial unconscious.”²⁸⁴ Exotic, menacing, dangerous, uncivilized, culturally and physically different, these ways of thinking, talking about, and mostly of representing the Immigrant, whether it is in the media, in political discourses, or in the public sphere, are strongly reminiscent of a rhetoric of images and discourses of another time, when the Immigrant or *Jeune de banlieue*’s role was played by the *indigène colonisé*. It is no wonder why, based on his alterity, difference and strangeness in the eyes of native French people, the Immigrant still represents a “figure de la colonisation” (Didier Lapeyronnie quoted in Atangana Kouna). When it comes to the representational practices used to identify

²⁸² Atangana Kouna 166.

²⁸³ During that famous discourse, then-president Nicolas Sarkozy declared, among other things, that the “drame de l’Afrique” was mainly due to the fact that the African man had yet to enter History and was too nostalgic of a lost childhood: “Le problème de l’Afrique, c’est qu’elle vit trop le présent dans la nostalgie du paradis perdu de l’enfance. [...] Dans cet imaginaire où tout recommence toujours, il n’y a de place ni pour l’aventure humaine ni pour l’idée de progrès.” An extract of this discourse can be found on the following website page : <<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/173901/politique/france-s-n-gal-extraits-du-discours-de-dakar-prononc-par-nicolas-sarkozy-en-2007/>>.

²⁸⁴ Indeed, these representations, discourses, and attitudes, disseminated within the public sphere, political circles and the media, are the signs of what Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (2005), have identified as the “colonial fracture” caused by an unexamined colonial unconscious persisting in politics, institutions and the media and dividing France into two opposing camps: “Nous” and “Eux.”

and categorize the *Beur*, we find the latter chained to a long series of images and discourses more or less similar to the ones used during colonialism.

In the *Beur* and *banlieue* fictions analyzed, four main (post)colonial stereotypical images emerge as the most recurrent and most haunting ones used by public authorities and the mass media²⁸⁵ to represent the polarizing figures²⁸⁶ of the *Beur* and his female counterpart, the so-called *Beurette*. While on one hand, we find the societal stereotype of the *Lascar* or delinquent and terrorist in *Le sourire de Brahim* and *Boumkoeur*; on the other hand, in *Shérázade* and *Les raisins de la galère*, it is the colonial stereotype of the veiled woman perceived as submissive or sensual and reminiscent of the figure of the Algerian women of the colonial harem that stands out.²⁸⁷

If one thing is sure, in effect, it is that when it comes to the media representation of the male immigrant, especially of the male suburban youth of Maghrebi descent, we are far from the image of the sympathetic, almost pathetic image of the “travailleur immigré,” living in muddy shanty towns or the “cité dortoirs” of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Instead, he has progressively been replaced by the more threatening figure of the

²⁸⁵ Repetition, as seen in chapter 1, is always the sign of a haunting.

²⁸⁶ As I mentioned in chapter 1, the figure of the *Beur* is a polarizing one for he is neither villain nor hero.

²⁸⁷ I am particularly aware of the extensive scholarship that has already been done regarding the genealogy of postcolonial stereotypes of the dominated, marginalized and oppressed groups. Such correlations between colonial and postcolonial stereotypes have for instance been made by scholars as respected as Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, Alec Hargreaves, Dominic Thomas, Pascal Blanchard, Mathieu Rigouste, Mireille Rosello, to name a few. Within the limit of this presentation, my intention here is not to conduct an extensive analysis of the context, nature, mode of production and transmission of those stereotypes but to highlight to main characteristics of this colonial unconscious which keeps inhabiting French collective imagination nowadays. I also agree with Wolton that “one must be particularly cautious in bringing forth the concept of stereotype and of its ‘colonial’ and ‘societal’ nature,” as one must always bring in mind that stereotypes, like any representational systems and practices, evolve according to their time and space.” One must be able to “distinguish between the product of a given time period in general and the direct impact of a system—such as colonialism—on the gaze— as it is turned on the Other” (536).

“jeune de banlieue,” product of France’s impoverished crime-ridden immigrant-dominated inner cities and perfect target for right-wing and far-right political parties—such as the National Front. In fact, when evoking the *banlieue*, it would be difficult not to admit that, under the influence of the media, what comes to mind is often this image of the *juvenile delinquent* who steals, deals, is often unemployed, and is a social misfit.

As we have seen with *Boumkoeur* or *Le Sourire de Brahim*,²⁸⁸ this image of the juvenile delinquent is also the most insistent and recurring one found in Beur and *banlieue* fictions and, for the characters, probably the most obsessive and haunting one in the collective unconscious. As a negative consequence of their popularity, such stereotypical images have managed to overshadow the popular image of the “immigré qui a réussi” or *Beurgeois* who, after the politization and mediatization of the Beur movement, came to be seen positively as an “agent of modernity” (Battegay). A social and cultural agent, he is embodied in the “animateur de quartier,” the educator, the businessman, the sportsman, the writer, or the politician.²⁸⁹ Instead, what has pervaded the collective imagination is the public image of the young delinquent, member of a “bande ethnique” and living off petty crimes.

²⁸⁸ Both novels were written before the riots of Fall 2005 which, starting in reaction to the death of two teenage boys after a random police control, were to leave, thanks to the rhetoric of discourses and images (e.g. images of burning cars, of masked rioters confronting the police) used by the media and politics, a solid imprint in France’s collective imagination and to immortalize the *banlieue* as a violent space ruled by ethnic gangs.

²⁸⁹ For politics and the mass media, the *Beurgeois*, plays the role of local or national intermediary between the ‘France d’en haut’ and the ‘France d’en bas’ and is a perfect example of successful integration. Azouz Begag, for instance, is an exemplary figure of the *Beurgeois*, as a researcher, a writer and as an important political figure. Member of the government of Dominic de Villepin, he was named delegate minister for Equal Opportunities of France from 2005 to 2007.

This stereotypical image also competes with a more *extreme* one: the “extremist,” another common figure in Beur and *banlieue* fictions linked to the stereotypical figure of the Muslim ‘Arab’ man. As mentioned in chapter 1, in the case of France’s immigrants, negative correlations as well as broad generalizations equating the qualifier “North African” with other loaded terms such as “Arab,” “Immigrant,” “suburban youth,” or “terrorist” have resulted in dangerous essentializations of these subaltern figures. Consequently, in the eyes of the public, the *banlieue* problem has become nothing less than a collective and ethnic problem.²⁹⁰

Such essentializing and reductionist practices are echoed in the aforementioned scene from *Boumkoeur* during which the only (and probably the typical) concern of the journalist is to find out from the *jeunes* their relationship with the Algerian political party “FIS” or “Front Islamique du Salut” (Islamic Salvation Front) and the extremist group “GIA” or “Groupe Islamiste armé” (Armed Islamist Group) whose terrorist activities peaked during the 1990s in Algeria and France²⁹¹: “Qui parmi vous possède des armes? Qui vend de la drogue ? Qui a son bac ? Qui fait régulièrement ses prières dans les mosquées clandestines ou règnent les membres du FIS et du GIA ?” (20-21). Through

²⁹⁰ According to Guy Lochard, this *ethnicisation* is directly inherited from the past : “[...] on a vu se perpétuer dans les positions affichées—parfois les plus antagoniques—, cette logique ancienne d’‘ethnicisation’ des rapports sociaux qui concerne, au premier chef, les jeunes habitants des cités puisqu’elle aboutit obstinément à définir leurs identités individuelle et collective par leur origine géographique” (151).

²⁹¹ Born and acting mainly in Algeria, one of the main actors of the Algerian civil war, the terrorist organization known as the GIA also spread its influence and war against the Algerian secular government (its goal was to establish an Islamic state) in several European countries including France. Its actions in France were particularly traumatic for the entire nation when, protesting against French policy in Algeria, it proceeded to organize several terrorist attacks on its very own soil in 1995, striking her at the heart of its capital during the famous attack of the Saint Michel station. Like what happened during the Algerian war with the presence and role of the FLN in France, individuals of North African descent came to be seen as “enemies from within” and became the target of many discriminatory practices.

this example, it is clear that Djaïdani is, once again, shedding light on media malpractice and manipulation of information, and in particular on the tendency to have recourse to broad generalizations that only serve to stigmatize further this part of the French society. Perceived as a tank full of criminals, France inner cities are also recurrently depicted as the gathering point of many religious extremists (*islamistes*), a negative component of the media figure of the “Arab” and “Muslim” as shown by Mathieu Rigouste and Thomas Deltombe in “L’ennemi intérieur: la construction médiatique de la figure de l’Arabe.” Indeed, in addition of their being a symbolic space of exclusion and marginalization, the *banlieues* have often been considered as safe harbors for terrorist cells and the perfect place to recruit young, socially alienated, and disgruntled individuals to participate in future terrorist activities in France or the West more generally. Ever since the worldwide rise of terrorist attacks and religious fundamentalism in the Middle East and, closer to home, in Europe,²⁹² immigrant youths have been associated with the figure of the Islamic “terrorist” or religious fanatic, turning him into the perfect suspect or “ennemi de l’intérieur” (Rigouste and Deltombe).²⁹³ It is also conspicuous that such a discursive

²⁹² These stereotypes, which appeared in the 1980s, were to be reinforced during the 1990s after several bomb attacks, linked to the Algerian “Groupe Islamiste Armé” (GIA), took place in the Parisian metro in 1995, as well as in the early 2000s especially after 9/11 attack in the United States claimed by *Al Qaeda*. As in the case of the GIA’s attacks in France, the *Al Qaeda*’s attacks contributed to building a violent image of North African and Muslim communities perceived as fundamentalists wanting to impose Islam by force. The most recent terrorist attacks in Paris in January and November 2015 and claimed by the terrorist group ISIS (the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria) have only contributed to reinforce that image.

²⁹³ As shown by many historians and scholars, such practices are intrinsically linked to the arrival of millions of individuals from the former colonies, most of Muslim faith, since the 1960s, has created an unexpected shift in France’s social and cultural landscape and also in the collective imagination. The entrance of these individuals and their descendants in the realm of the visible happened during a time when the “Français de souche” still had to come to terms with the affront to national pride resulting from the loss of the Algerian war. Furthermore, with the fear of the “enemy from within” and the fact that the specter of the Algerian war still haunting France’s collective imagination and its media, it is therefore not surprising that Islam and Muslim culture, and by extension, the *jeune de banlieue* of North African origins, are continuously perceived as a *threat*, or as the epitome of the traitor like the *fellagh* before him. The term

configuration can only lead to the reinforcing of stereotypes. And yet, the *Jeune de banlieue* is not the only one haunted by stereotypes linked to his socio-cultural environment, origins, and appearance. The *Beurette* or French woman of Maghrebi descent is also the victim of the media's negative representations of the *banlieue* and the target of fantasies of a radical alterity ("fantasmes d'une alterité radicale entre le Nous et ce Eux [the collective Other]," Lochard 154) deeply rooted in the colonial era.

If one thing must be said is that the figure of the *Beurette*, and by extension of the Maghrebi woman, has evolved over the course of many years and multiple media coverage. Like her male counterpart, the *Beurette* also has acquired a greater visibility since the 1980s and especially the "affaires du voile" and, for this reason, has been subjected to the objectifying gaze of the Other by being its center of attention. Like her male counterpart, she also has become a symbol of an entire generation, pushing the boundaries between tradition and modernity, by redefining the role of the Maghrebi woman and her place in French society. According to Caitlyn Killian in "The Other Side of the Veil," "[i]n the eyes of the host society, immigrant women are seen in one of two ways: as either "barriers to assimilation" because of their insistence on maintaining cultural traditions or, as the opposite, "vehicles of integration into dominant society" (568).²⁹⁴ Raised and educated in France from immigrant parents, torn between two cultures, most of the *Beurette*'s life consists in acting out her role within the Maghrebi community as the "guardian of the traditions of the home country," a good wife and good

fellaghas was used during the Algerian war to refer to the FLN fighter fighting for the independence of his country, Algeria, and the end of French colonization.

²⁹⁴ Caitlyn Killian in "The Other Side of the Veil. North African Women in France Respond to the Headscarf Affair," *Gender and Society* 17-4 (August 2003):568.

mother, while facing pressures from French society to conform to another role, that of symbol of integration and emancipation. It is a theme that we find in many Beur novels staging a *Beurette* as its main character such as, to name a few, Sakhinna Boukhedenna's *Journal Nationalité immigré*, Soraya Nini's *Ils disent que je suis une Beurrette (1993)*, or even Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Les raisins de la galère*.

The stereotypical rebellious *Beurette* of the early 1980s has been replaced by the veiled woman of the 1990s and 2000s, a symbol of feminine oppression, of political dissension and even, to some extent, of mysterious sensuality.²⁹⁵ The negative image of the veil is not new but the intensity and duration of the controversy betray a long-term obsession or haunting in the French collective imagination. According to Killian, one should remember that “the struggle over Maghrebi women's dress began long before their immigration to France in the 1970s. French and British colonizers encouraged Muslim women to remove the veil and emulate European women. Consequently, in Algeria and other North African and Middle Eastern countries, the veil became a symbol of national identity and opposition to the West during independence and nationalist movements” (570).

²⁹⁵ It is during the period between 1989 and 1995, and more recently in the first decade of the 2000s, that this polarizing figure emerged in the French collective imagination as well as on the political and media scene thanks to what will famously be known as the “affaire du foulard,” which divided French public opinion. It all started in 1989 in a *collège* in Creil when three pupils came to their school wearing a headscarf and were subsequently banned by the director after refusing to remove it. Quickly picked up by the press and politicians, the 1989 incident was blown out of proportion, dividing the public between defenders of “a *droit à la différence*” and religious freedom and the proud defenders of France’s secular republican school system. The controversy reached its peak when, finally, it led to the voting of a law banning any religious symbol and proselytism from all French Republican schools in 2004 (“*loi sur les signes religieux dans les écoles publiques*”) by the Chirac government. This event was the first of a long series which, in more recent time, reached a higher level with the official banning in October 2010 of the wearing of the “*voile intégral*” (also known in France as *burqa*) in public spaces.

Still today, it remains a “symbol of contention” (Killian), crystallizing the hope and fears of an entire society, as the “headscarf affair raised questions about the rights of minority groups, religious expression in schools, and integration of the immigrant population” (Killian 567), as well as questions about Frenchness, that is to say, about French national and cultural identity.²⁹⁶ Thus, to the veil is attached a long series of images, clichés, stereotypes and, as a result, a plethora of meanings and connotations. Toni Lewis and Neil Macmaster, in their article “Orientalism: From Unveiling to hyperveiling” (1998),²⁹⁷ effectively point out how in Europe “the image of the veil, both in texts, painting and photographs, is strategically placed to signify a much wider field of religious, social and cultural practices which include purdah, the harem, polygamy, a repressive political order based on the subjugation of women, Oriental despotism, sadism and lasciviousness” (n. pag.). It is a register of images and discourses that combine both modern stereotypes and old ones which can be traced back to the colonial figure of the Oriental woman, and more particularly, to the figure of the *Odalisques* of the harem. Clearly, the figure of the veiled woman of the harem is an image that contrasts with the modern one; it crystallizes not only the fear, but also the fantasies and desires of the Western male. For Lewis and Macmaster, what we are witnessing today is the fruit of a “dramatic inversion,” as we have gone from the desire of unveiling the Oriental woman

²⁹⁶ Indeed, according to Trica Keaton, in “Arrogant Assimilationism: National Identity Politics and African-Origin Muslim Girls in the Other France” (2005): “the veil has come to symbolize something at antipodes to French values and culture, triggering laws and policies aimed at Franco conformity” (406).

²⁹⁷ Lewis, Toni and Neil Macmaster, “Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling.” *Journal of European Studies* 28.1-2 (1998): 121+. *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Web. 13 Sep. 2015.

to the desire of hyperveiling her.²⁹⁸ They point out that when it comes to the representation of the Algerian veiled woman,

during the whole of the French colonial period [...] ‘classic’ Orientalism was centered on erotic images of unveiling or what might be termed the ‘Scheherazade syndrome.’ This fiction, a projection of European masculine fantasies, which claimed to uncover and expose to the public gaze the inner secrets of the forbidden and sacred, the harem and the Turkish baths (hammam), reflected French colonial hegemony [...].²⁹⁹

While Lewis and Macmaster caution that “this kind of representation remained remarkably unchanging in its essentials until the mid-twentieth century, Leïla Sebbar’s novel, *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée*, seems to prove otherwise. In *Shérazade*, Sebbar brings to the fore all the issues previously examined, including the visual representation, exoticization, sexualization, and eroticization of the Arab woman. She also pinpoints the question of the (neo) colonial, objectifying and voyeuristic gaze of the French Other.

While the image of a woman or teenager wearing the veil have traditionally contributed to the obsession or perverse fascination with the *beurette*, in Sebbar’s novel it is another stereotype, this time more sexualized, that is once again the cause of obsession: the *Odalisque*.

In this novel, the eponymous character, Shérazade, much like the *Odalisque* of the nineteenth century, finds herself the constant object of the French natives’ gaze and perverse fascination. She is also in a constant struggle to distance herself from the female Maghrebi stereotypes conveyed in the mass media and art (orientalist paintings and

²⁹⁸ This idea of hyperveiling the North African women stems essentially from the tendency to represent her as “heavily veiled” (Lewis, Macmaster).

²⁹⁹ In other words, the act of unveiling was the marker of colonial domination while the act of hyperveiling became the marker of a political protectionism against an external threat.

photographs) and legacy of the past. Characterized by an ekphrastic writing, Leïla Sebbar's novel *Shérazade* is full of references to different visual media and artistic representations, in particular iconographic representations of Algerian women captured in photographs and paintings. Indeed, Sebbar's narrative abounds in particular with references to and descriptions of orientalist paintings of "Odalisques"—the famous Harem women who captured the imagination of Western artists like Eugene de Lacroix—as well as of descriptions of photographs the protagonist comes across in books and magazines, advertising shoots she observes and portraits of her taken by her friend Julien Desrosiers, a French student of *Pied-noir* origins and specialist of oriental languages. A passionate collector of orientalist paintings, Julien is particularly obsessed with Odalisques. As a consequence, he compares Shérazade—whose truncated name is a direct reference to queen Schéhérazade from the *Arabian Nights*—many times directly to these legendary figures.³⁰⁰ Hiding behind this passion for Odalisques is thus the stereotypical image of the Maghrebi woman, full of eroticism, exoticism and mystery. Regardless the name of the artist and whatever the price of the work of art, Julien admits that he is ready to buy any painting "pourvu qu'il y ait une femme algérienne [...]. Une femme arabe" (98). Later, he also confesses to Shérazade to loving Maghrebi women only "en peinture," revealing thus his preference for the copy over the original.

This stereotypical image of the Odalisque is what attracts Julien to Shérazade, as he keeps seeing her only through this filter. Fascinated with Shérazade's uncanny beauty

³⁰⁰ Thanks to him, Shérazade, who was born in France to immigrant Algerian parents, discovers a part of her Algerian culture heretofore unknown to her and starts learning literary Arabic. With Julien or by herself, she also revisits the history between France and Algeria, their colonial past, and sensitive topics such as the Algerian war, about which he refuses to talk.

and exoticism, Julien starts developing an unhealthy obsession with her image, as characterized by his irrepressible urge to photograph her and to turn her into a living painting—an Odalisque. For him, she is not a woman but an incarnation of this ideal of the perfect Maghrebi woman; she is an *objet d'art* to be possessed, displayed and worshiped. Hence, Julien's relationship with Shérazade, his relentless comparison of her body to that of an Odalisque, is not only symptomatic of his own incapacity to go beyond his fascination with the object of his desire, it is also ultimately emblematic of the way part of French society continues to see those members of France's ex-colonies and thus a throwback to the colonial era. He is haunted by the object of his own desire and in a twisted way causes her, through his gaze (the *fascinating gaze*), to fall victim to a reverse haunting or curse similar to that caused by the Evil Eye. Shérazade is relentlessly pursued by the specter of Orientalism and colonization conjured up by the many photographs and paintings of Odalisque. Such a haunting and its effects irremediably force a reflection on the power at stake in such a relationship with the *seeing* Other (the French spectators) and the way the postcolonial subject manages to free him/herself from its oppressive and violent control. In the final section of this chapter my intent is to show how, by confronting the objectifying and alienating gaze of the French public and its media, the subaltern figure embodied by the Beur characters embarks on successful path toward more freedom, agency and a greater sense of self.

III. From Eye to I: Violent Postcolonial Encounters and the Warding off of the Evil Eye.

A. Confronting the Evil Eye: Postcolonial Stereotypes as Site of Symbolic Violence and Symptom of Social Oppression.

For Wafae Karzazi in “L’écriture du corps chez Leïla Sebbar,”³⁰¹ “[I]e regard de l’autre est un élément essentiel dans la construction sociale du corps. Sebbar, dans *Shérazade, dix-sept ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, fait fréquemment allusion au regard porté par certains milieux parisiens, qualifiés de « nouvelle bourgeoisie esthète et cultivée », sur les jeunes d’origine maghrébine ou africaine” (8). In their case, this “regard” is often an orientalist and objectifying one, fed by images and stereotypes of another time and which projects the most hidden fantasies and unavowed desires of these “milieux” on that young fascinating “object” (the colonized, the Odalisques, the delinquent). Materializing the scopic drive of a few individuals in an entire nation, the media attention and the engendered stereotypes function in these novels not only as the site of a disturbing haunting deeply rooted in a not so remote past—the colonial era— but they are also in many ways perfect embodiments of the powerful gaze of the French native/Other as represented by the Evil eye. In effect, if the belief in the power of the gaze of an ill intended Other is not exclusive to mythology, then the evil eyes of Medusa could very well be compared to the Gaze which emanates from European or French (tele)visual media.

Whether it is the Medusa-like gaze of the former colonizer or the media, they both have petrifying and reifying powers and any encounter with them is often detrimental as it is the site, at the bodily and psychic levels, of an incredible symbolic violence and oppression, which the characters must confront and ward off in order to operate as free agents. As seen above, under Julien’s gaze Shérazade is stripped of her humanness and

³⁰¹ Karzazi, Wafae, " L’écriture du corps chez Leïla Sebbar," *Loxias 22. Littérature française et comparée* (2008) : 1-12. <<http://revel.unice.fr/loxias/index.html?id=2458>>

agency. The power of that gaze or evil eye is particularly well pinpointed by the narrator who describes how, after an unsuccessful attempt at purchasing a painting, Julien laid eyes on Shérazade for the first time: “il s’arrêta pour la regarder [...] [oubliant] tout à fait cet exotisme d’artifice [the painting] lorsqu’il aperçut à sa place, Shérazade” (Sebbar 75). At that very moment, the young girl is no longer a human but a living painting; she is a stereotypical icon an “Odalisque,” in the envious and desiring eyes of Julien. More than her body, it is her image that Julien wants to capture on film and possess.³⁰² This obsession is what leads him to take hundreds of pictures behind which the real Shérazade dematerializes and becomes invisible.

Hence, by turning each of these characters into objects of desire that can be possessed and subdued, the French natives’ mediated gaze not only violates and oppresses them to the point that they are left questioning their sense of self, agency and identity as a human being. From that angle, we could not agree more with Homi K. Bhabha when he argues in “The Other Question” that

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relation. (75)³⁰³

Caught in the eye of the camera, prisoners of the stereotype, Beur protagonists Nadia, Yaz, Shérazade and Brahim struggle to break free from its power and the representational

³⁰² This point is particularly interesting and has been stressed by Susan Sontag who, as we have seen in chapter 1, argues in *On Photography* and *Regarding the pain of Others*, that people or things that are photographed become objects that can be symbolically possessed: “Photographs objectify: they turn an event or person into something that can be possessed,” (Sontag, *On Photography* 91).

³⁰³ Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question,” *The Location of Culture*: 75.

web that has come to predetermine their public image and social identity. In these novels, media and their stereotypes act as a dangerous weapon.³⁰⁴

Writing about the world of journalism and the way television, as an institution, operates, Pierre Bourdieu argues in *On Television* that television has become an “instrument d’oppression symbolique” (8). For him, with television, “on a à faire [...] à un instrument qui, théoriquement donne la possibilité d’atteindre tout le monde [...]” (12), but in its structure, it exerts what he calls a “symbolic violence” (*violence symbolique*), an indirect form of violence that aims to maintain the domination of the strongest over disempowered groups (16). On this point we could not agree more with Bourdieu since we live in a panoptic world, an era of intense surveillance and hypervisibility, where nothing escapes the field of vision and where “Big Brother” media, a symbol of hegemonic powers, have seemingly managed in many ways, often unknown to us, to control (and discipline) our minds and bodies. Yet, Bourdieu goes even further to define this type of violence as “une violence qui s’exerce avec la complicité tacite de ceux qui la subissent et aussi souvent, de ceux qui l’exercent dans la mesure où les uns et les autres sont inconscients de l’exercer ou de la subir” (16).

The reference by Bourdieu to a “complicité” (a complicity), that is to say, to some type of involvement or bond between the two opposite parties, is particularly compelling since, as we have seen in *Boumkoeur*, the target of this violence by images is often guilty of playing a role in it. Furthermore, the idea of such interplay definitely resonates with

³⁰⁴ This dangerousness is mainly due to the fact that those stereotypes, as conveyed by the media, manage to substitute fiction for reality, the virtual object of vision for the real subject (Wolton 536). As seen with the figure of the terrorist, such stereotypical representations clearly work as filters or screens, which prevent the public from really seeing them for who they are in all their diversity and individuality. This mainly results in their stigmatization by part of society and its media, and their spectralization.

Freud's idea according to which the victim of the Evil Eye is also unconsciously responsible for his or her misfortune. It is, thus, in the exchange of looks that we should locate another trigger of that symbolic violence—aftermath of the Evil Eye. In the novels previously examined, it is, effectively, in the exchange of gazes between the media and host society, and the subaltern figures of the *Beur* or *Jeune de banlieue*, that I primarily locate signs and symptoms of the type of violence that Kelly Oliver identifies in *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* as the pathology of oppression. Like with Medusa, whose deadly gaze could petrify anything and anybody, the shock of this encounter between the subaltern subject with the gaze of the French natives is so violent that it can also petrify them, turning them into a dehumanized and unrecognizable being. Oppression marks its victims. According to Oliver, “oppression makes people into faceless objects or lesser subjects. The lack of visage in objects renders them invisible in any ethical or political sense” (149). The Subaltern—like the *Beur*—under the gaze of his nemesis, the French media (or society), is turned into a faceless being, petrified and shattered in his inner self as he is being denied all individuality, agency and humanity. All these reasons lead us to suggest that it is at the discomfort and other turmoil that follow this confrontation that we should primarily look in order to understand what we could call the postmodern phenomenon of the Evil Eye and the way it is experienced physically and psychically by those subjected to it.

B. Diagnosing the Evil Eye: Of Shame, Anger, Scopophobia, and Alienation as Psychosomatic Symptoms of Oppression.

As previously stated, the characters in these novels typically find themselves in the position of those whom Mireille Rosello has named “reluctant witnesses,” that is as “[people] who ha[ve] been invited to represent a stereotype or witness such a representation” (Laura Reeck, *Writerly Identities* 131). Their positioning as reluctant witnesses is made clear as they become aware of the way society looks at them. Such witnessing and awareness have a profound and violent effect on them as they realize that their existence depends, first and foremost, on their visibility and the recognition by others.

Like in Frantz Fanon’s depiction of the Martinican’s first and true experience of racism and confrontation with the (white) Other’s racist gaze in France, this confrontation and concomitant recognition are not without consequences: “And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us. The real world robbed us of our share” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 90). During that scene, the Martinican man becomes violently aware of his blackness and that he is nothing in the eyes of that French Other; worse yet, he recognizes that he is also nothing without him: he exists only through the white man’s eyes that “fixes [him, the black man]” (89). He realizes that for his white counterpart he is nothing but a body, a black body; he is not a human being but “an object among other objects.”³⁰⁵ He realizes that he cannot escape it, “locked in this suffocating reification,”³⁰⁶ for the all-seeing gaze is omnipresent and omnipotent. At that very moment, he feels petrified, and his confidence and sense of self are shattered, annihilated as if he had been touched by an atomic bomb: “As a result, the body schema,

³⁰⁵ Fanon 89.

³⁰⁶ Fanon 89.

attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema. In the train it was question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple. [...] I was no longer enjoying myself” (92). As he progressively and violently becomes aware of his own alterity and difference, he first feels numbness, discomfort, and shame, which then turn into an uncontrollable anger.

Like the Martinican man, as they become brutally aware that their existence depends on their visibility and recognition by French society, Nadia, Shérazade, Yaz, Brahim and other characters of immigrant descent appear to share, to some extent, the same experience while displaying similar symptoms of oppression. These characters are all aware that they only exist for society when they are under the spotlight, subjected to the public gaze, and when they fit the the mold of the social identity imposed by those in power.³⁰⁷ They also know that the media do not have their best interest at heart as they keep associating them (the immigrants) with negative and humiliating images; as a consequence, not only are they wary, they also express feelings of frustration, of betrayal and of embarrassment. It is at least what is suggested in this passage from *Les Raisins* in which Nadia’s father expresses both his dismay and shame regarding the way French television has been portraying “Arabs”: “Mon père avait honte quand on montrait à la télé des Arabes à qui on avait retiré leur dignité. Il disait qu’on parlait de nous qu’en cas de malheur” (62).

³⁰⁷ As seen previously, to be in the spotlight requires for the *Beur* or the Immigrant to be considered as a hot topic exciting discussion and analysis, and thus worthy of being scrutinized and published or aired on television.

Their humiliation and exasperation are even more aggravated when they realize that the same media are generally insensitive to their fate.³⁰⁸ For Nadia, such disinterest and the invisibility to which it relegates them can only be explained by the fact that they are not conforming to the *cliché* of the dysfunctional “Arab” family, one that is plagued by drugs, illiteracy, forced marriages, religious fundamentalism, and other forms of violence:

La vie tranquille, le bonheur de vivre en paix ne font pas les bonnes histoires ni les gros titres. Nul besoin de mobiliser des équipes de télé pour faire savoir à la France entière que la famille Belaïd se porte bien, que le père travaille normalement, que la mère s’occupe à la perfection de ses enfants, que la drogue change de trottoir quand elle s’approche de cette famille-là, que les filles sont libérées, que les garçons font des études supérieures, bref, que tout, tout va bien. (Ben Jelloun 85-86)³⁰⁹

Rarely making the headlines or shown during primetime news, they only appeal to the voyeuristic gaze and inner desires of a public thirsty for sensations when portrayed as delinquents or modern day “Odalisques” like Naïma, daughter of Moroccan immigrants whose dream to “faire du cinéma” (97) leads her to flee to Italy where she is finally able to launch a successful modeling career. This type of unequal media coverage is the cause of many discomfort feelings among the characters. The Beur characters’ discomfort in face of these types of images (like Naïma’s modeling pictures) is further corroborated in another passage depicting Nadia’s quest to find Naïma in Italy after her sudden disappearance. Indeed, Nadia’s encounter with Naïma’s image on a billboard illustrative of the violent psychological outcome of such witnessing. Hardly recognizing the young

³⁰⁸ As we already discussed, the media showed a particularly disinterest in their plight when they were forced to move out of their house by the mayor of Resteville.

³⁰⁹ Once again, we find echoed here Ben Jelloun’s criticisms of the French media treatment of ethnic minorities expressed in *Hospitalité française* (Ben Jelloun 1984).

girl with whom she grew up, Nadia experiences a shock at the sight of Naïma's advertised body, her nakedness and exotic features a source of an unsettling feeling, almost like a physical discomfort in Nadia which we would describe as a mix of fascination, dread, and shame:

Je me promenai et c'est alors que je vis l'affiche. Une immense affiche exhibant un corps nu de jeune fille sur toute la largeur du panneau. [...] Je m'approchai, me frottai les yeux. C'était bien elle : Naïma, plus belle que jamais, épanouie, certainement heureuse. Naïma exposant son corps pour rien. Pas tout à fait: en tournant le coin de la rue, j'aperçus la même image sur un autre panneau, accompagnée cette fois, en lettres capitales, du nom du fameux empereur du prêt-à-porter, ARNOLDO BENEDETTO. (105)

310

In front of that giant image, Nadia's first reaction is, thus, to be appalled by its gratuitous nature, its obvious intention to shamelessly sell and celebrate sex for all to see. At first, this reaction can appear particularly surprising since Nadia—the archetype of the rebellious young *beurette*—had many times before shown her open-mindedness by going against the grain of traditions and religions of her own culture by refusing to remain a virgin until marriage, and by fiercely defending the rights of women to control their own body. Yet, in front of Naïma posed as an *Odalisque*, Nadia cannot help but feel dismayed³¹¹ by the stereotypical and exoticizing nature of the advertisement. Her

³¹⁰ We should note here the indirect reference to famous Italian designer Luciano Benetton, founder of the famous fashion company, the “Benetton group,” made famous internationally for its bold marketing campaign displaying shocking images touching upon many important subjects such as race, violence, and abortion. It is also known for its slogan, “The United Colors,” as a tribute to diversity.

³¹¹ Furthermore, one should note that Naïma's pictures are also a source of discomfort for other characters in the novel. Although for different reasons, Naïma's parents are shocked, and especially her father, by the objectification and sexualization of their daughter posed as an *Odalisque* in the photograph: “J'ai perdu Naïma. Tout ça c'est du toc. Ma fille est devenue une image qui se promène dans la tête des marins et des dockers. Comment a-t-elle fait pour en arriver là ?” (111). As devoted Muslims, they express strongly their anger and the shame brought on them by the nature of these images. For them, that shame can only lead to the symbolic death of the daughter that they had raised; they proceed, thus, to “bury” her.

discomfort is primarily due to her realizing that Naïma and her image had been sold like any exotic object : “En feuilletant divers magazines féminins, je me rendis compte que sa silhouette était partout, accompagnant yaourts, crèmes de beauté, dessous de soie, voitures, fourrures [...] Ces prestations devaient dater de l’époque où Benedetto n’avait pas encore acquis l’exclusivité de son image. Naïma avait donc été achetée” (106-107). It is as if, with his name, Arnaldo Benedetto, written in giant letters on the image of a naked Naïma, the designer clearly was claiming his property, letting everybody know that he owns not only her image but also her body and soul. Naïma was just another Benedetto commodity offered for sale.³¹²

Anger and contempt towards the media are, thus, the most common feelings expressed by these “reluctant witnesses” as they find themselves the object of the perverse and voyeuristic gaze of French society. In *Le sourire de Brahim*, the dismay of the youths toward the media is omnipresent throughout the novel and can be corroborated in the previously mentioned scene³¹³ depicting the reaction of the “jeunes” during the media frenzy caused by the death of one of them (Larbi): “Mais les jeunes ne supportaient pas. Ils considéraient les médias comme les propagateurs des thèses racistes, cultivant l’instinct de voyeurisme des gens, plus qu’autre chose ” (134). As already mentioned, regardless of the political allegiance of the news media, the youths’ distrust *vis-à-vis* this enemy appears to be unanimous as illustrated by Brahim’s nicknames for the journalists: “vautours” and “mouches à merde.” The depth of that anger and distrust

³¹² Symbolically, his name on that billboard could almost be compared to livestock branding, a notion of ownership rendered visible that the completely bare and unmarked naked body in a picture does nothing to dispel.

³¹³ For a more complete reference to this scene, see page 208 of this dissertation.

culminates during an altercation between a journalist and a Beur from Brahim's *cit * who calls him out regarding the journalist's real intentions: "Qu'est-ce que vous allez dire, hein? On veut savoir, on veut d'abord  couter l'enregistrement" (135). Despite the journalist's plea and apparent support and sympathy, the fear of seeing their image distorted and used against their will is what prevails : " Le Journaliste s' vertuait   expliquer qu'il  tait solidaire, qu'il  tait lui-m me militant et qu'il ne trahirait pas leur cause. Le jeune continuait [:] On a tellement marre de ces zombies qui racontent n'importe quoi, qu'on a les boules   chaque fois que des mecs comme toi y nous filment" (135).³¹⁴

Reminiscent of Khalek's mother's reaction during their TV interview on a similar topic (the death of a young Beur), the young man's violent reaction during the filming, and fear of being misrepresented, in other words, of being harmed, is all symptomatic, I would like to posit, of a paranoid behavior known as *scopophobia*, that is the anxiety or fear of being looked at. Indeed, shame or anger are not the only signs or effects of that gaze; the characters also present more internal and insidious symptoms related to scopophobia, such as anxiety and psychotic behaviors which betray how much they have been affected by the hyper-mediatization of such stereotypical representations and by their own newly found hypervisibility. Such behavior is the sign that the *jeunes* have unconsciously internalized the stereotype. In this case, it can be argued that this

³¹⁴ This passage is particularly important as it reminds us of the positive role that journalists and investigative reporters played as activists for the defense of immigrants' rights. According to Alain Battegay, it remains important to avoid broad generalizations that portray the mass media and in particular print media as the eternal enemy of immigrants.

internalization or what Fanon has called *epidermalization*³¹⁵ is another sign of the pervasiveness of that symbolic violence engendered by constant stereotyping.

According to Carolyn M. West, one of the effects of negative stereotypes is their internalization which is often “linked to chronic health problem, psychological distress, and low self-esteem” (“Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire” 260).³¹⁶ This claim is corroborated in *Les Raisins de la galère* by the characters’ low self-esteem or even distress directly or indirectly caused by their treatment in the media. It is, for instance, the case of Nadia’s father³¹⁷ who, prisoner of his own body, dies after falling into a deep clinical depression, the consequence of both the city’s decision to destroy his house, fruit of a long and hard labor, and also the media’s (and French society) indifference to his plight. Noticing his detachment and rapid decaying of his body (visible signs of depression), Nadia declares: “J’ai trouvé mon père changé. Il avait l’air abattu, parlait avec détachement ” (20) ; “Il vieillissait à vue d’œil. [...] Muet, hors du temps, mon père regardait ailleurs” (46). If we were to relate her father’s depression to what has been argued before about the lethal power of the Evil Eye, such physiological symptoms would effectively constitute not only the proof of the physical and mental damages of social oppression but also the proof that an Evil Eye has effectively managed to penetrate his mind and body. It is as if Nadia’s father were under a spell.

³¹⁵ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes this *epidermalization* or *internalization* as the second part of the twofold process of the complex of inferiority experienced by the Black man in France, the first step of that process being economic, (xiv-xv).

³¹⁶ Carolyn M. West, “Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire and their homegirls: Developing an “oppositional gaze” toward the images of Black women,” J. C. Chrisler, C. Golden, & P. D. Rozee (Eds.), *Lectures on the Psychology of Women*, 4th ed (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2008): 286-299.

³¹⁷ A similar feeling of depression is exemplified by Nadia’s disinterest in school where she had always been a good student: “Je n’étais plus la première de la classe, Je négligeais mes cours. Je n’avais plus le cœur à l’étude” (21).

Moreover, it can also be argued that the most pervasive form of that *epidermalization* may actually reside in the fact that the characters unconsciously repeat the same pattern of this social oppression by reproducing the very same stereotypes responsible for it. There are two instances in *Les Raisins de la Galère*, when Ben Jelloun exposes the devious deeply rooted effects of social oppression and racism, as well as the contorted nature of media reporting. The first one is situated, once again, shortly after Nadia criticizes the national media disinterest in the fate of her “exceptional” family. Since the idea of a typical, that is “normal,” Maghrebi family,³¹⁸ seems to remain unfathomable and unrepresentable on French TV—which chooses to “hype” the more exceptional and stereotypical examples of dysfunctional families, Muslim extremists, and violent youth—Nadia, by way of compensation, imagines what a good talk-show about her family would be. She starts, then, by imagining how they would be described in the news anchor’s opening speech:

« Mesdames et messieurs, nous sommes heureux de vous présenter une famille maghrébine heureuse au sein de laquelle il n’y a ni drogués, ni chômeurs, ni trafiquants, où les filles ne portent ni foulard sur la tête, ni voile sur le visage, où règne un équilibre presque naturel. Une famille respectée et aimée dans son quartier, qui donne envie de considérer autrement le Maghreb, l’islam et jusqu’à l’ensemble du monde arabe. Une famille comme il y en a sans doute des milliers, mais dont on ne parle jamais, parce qu’on n’y pense pas, parce que les mentalités restent vissées aux habitudes et aux préjugés. Or cette famille existe, nous l’avons rencontrée. D’ailleurs, la fille aînée Nadia, se présente aux élections sous l’étiquette des verts... ! ». (86-87)

³¹⁸ One that would be within the norms of what is considered a typical French family.

It is evident that even in this imagined scenario,³¹⁹ Nadia cannot get rid of the underlying irony in the anchor's enthusiastic opening speech that insistently highlights all the common stereotypes attached to the image of a Maghrebi family and Maghrebi immigrants in general. Indeed, this passage suggests that the typical clichés of “drogués,” “chômeurs,” and headscarfed women have become the inescapable phantoms that keep haunting, thus poisoning, the existence of the Franco-Maghrebi youth. Furthermore, it should be added that with regard to the syntax, the use by Ben Jelloun of the adverb *presque* to highlight the anchor's own disbelief in the claimed normalcy of the family as he utters, for example, “un équilibre *presque* naturel” (my emphasis).

The second example can be found after Nadia's meeting with Naïma during which the activist becomes brutally aware of the extent to which such stereotypes are deeply rooted not only in the national collective imagination but also in her own unconscious. She effectively admits having only imagined Naïma as a prostitute in Italy:

Au fond de moi, j'eus honte d'avoir pensé au pire à propos de sa fugue. Pute à Naples ou à Hambourg ! Décidément, chez nous, à Resteville, on n'avait pas beaucoup d'imagination. On dirait même qu'on est formés à ne penser qu'au malheur. Que notre esprit ne sait déchiffrer que les mauvais penchants, les intentions tordues, les promesses d'échec. (109)

Being in a panoptic world, constantly subjected to stereotyping and exposed to the gaze of the Western Other has resulted in shaping not only the characters' own mind and sense of self but also their behavior. It is as if that Gaze has taken control of their body.

³¹⁹ Although the fruit of her imagination, this passage has the benefit of revealing to readers, that Nadia has finally accomplished one of her dreams: being politically active as a member of the ecologist party “les Verts.”

This last point is particularly relevant when it comes to understanding the link between oppression, recognition by others, vision, self-esteem and empowerment. Like Fanon or Lacan before her, Kelly Oliver contends that in our postmodern and postcolonial society, any theory of social oppression should acknowledge the correlation between vision and recognition in the emergence of a subjectivity in those othered and in position of subaltern. In Oliver's view, one should understand that with recognition, "subjectivity becomes the domain of domination. Subjectivity is conferred by those in power and empowered on those they deem powerless and disempowered" (*Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 149).

Given Nadia's need for a positive recognition and visibility in her life, we can only agree with Kelly Oliver about the fact this "desire to be seen, to be recognized is the paradoxical desire created by oppression. It is the desire to become objectified in order to be recognized³²⁰ by the sovereign subject to whom the oppressed is beholden for his or her own self-worth."³²¹ She also adds that "[t]he seeing/being seen dichotomy mirrors the subject/object dualism that is symptomatic of oppression. The seer is the active subject while the seen is the passive object. Being seen, like recognition, is a goal created by the pathology of oppression."³²² Under those circumstances, recognizing that fact and finding another way to free oneself from the need of recognition by another is one of the necessary steps that those *othered* should take in order to regain their agency as social agents, define their own identity as subjects, and assert their humanity as individuals.

³²⁰ According to Oliver, "[d]emands for recognition are also demands for visibility. Marginalization and enfranchisement are discussed in terms of visibility and invisibility" (147).

³²¹ Oliver 149

³²² Oliver 149.

This starts, for most of the characters, with the breaking of the social mirror in which self-images are distorted by postcolonial ideologies.

C. Breaking out of the Mirror Game, Warding off the Evil Eye.

According to Fanon the internalization of racist language, discourses and images represents a threat to the emergence and assertion of a unified self for the black man; it can lead to the fragmentation and alienation of the subject. Like the colonial “indigène” before them, these new “Indigènes de la République,”³²³ as the constant object of the Other’s gaze and witness to the images mirrored in it, are at the center of a power play resulting in a violent identity struggle. Alienation is certainly the most important consequence of that encounter with the gaze of the Other and encompasses all of the symptoms mentioned above. Whether experienced as a mental health problem or as a sense of estrangement from one’s humanity or feeling of powerlessness, (self-)alienation is a reality experienced by each of these characters. Alienation threatens their well-being and positive sense of self as individuals as they struggle to recognize reflections of themselves in the eyes of the French Other.

Thanks to Marxist philosophy and psychoanalysis, we now know that alienation plays an important role in the interactive processes of subjectivization and identification. For Lacan, whose approach differs from the Marxist definition of alienation,³²⁴ alienation is inherent to any subjectivity in that it is constitutive of the subject who is initially split: *I*

³²³ “Les Indigènes de la République” is the name of an association and political movement created in 2005 and aiming to denounce the remnants of colonialism in France. This phrase has also commonly been used as a label to refer to minorities coming from France’s former colonies.

³²⁴ To put it simply, Karl Marx considered alienation as the result of the process during which a worker becomes estranged from his own labor or product of that labor in a capitalist society.

is always an *Other*. For the psychoanalyst, alienation, as a constitutive process, participates in the formation of the Ego which emerges during the encounter with the Other. Using the metaphor of a baby looking at himself in the mirror of his mother's eyes in his famous 1949 essay "The mirror stage as formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic experience," Lacan defines his concept in the following terms: "we have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification in the full sense that analysis gives to the term, namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image [...]." ³²⁵

It is through the mirror of the Other's gaze and through the identification with the reflected image, that the subject comes into being and becomes aware of himself. That moment of recognition is based on a fiction, or rather, for Lacan, on a misrecognition and the "split" that it generates. It is a moment of violence as the subject, who strives to become that "Ideal-I" reflected in the mirror, realizes that what stands in front of him is a diffracted image. According to Oliver, for Lacan the subject during that phase becomes aware of the split between that "perfect" (whole) picture of the outside world and his own fragmented body and inner self: "alienation is inherent in all subject formation because of the split between the inner and outer world. The subject's dependence on the outer world to shore up its sense of the unity and agency of its inner world makes it aggressive and hostile toward the Other on whom it depends. For Lacan, subjectivity is fundamentally an experience of alienation, and all human relationships are essentially aggressive and

³²⁵ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," trans. Alan Sheridan, *Ecrits: A Selection*. (New York: Norton, 1977): 2.

illusory.”³²⁶ That moment of recognition and emergence of the Ego, according to Lacan, belongs to the realm of the ‘imaginary.’ The mirror stage is particularly important as it also demonstrates the role played by an external gaze in the constitution of one’s subjectivity and identity. For the psychoanalyst, it is also one the most important steps toward the constitution of the subject’s social identity.

And yet, for Fanon, the Black man does not experience the mirror stage in the same way as the White man. As pointed out by Oliver in *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, “Fanon not only implicitly rejects Lacan’s insistence on the necessity of alienation and hostility but also insists that the mirror stage is not an individual phenomenon but a social one” (21).³²⁷ Questioning the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, Fanon posits that, in the case of the colonized, this recognition is not reciprocal but unilateral because the slave/colonized’s recognition is irrelevant because, along humanity, he is denied the possibility of (self)-recognition. For Fanon, as well as for Oliver, the mirror stage as experienced by the Black man is the site of a debilitating “double alienation” and “double misrecognition.”³²⁸ It is an alienation that is not only personal but also social: “Whereas Lacan and other Freudian psychoanalysts attribute alienation to a split in the ego caused by discrepancies between the ideal-ego and reality, in the case of the colonized Fanon identifies an alienation that is not inherent in individuality but is social in nature.”³²⁹ For her, the mirror in Fanon’s version of the mirror stage is racist and *reversed*.³³⁰ “Rather

³²⁶ Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 21.

³²⁷ Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

³²⁸ Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 33-34.

³²⁹ Oliver, *Colonization of the Psychic Space* 30

³³⁰ Oliver *Colonization of the Psychic Space* 30; *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 33-35.

than produce the ego with its agency as a fictional defense against alienation, the alienation in the racist mirror destroys the ego.”³³¹ According to Oliver, this “reversed mirror stage”

[...] is inaugurated in the moment when the individual first experiences him-or herself as chained to a group in a dehumanizing or denigrating way. The reversed mirror stage begins with the recognition of oneself through the eyes of the dominant culture and continues with the double alienation that results from identifying with the very collective unconscious through which one has been othered. While Lacan’s mirror stage begins with the solidification of the ego and ends with a defensive alienation that the ego uses against others to protect itself, Fanon’s reversed mirror stage begins with a challenge to the ego and ends with the debilitating double alienation that leaves the ego defenseless against being othered within the dominant culture.³³²

Most importantly, what needs to be underlined is that this double alienation is mainly due to the fact that the othered subject does not recognize himself. He does not identify with the image reflected in the mirror of society whether it is through the colonizer or, as we have seen all along this chapter, through his television set, magazine, or newspapers. Indeed, these encounters with the media image(s) are often similar to a reflected image with which the subject cannot identify, since it is deformed and does not match its real referent. The characters, like Brahim, Nadia, or Yaz are well aware of that disjunction, even when the media genuinely seems to offer a better representation of their communities by producing ethnic TV programs, such as “Mosaïque.”³³³ These accusations can be found in *Le Sourire de Brahim*, when, Djamel, one of Brahim’s

³³¹ Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 33-34.

³³² Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 35.

³³³ See my reference to this television program on page 31.

friends, declares that such programs only contribute to their marginalization by continuing to identify the young Beurs as immigrants despite the fact that they (the Beurs) have been born on French soil and educated in French schools: “Ils nous assimilent à des immigrés, alors que nous on est ici chez nous autant qu’eux. Et ça, ils ne veulent pas l’admettre. Ils s’arrangent pour nous parquer. Même à la télé, ils ont mis une émission spéciale [*Mosaïque*], [...]l’émission cartes postales des gouvernements français et algériens. Celles que m’envoie mon cousin sont encore plus belles” (Kettane 167).

Under such circumstances, it is then normal that these characters do not recognize themselves in the social identity in which they are confined by the media and society. It is at least what the following sentence suggests : “ Tout ce que les médias et spécialistes ont trouvé à faire, c’a été de donner un numéro à cette génération : la deuxième ! Ainsi classés, nous étions forcément mal partis On oublie que nous ne sommes pas du tout des immigrés [...]” (76).

Illustrative of the lasting effects of the media is the inability of Yaz (*Boumkoeur*) to look at himself in any mirror can be interpreted as his failure to identify with the (stereo)typical image of the “jeune de banlieue,” often seen on his television screen. It is an image that he reluctantly witnesses on a daily basis and which strips him of his dignity, infuriating him and in effect disabling him by rendering true self-identification impossible: “Il fallait bien me défouler un jour sur ce reflet de moi qui m’a toujours ridiculisé” (56). More importantly, Yaz’ disability is according to me the perfect example of the existential *malaise* experienced by the characters studied in this chapter: “[...] je n’espère pas devenir un ange, mais j’aimerais être un autre que moi” (60). Being in front

of a specular object, whether it is a mirror or a TV screen, that captures and reflects his image (even deformed) is almost like a curse or a haunting for Yaz who, in his mind, is incapable of escaping the mirror (the Gaze). He is convinced that he is always seen by it: “Malédiction, la glace ne voit que moi” (29). As with Nadia, this curse of the haunting gaze and the inability to escape it or even one’s own gaze, is enough to destabilize the character by alienating him (or her), both literally and symbolically. To my sense, it is a good example of a failed “mirror stage” in which the identification of the “je” (“I”) through the gaze of the Other (the native French people) does not work as intended. Yaz does not identify the reflected body as his own and, consequently, does not embrace it as an emanation of his own identity.³³⁴ Rather, he prefers to find other ways to find what he thinks is his true identity, by either making his own documentary on life in the *banlieues* or through writing by maintaining a personal diary.

As shown above, both Nadia’s and Yaz’ curses are mainly due to their failure to escape the Gaze and consequently to identify with the mirror-image produced by society. Feeling trapped and paralyzed, they both long for more freedom, that is, the freedom to construct their identity, subjectivity and agency on their own terms. This freedom is, according to Fanon, what is refused to them from the beginning with the production and dissemination of stereotypes, as they do not control the terms of their representation. Reflecting on how to escape this curse, Nadia wonders :

³³⁴ As seen at the beginning of this chapter, since Antiquity and with the myth of Medusa and Narcissus, the idea that the eye is a mirror and, as such, is responsible for the victimization of the object seen was widespread. What we should retain is that it is because the mirrored gaze and reflected image are inherently deformed or oblique that their effects are felt physically and mentally as evil during the process of self-identification or coming into consciousness.

Quelle est cette malédiction qui s'acharne sur nous ? Comment échapper à ses méfaits ? Faut-il trahir, quitter ce lieu, devenir une autre, une femme toute neuve à la peau couleur de miel, quelqu'un qui ne se souvient même plus de ce qu'il a été ? Faut-il mourir à soi-même, tout sacrifier à l'oubli pour renaître ailleurs, là où les regards ne sont chargés d'aucune haine, où ils se moquent pas mal de la couleur de peau, où ils ne réclament rien, ni papiers ni explication ? ³³⁵

Feeling uncomfortable like a prisoner in her own skin, Nadia dreams paradoxically of becoming invisible, without any distinctive features (for example, her skin color or her name) that would allow her to be labeled as an "Arab" or an "immigrant":

C'est que je me serai exilée dans une contrée anonyme où je serai moi-même enfin devenue n'importe qui, ni plus ni moins qu'une personne sans signe distinctif, affublé d'un nom quelconque rappelant un arbre ou bien un animal, avec un visage indéfinissable, un corps qui ne trahit pas ses racines, une voix sans aucun accent. ³³⁶

For the most part, Nadia's wish is particularly surprising since, throughout the novel, she is depicted as the symbol of this "génération de l'oubli [qui] voudrait sortir de l'ombre, soulever les grosses pierres qui la recouvrent, rejeter ce linceul de mépris et ébranler l'arbre des ancêtres" (131).

Nevertheless, this need of becoming invisible may also be read not only as a survival tactic but also as a potential weapon of self-defense against the Other's gaze. ³³⁷

This argument is particularly valid if we take into account the fact that Nadia's very own disability is, in fact, a case of hypervisuality, the result of a highly developed vision and lucidity that allows her to see the hidden messages of life and the nature of their

³³⁵ Ben Jelloun 121.

³³⁶ Ben Jelloun 123.

³³⁷ In fact, in a very interesting passage of the novel, Nadia explicitly evokes the protective powers of the shadows against the Evil Eye when she states: "La nuit est bonne compagne. Elle nous protège du mauvais oeil et de la violence des autres" (125).

conditions in society: “Hélas, je n’ai jamais eu les yeux aussi ouverts. Je suis atteinte de lucidité comme d’une sale maladie qui ne veut pas guérir. C’est douloureux la lucidité. On voit les choses exactement comme elles sont, non comme elles devraient être. Et j’en ai assez de voir clair, je n’aspire qu’à une nuit profonde, réparatrice” (123). From the shadows of society, from the margins of their *cit*é, with hypervision like Nadia’s, the Beurs seem to be reduced to mere witnesses of their own misfortunes. The price they pay for their lucidity is enormous. Like Nadia, their lucidity can lead to a loss of identity and an inability to find a productive place in society. And yet, far from simply falling victim to the Other’s gaze, most of the characters like Yaz or Nadia express their desire to change not only the French society’s gaze and mentalities, but also the knowledge and representational system that continues to frame them negatively. What each of these characters wants ultimately is to prove that they are more than a picture. In the case of Nadia or Shérázade, this change starts by their shattering the mirror while re-claiming their difference and identity.

This refusal to conform, that is to say, the refusal to be imprisoned in a predetermined system of representations (e.g. stereotypes) or to be fixed in an identity one does not recognize, and the desire to subvert the established order are a significant cause of action for the four characters. For Brahim it is vital to revolt against the established order, as it is the only means of self-assertion and recognition independently from those in powers: “Se révolter contre la loi imposée. Ne jamais négocier son identité. Refuge de l’espoir, elle évite la réclusion” (172). Fueled by their frustration, this revolt

can take many forms; from pacifist actions (e.g. political, social or cultural activism) to more violent ones (e.g. destruction of symbols).

Anger, verbal or physical altercations, and other destructive actions can become ways for the characters to express their revolt. These forms of revolt can also be the expression of a desire for the Beurs to assert themselves as *subjects*, and therefore, to impose their difference in a society that often does not recognize it: “Ils tentent d’affirmer leur présence et leur spécificité dans un environnement qui les nie et avec lequel le rapport est violent, voire meurtrier” (Laronde, “La mouvance beure” 691). Such is the case, for instance, in the scene from *Boumkoeur*³³⁸ during which a group of youths being interviewed by a journalist suddenly starts to mug him and ends up stealing his camera—the producer of stereotypes and symbol of their oppression—as sign of protestation. The refusal of being the object of someone’s gaze, of being reduced to an image, a stereotype, or just being confined in the symbolic and social boundaries of own one’s sex is also what leads Sherazade to violently react during a fashion shoot. Asked to be models for a series of nudes by a rich fashion photographer, Shérazade and her friends, France (from Martinique) and Zouzou (from Tunisia), find themselves forced to reproduce the exotic fantasy of the sensual exotic female Other. According to the photographer such images were in high demand due to their popularity with a particular type of public. Pretending to comply with the fashion photographer the young women’s behavior quickly changes, going from being lascivious to becoming very aggressive, followed by the destruction of the studio in a last attempt at resisting the exploitation of their image and at regaining

³³⁸ See the reference to scene on pages 207-208.

control of it. Finally, refusing to be photographed by her admirer and friend, Julien, and destroying his photographs, Shérazade ultimately declares with anger: “Je ne suis pas une Odalisque!” (158).

Likewise, for Nadia in *Les raisins de la galère*, it is important to acknowledge that “la colère est tout ce qui nous reste” (128). Indeed, when one is not in control of the means of one’s representation, when one is silenced and invisible, anger can work generally as a self-defense mechanism, as the expression of a survival instinct, to get the attention for which one longs: “On est pressés. Pressés de vivre sa vie, affolés à l’idée qu’on puisse nous la retirer. Légitime défense. Attaque préventive.”³³⁹ According to her, it is thus their right to defend themselves. Inherently rebellious, not willing to let themselves be kept prisoners of any traditions, imposed rules, or biases, in search of their own voice as they battle the many torments of their bi-cultural identity (French and Maghrebi), these characters take matters into their own hands. From that perspective, and in contrast to such violent act, their refusal can also take the form of a more peaceful and efficient method such as political or social activism. For instance, Brahim, as a community worker in his own neighborhood, finds in teaching theatre and cinema a way to fight against biases and empower others around him by increasing their self-esteem.

What these characters ultimately want to do is to tell their stories, their truth, as well as to claim and embrace their radical otherness—their difference. In an environment in which they are victims of diverse forms of violence (e.g. police abuses, racist crimes, discrimination, or even the media’s symbolic violence), the desire for self-assertion and

³³⁹ Ben Jelloun 128.

recognition can also lead to the desire to produce and impose one's own systems of representation, one's own meanings, the only way to more freedom.³⁴⁰ Hence, in the case of Shérazade, her refusal to conform is translated in her adoption of several pseudo-identities or different wardrobe styles in order to escape all categorizations. Also common to these characters, in addition to their will to oppose and denounce the stereotype of the *Beur* or *Beurette*, is their categorical refusal to be labeled as “issu de l’immigration,” or as the “seconde génération” in/by the media or by politics. According to Laronde, this rejection of the label “seconde generation” is a positioning and discursive device common to several Beur writers and activists who : “ [refusent] catégoriquement l’appellation de “jeune de la deuxième génération”, arguant que les Arabes sont les seuls immigrés à qui on donne un numéro.”³⁴¹ Instead, they claim the right to self-determination, to be either French, Maghrebi or both, as they like.

It is clear that through them, authors like Ben Jelloun and Sebbar are trying to remind us that identity is not something unique, immutable, and fixed. Rather, in line with Stuart Hall's thinking, they want to highlight the fact that identity is something plastic that changes over time and with locality. There is not “one” identity, but there are several identities. According to Hall, in his essay, “Who Needs ‘Identity’?”³⁴² one must understand that “identity” differs from “identification”; he argues that “identity” is constituted not outside but within the signifying practice constituted by representation or “discourse.” Identity is not something essential, originary, or stable, but, in a context of

³⁴⁰ This way they free themselves from the bondage of the Other's gaze.

³⁴¹ Laronde, “La mouvance beur” 684-685. Let's note that, in this article, Laronde also points out the fact that, “[l]a dénomination ‘jeune Maghrébin de France’ ne rallie pas non plus le suffrage des médias. Parmi les Français d’origine arabe, certains ne se reconnaissent pas sous le vocable de ‘Beurs’” (684).

³⁴² Stuart Hall, “Who needs ‘Identity’?” Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (eds), *Questions of Identity* (1996).

globalization and migrations, it is “fractured,” “fragmented”; most importantly, it is a social and discursive construct. Likewise, Homi K. Bhabha defines *identification* not as : “l’affirmation d’identité prédonnée, jamais une prophétie s’auto-accomplissant [...],” but rather as “ [...] toujours la production d’une image d’identité et la transformation du sujet assumant cette image. La demande d’identification—être (pris) *pour* un Autre—entraîne la représentation du sujet dans l’ordre différenciant de l’altérité.”³⁴³ Fighting against dual feelings of “appartenance” (belonging) and “désappartenance” (non-belonging), a term coined by Mireille Rosello, what characters like Nadia want to prove is that one can be a woman, both Kabyle and French, born in France from Algerian parents, be from the *banlieues* and successfully become a politician.³⁴⁴

Correspondingly, it is important to realize that their desire to be whatever they choose, to create their own meaning, and to regain control of their representation also stems from their refusal to wait any longer to be recognized by mainstream French society as equals. Creating meaning is an important part of the process of their reclaiming of their subjectivity and agency that has also been addressed by Kelly Oliver in *Colonization of Psychic Space*. Like the black man facing colonial racism in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, it can be argued that for these characters, “[t]he struggle to liberate [their] psychic space from colonization hinges on [them] to make meaning from [themselves]. [They do] not want recognition from the white [Other], an impossible

³⁴³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 93.

³⁴⁴ Likewise, like Yaz, one can be a young male born in the *banlieues*, a former delinquent, and still be an aspiring writer and director.

recognition; rather, [they want] to *recognize [themselves]*.³⁴⁵ According to Oliver, in the case of the black man and his relationship to the movement and concept of Negritude,

[...] creating meaning for oneself within the colonial situation, [...] is a dialectical operation between domination and resistance. Although the negritude movement is a reaction to whiteness in the sense that, as Fanon says, the black man is forced to secrete a race, it can be a form of resistance and revolt. It can be part of a psychic revolt in which the black man reasserts his agency as a meaning maker, which works against the alienated sense of arriving too late into the world.

It is precisely the sense of arriving too late to create one's own meaning that can make the colonization of psychic space so effective. (15)

Nadia's story is a powerful narrative of her efforts to regain her place within society as a political agent and to change the system from within. To do so, she becomes the human symbol of the new France by challenging not only its notion of identity but also the image reflected by the media thanks to her own hybrid French-Maghrebi identity.³⁴⁶ In fact, it is because "les mentalités restent visées aux habitudes et aux préjugés" that Nadia chooses to become politically active. Indeed, as an example of her determination to counter these stereotypical images and make her voice heard as a French woman, she decides to pursue a higher education degree and to be involved in political activism by running alongside the "Verts" in the cantonal election, and later, the legislative elections, a field until then generally reserved to the "Français de souche": "Et voici qu'aujourd'hui, moi Nadia, née en France, devenue française avec encore de la terre algérienne collée à la plante des pieds, moi, la rebelle qui refuse d'être réduite à la condition de Beur, je me présente aux législatives, et pourquoi pas demain aux européennes ?" (89-90).

³⁴⁵ Oliver, *Colonization of Psychic Space* 15.

³⁴⁶ Both examples are also illustrative of the role played by cultural initiatives (from the creation of *radios-associatives* to local theater companies), and social and political activism in the birth of the Beur movement ("la mouvance beure") and the assertion of a Beur identity and culture.

Likewise, it is also because she wants to shatter the image of the Beurette and of the perpetual immigrant that, following her defeat at the European elections, she proceeds to symbolically plaster photocopies of her national identity card on her apartment door for all to see (125). Thus, through this symbolic gesture, one is tempted to see her proclaim or reclaim an identity that has been for so long questioned by others around her.

Nonetheless, in the closing scene of the novel, another symbolic gesture casts some doubts about the absolute meaning of the previous one, as Nadia for the first time signs her name in Arabic, thus also embracing that other side of her identity. All things considered and in opposition to what has been said by other commentators, we might simply choose to see in this double gesture, beyond the author's will to confound the readers, Nadia's ultimate intent to refuse the mirror-image (the stereotype) that has afflicted her and her entire generation:

“Aujourd’hui, j’ai subi une grande défaite. Mais ils ne m’auront pas. Je ne serai jamais la petite Beur [sic] qui passe à la télé pour dire combien elle est assimilée, intégrée, rangée. Non. J’ai la rage ! J’ai la haine ! Trop d’injustice. Je ne serai jamais galérienne...Merde !” (22, italics in original).

Despite her failure at the legislative elections and her disappointment, Nadia cannot help but notice that her political and social work is only the beginning for another future, a door opened for others like her who belong to the “génération de l’oubli.” Through her actions, she invites them to come out of the the margins in order to liberate

themselves from the curse of their own image—an image inherited from the colonial era and which, like a shadow, has been haunting generations after generations:

Nous ne voulons plus vivre hors les murs, relégués dans les banlieues, nous ne piétinerons pas indéfiniment sur la rive de l'attente, nous ne nous contenterons plus longtemps des cages d'escaliers, des hangars humides, des garages insalubres. Nous allons descendre en ville, la tête bouillante, la bouche pleine de mots durs comme des cailloux [...]. (131-132)

Even under pressure (to conform, to assimilate), the goal of each of these characters is to drop all masks and to stay true to themselves, without compromising their identity in order to be able to sustain their own gaze in front of the mirror: “Être soi-même, ne pas vouloir être l'autre, mais seulement le respecter. Surtout ne pas se prostituer, le miroir serait impardonnable. Car l'image même déformée est sans pitié...” (Kettane 171-172). By doing this, they come one step closer to warding off the Evil Eye, by throwing off the gaze of the Other along with the bondage of constant need for recognition.

Conclusion

Finally, if we are to believe Stuart Hall's claim that identity “emerge[s] within the play of specific modalities of power,”³⁴⁷ one can see why what is really at stakes in the analysis of the Subaltern's relationship with the mass media entails not so much (or just) his *othering*, objectification or subjugation by this latter, but rather his struggle for emancipation, agency and subjectivity. It is about the process of identification and subjectivization experienced by the subaltern subject represented here by the figure of the Immigrant or the *Beur*. It is, indeed, about the struggle for control between the *Eye* and the *I* which ultimate goal for the *Beur* is to ward off the Evil Eye by stopping the mirror

³⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, “Who needs ‘Identity’?”: 4.

game and getting rid of the deformed mirror-image responsible for his diffracted identity.³⁴⁸

At beginning of this chapter, our exploration of the myth of the Evil Eye led us to the unveiling of its ancient origins, its mode of functioning and its aftermath. Whether it is from popular beliefs, optics sciences or psychology, there is tacit agreement among believers or practitioners that the power of the Evil Eye, through the provoked gaze of its bearer, is aimed at, consciously or unconsciously, inflicting harm to its victim—object of its desire. Compared to a spell, a bewitchment or a curse, the power of the Evil Eye was believed to be generated by the projection of invisible rays that penetrate the eyes then the mind of its target in order to take control not only of the mind but of the victim's body as well. The power attributed to the gaze has often been compared to that of Medusa, a mythical creature whose powerful glance was capable of petrifying and then killing its victim on sight/site. Her eyes were so powerful that even when she was beheaded by Perseus and her image reproduced by Minerva as a protective symbol, they could still be used as a weapon to harm others. It has also been compared, in this project, to technological apparati like television or the gaze of the French *natifs*.

In each of the novels studied, the mass media's attention to the *banlieue* and its inhabitants is described as being random and unpredictable, as well as as an obsessive fascination felt by most of the protagonists as a haunting, a dreadful threat or omen. Hence, in order to comprehend the intensity of the Gaze and its disturbing (or haunting) power, my goal in this chapter has been examine the when's, where's, who's and how's

³⁴⁸ See chapter 1.

of this type h(a)unting, which is none other than the materialization of that Evil Eye. I proposed, within the limit of this project, to look at the historical and socio-cultural context behind the media treatment of the *question des banlieues*, as well as the modalities, frequency, and role of the *mediatization* and stereotyping in the construction of the *Beur* figure or *banlieue* phenomenon. We have seen that each of the novels that are part of our corpus raises, in its own particular way, the question of the negative or positive effects of the televisual media on the individual social and personal identity and psyche.

Whether it is Sebbar, Kettane, Ben Jelloun or Djaïdani, the criticism of the role played by print journalism, radio, and diverse forms of advertising in the stereotyping and, consequently, the symbolic oppression of immigrants and underrepresented groups, are a constant feature in their narratives. Each of these authors seems to agree, nevertheless, on the fact that the relationship between the Immigrant—embodied here by the figure of the *Beur*—and the mass media is, at first sight, essentially unbalanced and unhealthy, and also ultimately dialectical, conflictual and devastating for the Immigrant on a personal, social, psychological and even symbolical level. Television and other media come to symbolize in these novels the threatening and alienating (French) Other who, through his gaze, constantly seeks to reify the dominated groups by turning them into “objects of spectacle” (Oliver) for his (the French spectator/Other) (visual) pleasure. Such view of the media certainly echoes reality, as the news media in particular is accused regularly of assigning minorities an identity that is so deformed in the stereotyped images projected in the televisual mirror that they do not recognize

themselves. We have shown that, in most of these novels, the protagonists' encounters with the media are experienced as an attack on the self and a source of deep anxiety, shame, and anger that are manifested through psychosomatic symptoms like clinical depression. Henceforth, it is against this powerful and destructive force that these characters must protect themselves as they struggle to assert their own subjectivity as agents in a society that, despite its efforts to recognize them, still manages to relegate them to oblivion and its shadows. In the case of Brahim, Yaz, Nadia and Shérázade, it is by embracing their radical Otherness, by blindsiding the Other with the same weapon (mirror-image) used against them, that they are able to embark on the journey of self-assertion and freedom.

Chapitre 4: Pour un autre droit de regard: Remediating Everyday Life through the Mediascape of Television

Introduction

Released in 1997, *Les tentations*, the first solo album of French-Congolese rapper, Passi Balende, known to his fans as Passi, was to become an enormous success, thanks to hits like “Le Maton me guette,” “Il fait chaud” and, probably the most successful of all, “Je zappe et je matte.” Like most of the songs of that album and others in subsequent ones, this song was inspired by daily life in a housing project of the Parisian *banlieues*. However, whereas most of his other songs usually depict the “common” difficulties encountered by young men and women (mostly) of immigrant descent in the projects known for unemployment, problems of integration, tension between the youth and the authorities, drugs and violence, or immigration, “je zappe et je matte” is essentially focused on what Passi calls in the song “le syndrome du canapé,” a type of pathology generated by television. With this song, Passi plunges us directly into the world of television and of popular culture based on his own experience. Indeed, what makes this song interesting is the fact that Passi was essentially describing his particular relationship to the televisual medium, and its constant presence during his childhood, and going as far as to identify himself as “un enfant d’la télé” (“a television kid”). Also relevant is the fact that the singer, in addition to emphasizing the medium’s omnipresent and determining role in his life since his early childhood, was also touching upon the question of both its ominous powers and its mesmerizing and addictive effects on the spectator.

Nothing illustrates this claim more than the visual narrative of the music video dedicated to the song.³⁴⁹ From the beginning of the music video, the television set appears as a central character and the focal point of an empty room; but as the camera zooms in, we notice a young boy sitting on a couch in front of it. Before we know it, a strange phenomenon occurs at the precise moment when the young boy turns on the television with his remote control. We, the viewers, are immediately transported into a dream-like or, rather, a twilight-zone dimension where the frontier between reality and virtuality is blurred. In that dimension, the young boy—who we later understand, thanks to the lyrics, is a younger Passi—appears to be completely mesmerized by the television screen and its images, oblivious to his surroundings and the strange phenomenon taking place, as if under the effect of a spell or a powerful drug.

From the beginning of the song, Passi himself does immediately acknowledge the power of television over him, and especially, as we have just pointed out, because of its addictive nature. Indeed, he compares the televisual experience with being as powerful and dangerous as a hard drug that is “injected” and that has the effect of knocking one out (“fonce-dé [défoncé]”): “les programmes je becte, les directs je m’injecte/ je suis un enfant d’la télé, fonce-dé [défoncé] aux rediffusés.” Hence, by choosing such powerful imagery (a drug taken intravenously), Passi seems to corroborate the “hypodermic needle” theory that essentially emphasizes the mass media’s supposedly powerful and harmful effects on the body and mind of the audience seen to be passive and powerless.

³⁴⁹ The video can be seen on Passi’s official page on the website *Youtube*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRLmmnzbQHE>. Web. 15 Sept. 2015.

What this video also seems to suggest is the fact that, as in the case of psychotropic drugs, not only does television have the power to transport us into a different world, it does so by blurring the limits between the worlds of reality and fantasy. Within that new world and liminal space, anything can happen, even the uncanniest things. For instance, we quickly realize that, as the result of the boy's "zapping,"³⁵⁰ strange, ghostly apparitions have directly emerged from the televisual world or tele-reality, and that each one of them represents a particular character of a potential TV series. It is as if, with these ghostly interruptions into the real, the virtual world of television has materialized and come alive in front of our eyes. We are, in short, haunted. Yet, this haunting by the television ghosts is far from being threatening or even frightening for the protagonist-narrator. In fact, what makes the scene all the more surreal is the fact that the boy is seemingly unfazed by the ghostly figures surrounding him. The reason might be that it is a haunting by television characters that the narrator knows too well, as is illustrated by his initial description of his televisual experiences as a haunting: "Cablé sur télé, l'image, le son sont mes spectres." Thus, while these ghostly figures, products of external and threatening forces, seem to enter his space from the outside, they are really the sign of an internal haunting since these "specters" live inside of him as remanences (traces, residues) of the television content he had watched. If television does *inhabit*³⁵¹ him like a specter, it is a haunting that the narrator embraces.

³⁵⁰ In this context, *zapping* refers to the rapid change between TV channels, generally with the use of a remote control.

³⁵¹ See Chapter 1 and 3, for a more complete analysis of the experience of haunting.

Actually, these specters are entirely part of him (body and psyche). Passi's relationship with television is thus not simply a matter of a habit—a daily activity, it is also physical, mental, spiritual and, more importantly, a matter of life and death. It is vital to his existence. Indeed, as he boasts about his extensive knowledge of the television world and of American and French popular culture, the narrator also seems to suggest that a fusion has taken place at an internal, spiritual level. By identifying with the popular television shows with which he grew up, the narrator has become something else. With bits and pieces, they—and television more generally—have fashioned him into a type of hybrid, becoming part of an identity that he does not hesitate to claim: “Pose une question pour un champion³⁵²/ parle-moi d'émissions/ [...] je suis barjot comme Columbo³⁵³ [...] / Je suis un téléphile au-delà du réel.” In this last line, “un téléphile au-delà du réel,” the beyond referred to is a veiled reference to the American show “The Outer Limits,” known in France as “Au-delà du réel.”³⁵⁴ This cultural reference is particularly significant because it emphasizes the narrator's difference and belonging to a different world and reality. He is not just a television fan; he has acquired a new, elevated status thanks to the alternative world opened up by his television set and zapping.

Surprisingly, it is in that new reality, in the liminal space between reality and virtuality, that the narrator finds himself in a position of power, and as such, is able to act

³⁵² “Question pour un champion” remains one of the most popular French game shows. Created in 1988, the show was hosted by Julien Lepers until 2015. He has since been replaced by Samuel Etienne.

³⁵³ This is a reference to the famous American television series “Columbo,” a police drama, created in 1968 as a television movie by William Link and Richard Levinson and starring Peter Falk as the inimitable detective Columbo. However, the original series ran from 1971 to 2003. The show was widely popular in France.

³⁵⁴ Created by Leslie Stevens for an American audience in the early 1960s, this sci-fi television series, “Outer limits,” translated in French as “Au-delà du réel,” was mainly broadcast in France from the 1970s onward.

as a “télé-commandant chez les zappeurs.” Indeed, through its simple (yet highly elaborated) word game,³⁵⁵ this last line becomes key to understanding the subject position of the narrator as a viewer, spectator, subject and, finally, agent. More than that, it noticeably counters the view perpetuated by many thinkers such as Baudrillard, Debray, or Bourdieu, of a spectator enslaved, violated and, therefore, victimized by television, due to his passivity and lack of critical thinking. As exemplified by this song, it is, however, clear that one can neither reduce television’s role and power to just what Bourdieu has called a “miroir de Narcisse,” nor simply associate it with the material form or metaphor of the traditional evil eye, as I have discussed in Chapter 3. Television does not just open up a space of oppression and symbolic violence; it can also allow the emergence of a liberating and empowering space in which the subject/viewer can act. It is in that power and especially the identity politics that take place within the space provided by domestic television spectatorship that I am interested, as I embark on a close analysis of the representation of the relationship between television, imagination and cultural identity in the more recent literary category known as the post-Beur novel or *banlieue* writing.

Like a Janus mask, television could be considered, at first sight, as the epitome of oppositional forces coming together under one form, for it is neither totally bad nor absolutely good. Beyond its ostentatious glorification of the culture of images and French and American popular culture, or its veiled criticism of the negative power of television

³⁵⁵ Passi plays on the double meaning of “télé-commandant” to emphasize his ability to be in total control of things at a distance thanks to television. Indeed, “télé-commandant,” first, clearly find its etymological roots from the word “télécommande,” “remote control” in English, an object that allows the control of a device from a distance; secondly, it refers to the military rank of “commandant,” someone in charge of military forces and by extension, a figure of authority.

on our mind, this song irremediably brings up legitimate questions regarding the practical and symbolical role played by this medium in a world characterized by the hegemony of technological innovations. It paradoxically highlights not only the preponderant place that television has taken and continues to play in our daily routine, but also the transformative social and cultural dynamics associated with the television set. Moreover, by focusing so much on the importance of televisual content (i.e. its programs, genres, images and messages) in the life of the narrator and its creative power, this song also raises the question of its influence on our imagination. More importantly, it unequivocally invites us to muse on a different aspect of the nature of the relationship between suburban youth, ethnic minorities or, in our case, immigrants, and a powerful media like television in our postcolonial, postmodern, and more and more globalized world.³⁵⁶ Given that it is, in most cases, a world from which subaltern groups, such as immigrants or minority youths, are too often excluded, this song definitely gives us an opportunity to reflect on the role played by media technologies in their experience of and in the world, as well as on their own positioning as subjects and cultural agents.

Thus, the fact that Passi could be considered as the embodiment of the postcolonial subaltern figure—as a French citizen of immigrant origins³⁵⁷—is all the more relevant for our project. It is true that this project has so far focused on the rather violent relationship between the second or third generation of immigrants in France and the mass media such as television, which because of its origin, nature and outcomes has

³⁵⁶ It also brings about the issue of television's influence on the writing process and practices in the work of authors pertaining to these groups.

³⁵⁷ Passi was born in Brazzaville but spent most of his childhood and adulthood in France in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles.

been compared to the mythical curse of the “evil eye” (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, although Passi’s experience, as described in his song, is in many ways enlightening for us, I have chosen to remain focused on the literary figure of the suburban youth of North African origins born in the 1990s, and on his close relationship with the televisual medium. One fact that is certain is that television, like any media, has managed to pervade the social and cultural fabric of the characters in most of these novels, and *a fortiori* that of their authors as well. In our media-saturated world, I am restating the obvious in asserting that television has pervaded not only our homes, but also our bodies, minds and imagination. Nobody can escape its influence, not even the marginalized subaltern or immigrants existing in the shadows. It is, therefore, not surprising that we can find references to television, not only in a song like Passi’s, but also in the novels under discussion in this dissertation.

It is therefore worth pointing out that recent productions in Francophone literature, and especially Beur or *banlieue* novels, have demonstrated an increasing awareness of the embeddedness and impact of the mass media and media technologies in our everyday life and also in our relation to others and to ourselves. As I have already pointed out in the general introduction, these dynamics, along with new writing practices that take them into account, have been analyzed at length by literary scholars such as Sylvie Durmelat in *Fictions de l’intégration* or Typhaine Leservot in *Le corps mondialisé: Marie Redonnet, Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar*. For a long time overlooked for its lack of literary or aesthetic interest in the field of Francophone literature, television and other media (e.g. radio, internet, and cellphones) have since become the object of

interest in the work of a younger generation of Francophone writers, born in the era of television and of new technologies of the 1980-1990s. With such accrued interests, new writing and discursive practices have emerged, as well as new narrative models that take into account the impact of these media in our societies and on our psyche. As a result, they have also progressively departed from the traditional discursive configuration about the mass media and, in particular, television by focusing as much on the concept of *representation* as on that of *mediation*, or *intermediality*.

“Representation” has always been one of the key concepts and indeed a commonplace used when it came to the analysis of the interconnection between Francophone immigrant literature and the media.³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, “representation,” as a concept, no longer has the monopoly on the way this relationship is approached and thought about. As we have seen in the case of Beur novels from the 1980s and 1990s, one of the main criticisms directed at a mass media such as television has regularly been focused on the negative impact that their representations of immigrants and ethnic minorities have on those concerned. In chapters 1, 2 and 3, I have shown that in most of these novels, such representations and perceptions are all too often stereotypical and also spectralizing, that is, objectifying; they thus dehumanize, inflicting serious psychological effects on those subjected to them. Such effects, as we have seen, can be the loss of self-confidence, alienation or a pathological need for recognition.

³⁵⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the concept of representation, and especially of the role of visual representation in Francophone literature, see for instance Marie B. Vogl (2003).

Yet, by focusing on the issue of representation of postcolonial migrants, although crucial, such approaches to the role of the mass media in our contemporary postcolonial societies are too restrictive. They often relegate the immigrant or subaltern subject to the position of the perpetual victim or a “reluctant witness” who always has to bear the weight of history and fight against the curse of negative media representations (i.e. the Evil Eye). It is, therefore, worth pointing out that while television has been considered, by far, as the quintessential enemy for being the medium used by political powers to convey negative representations and discourses about immigrant communities, it is paradoxically also the one that the very same immigrants use the most in their everyday practices. Most importantly, for diasporic groups, an object and a medium like television has played, and continues to play, an important role in the difficult situation of exile. For these groups, television, as well as films and videos have been a necessary means to preserve and build not only their sense of self but also their cultural identities by maintaining a link with the motherland and the constant production and reproduction of old and new cultural practices.³⁵⁹

Likewise, for cultural and media theorists such as Stuart Hall, Chris Barker or Roger Silverstone, or the anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai, television has become a major “source” or “resource” (Barker, *Television, Globalization, and Cultural Identities* 3) from which we draw our models and our knowledge of the world. It mediates our experiences and shapes our postmodern identities. In the era of global media, our identities have

³⁵⁹ For more information on the question, see *Transnational Lives and The Media: Re-Imagining Diaspora*, eds. Bailey, Olga G., Myria Georgiou, and Ramaswami Harindranath (2007); *The Media of Diaspora* by Karim H., Karim (ed), 2003, or Alec Hargreaves and Dalila Mahdjoub in “Antennes paraboliques et consommation télévisuelle des immigrés,” *Hommes et Migrations* 1210 (Novembre-Décembre 1997).

become more decentered, more fragmented, and more plastic than ever. It is a resource that can be re- “appropriated” (Barker 6) and even “domesticated”³⁶⁰ (Roger Silverstone) so that it serves our daily needs and our most inner and hidden desires. As argued in my introductory chapter, a medium like television can be used as a tool to cope with the wrongs and other ills of one’s daily life. In the case of the Immigrant, he uses media technology and culture as a way to *remediate*, that is, to heal the open wounds and fill the void of his existence. This use of a key concept like *Remediation* is what sets my work apart. While from a textual and intermedial point of view I do take into account one of the primary meanings of remediation— the refashioning of old media in new media,³⁶¹ I believe that we also need to take into account its psychological and personal dimension.

A perfect example of both types of remediation linked to the televisual medium can be found in Faïza Guène’s first novel, *Kiffe kiffe demain*, a best seller. Like Passi’s song, Faïza Guène’s novel has become a huge global success with more than 400,000 copies sold and translations in more than twenty-two languages (Fatimah Kelleher) since its publication in 2004. But for the fact that the novel was drawn from the sad reality of a housing project located in Les Courtilières, a disfranchised and impoverished suburb on the outskirts of Paris, Faïza Guène’s success would seem to come straight from a fairy tale. Thus, what makes this success story even more interesting is that its heroine was not

³⁶⁰ As already stated in my introductory chapter, according to Silverstone in *Television and Everyday Life* (1994), “domestication” “involves bringing objects in from the wild [...]. [It is the] transition, which is also a translation, of objects across the boundary that separates public and private spaces [...].” In the case of technology, “domestication [...] refers to the capacity of a social group (a household, a family, but also an organization) to appropriate technological artifacts and delivery systems into its own culture—its own spaces and times, its own aesthetic—to control them and to render them more or less “invisible: within the daily routines of daily life” (Silverstone 98).

³⁶¹ This definition, which has been simplified, is attributed to Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin. For more information, see Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin.

a lost princess, but the daughter of Algerian immigrants and a first-time novelist at age 19, who never imagined such a positive reception. In an interview given to Fatimah Kelleher in 2013, Guène even admits that this whole experience: ““was better than a dream coming true, simply because I’d never had the crazy idea of having such a dream in the first place, especially with the elitist attitudes towards literature here in France”” (Fatimah Kelleher, “An Interview with Faïza Guène” 3).

Of course, the success of the novel and its reception cannot be attributed solely to the socio-economic background of its author but, rather, to her talent. Praised by the critics, *Kiffe kiffe demain* managed to seduce a large public, young and old, thanks in large part to Guène’s talent and style characterized by a rhythm reminiscent of rap, a mix of backslang (*verlan*) and conventional French, and a view of French society (both mainstream and in the *banlieue*) peppered with a goodly amount of humor. To all of the former, one should add her impressive knowledge of global youth culture displayed through her fifteen-year-old character, Doria. More importantly, Guène manages to offer us a different take on the usual representation of the *banlieue* and of the experience of suburban youth of immigrant descent commonly found in the media and Beur novels.

Through first-person narration, Guène describes, with a lot of wit, the daily economic, social, cultural and psychological struggles of Doria, a fifteen-year old girl of Moroccan origin, in a housing project located in the outskirts of Paris. In many ways, Doria can be considered as the archetype of the social outcast. Abandoned by her father

(the “barbu”³⁶²) who went back to Morocco to remarry, she is left with a mother struggling to make ends meet and condemned by a lack of professional skills and illiteracy to a low-wage job as a hotel maid. As if it is not enough, Doria also underperforms at school and is the frequent victim of discrimination and bullying by her peers. Isolated, depressed and questioning her own identity and existence, Doria finds comfort in two things: her personal diary and her television.

By choosing the stream of consciousness as her main narrative technique, Guène introduces us, in a series of short chapters, to the inner world of Doria, with her most intimate thoughts, feelings, and reactions regarding her daily life and the outside world. Although situated in the “familiar backdrop for urban angst, immigrant marginalisation [sic] and an exposure of the country’s unaddressed socio-economic inequalities” (Kelleher 3), Guène, through the observant eyes and critical voice of her young narrator, paints a picture more intimate, far less politicized, but still insightful, of what daily life is like in a housing project as a poor young “immigrant” woman. In fact, beyond the description of the “young immigrant experience,”³⁶³ it is the focus on the trivial of everyday life, the many “tactics” (Michel de Certeau) and transformative practices deployed by the protagonists to not only survive but also to thrive in the all-urban, marginalized environment, from which the novel draws most of its strength. Among those tactics deployed is certainly the recourse to, and the preservation of, cultural

³⁶² In addition to being a humorous way to surname her father, this synecdoche, “le barbu” (“the bearded”) also alludes to his religious beliefs and practices as a Muslim, “barbu” being a term generally used to refer to the practitioners of a more radical form of Islam, easily identifiable because of their beards.

³⁶³ Kelleher 3.

practices from the country of origin and the adoption of new ones that are deemed more westernized like television watching.

What, first and foremost, draws the reader's attention is the fact that Doria's view of the world is profoundly influenced by the mass media and especially by the television world of sitcoms, game shows, ads, and soap operas.³⁶⁴ Indeed, it is not difficult to notice, from a textual point of view, the intermedial nature of the narrative, full of references to films, advertisements and television programs pertaining to both American and French popular cultures. From the beginning, we are immersed in what constitutes Doria's "mediascape."³⁶⁵ As with Passi, what interests me most is not only the use that Doria makes of television as a visual, technological and cultural apparatus in her daily life, but also the emergence of a liminal yet liberating space of self-fashioning created by television viewing and the practices that sustain it.

As an object and a medium, I contend that television in this novel serves as a companion, a site of popular knowledge, and a "place of gathering" (Adam) and socialization for Doria, for her mother, and the other women of the *cit e*. As such, it also functions as a tool for integration. As a window onto the world, television becomes symbolically for Doria not only a "zone of contact"³⁶⁶ between her inner self and the outside world, but also a filter or grid through which she can observe, evaluate, understand and meaningfully interpret life in the sense of Stuart Hall's "preferred

³⁶⁴ It is worth pointing out that these shows are for the majority American.

³⁶⁵ Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large*. For a succinct definition, see the introductory chapter of this dissertation, page 13.

³⁶⁶ See my comment on page 59.

reading” in “Encoding, Decoding.”³⁶⁷ Whereas in her daily life she struggles to find her place within her own family and society, with television she enters a world where social, economic, and cultural barriers are abolished. It is a space where, thanks to the power of imagination and narration, she can finally be in control of her fate. Television allows her to right the wrongs of the past, present and future while bringing order into the chaos of her life. By feeding the narrator’s imagination, television provides her with the material, weapons and “tactics” necessary to cope with, and escape from, the ugliness of her real and daily life, thereby *remediating* it, by borrowing from television’s content.

The use of television, the role of her imagination, and the power conferred by the privileged position of spectator, television critic, and diarist all favor the creation of a space of mediation, negotiation and production of meanings. It is a space which allows her both to overcome her own mental, social and cultural alienation, and to undertake her own identity project. By using television, its genres, images, and “morality” to create scripts and other “narrative-based accounts of strips of reality” (Appadurai 35) to *remediate* the shortcomings of her own life, Doria not only asserts her own voice, identity and subjectivity, she also—and this most importantly— defends her right to existence by exerting her own “right to look.” Through a reading of *Kiffe kiffe demain*, my ultimate goal is to investigate how the immigrant or subaltern subject, in a media-saturated world where screens are omnipresent, manages to free him/herself from institutional (family,

³⁶⁷ According to Hall, “dominant” or “preferred reading” refers to the “hegemonic viewpoint” in place in a given society or culture. It “defines within its term the mental horizon, the universe Of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and [...] carries with it the stamps of legitimacy-it appears coterminous with what is “natural,” “inevitable,” “taken for granted” about the social order.” To be more precise, “[w]e say *dominant* because there exists a pattern of ‘preferred readings,’ and these both have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalized” (138).

state) oppressions that have psychological and intellectual dimensions in order to sustain new narratives about the self.

I. Living through the Mediascape of Television in the *Banlieue*: the Practical and Symbolic Role of an Everyday Medium.

Although *Kiffe kiffe demain* has received much attention from literary critics, the role of television, whether practical or symbolical, has often been overlooked. If studied, it is read through the frame of the dichotomy popular (sub)culture and high (French) culture. Yet television, as a purveyor of popular culture, constitutes the other landscape, or “mediascape,” from which Guène and her characters draw their inspiration and life examples. This novel, in many regards, is a resounding reminder of the role that mass media such as radio, newspaper, and television have played in the birth of what I call the “génération du visible” since the 1980s,³⁶⁸ in a context of economic and cultural globalization.³⁶⁹ Thus, like Passi, it is without doubt that Guène should also be considered as belonging to this generation of media users that often self-identify as the “children of television” (“les enfants de la télé”), that is, the products of the television they consume. They are individuals who not only have been born into the television era it but also, literally and figuratively, have been raised by/with the nanny-TV. Television has always been a part of their social, cultural and mental fabric from childhood to adulthood. Thus,

³⁶⁸ See general introduction, page 16.

³⁶⁹ According to Alec Hargreaves in “Perceptions of Ethnic Difference in Post-War France,” “While political elites have been struggling to resist this process, [...] young people in France appear more willing to embrace the horizons opened up by globalization. Minority ethnic youths were particularly well placed to lead the way.” Alec Hargreaves, “Perceptions of Ethnic Difference in Post-War France,” *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*. Eds. Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (2001) : 11-12.

it is no surprise that in *Kiffe kiffe demain* Doria's world revolves around three poles: her family, her *cit * and the "mediascape" of television.

A. Welcome to the World of "un enfant de la t l ."

With *Kiffe kiffe demain* we penetrate the inner world of Doria whom we meet for the first time after one of her psycho-therapy sessions. By choosing such an "entr e en mati re," Gu ne managed to definitely set the tone of the novel which, she recognized during an interview, is not an "optimistic" one. From the first pages of the novel, we quickly get an idea of the personality and life of the teenager who, as the narrator, confides in her personal journal. We learn rapidly that she was born of Moroccan parents but also comes from a broken home, mainly due to the fact that, six months prior to our first encounter with her, her father had left the marital home without warning to return to Morocco in order to remarry. We also learn that in addition to the difficulty of making ends meet with her mother, despite receiving public assistance, she is not doing so well in school. Depressed and retreating into a constant silence, she is being treated by a psychotherapist; having raised some concerns, her asocial behavior and mental state are the main reasons behind the decision to start therapy. And yet, while she seems incapable of opening up during each of the therapy sessions, Doria finds in her journal the perfect confidant to whom to voice her concerns and hopes. Indeed, each of her journal entries consists of a description of her daily struggles and reactions toward the issues that affect her life. It is comprised of her most intimate thoughts and feelings on serious matters, like her father's departure or her bullying by her schoolmates, or more trivial ones like her

favorite television programs. In fact, as we shall see later in this chapter, television and its programs are often the recurrent topic of most of her entries.

From the beginning of the novel to the end, we, the readers, are overwhelmed by the recurrent references to television, radio, advertisements and cinema, as well as to French and American pop cultures. We are, indeed, struck by the many intertextual and intermedial references present in the narrative and pertaining to the culture of images or what Éric Macé calls “mediacultures.”³⁷⁰ Of course, such intermedial references, symptomatic of our culture of images, are not unique to *Kiffe kiffe demain* and can be found in other recent Francophone novels, such as, to name a few, Thomté Ryam’s banlieue novel *En attendant que le bus explose*, *Pieds-Blancs* by Houda Rouane, or novels by African writers like Alain Mabanckou’s *African Psycho* or *Black Bazaar*. However, none of them stands out as much as *Kiffe kiffe demain* in terms of the constant depiction of what Roger Silverstone calls “the experience of television.” Indeed, every entry of her diary is full of references to television shows, games, and other genres like soap-operas from French or American television, showing off, then, the extent of her knowledge on that matter, as well as the nature of her relationship with that medium on a daily basis.³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ In *Les imaginaires Médiatiques* (2006), Eric Macé provides the following definition for “mediacultures” : “ [...] ce que j’appelle les *mediacultures*, c’est-à-dire l’ensemble des rapports sociaux des expériences médiatisées par les représentations médiatiques et leurs usages. Typiques des mutations historiques postindustrielles, les *mediacultures* auront ainsi alimenté l’imaginaire collectif [...]” : (12-13).

³⁷¹ As we shall see later in the chapter, in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, these televisual references not only are interwoven in the narrative and serve as a constant intertext, but they also become the pretext for a metanarrative which allows, through the fruit of her imagination and own interpretation of her surroundings, a new reality to come into being.

Like every teenager of her generation, living in the new millennium, Doria's world and, consequently, daily routine, are constantly shaped by her consumption of media products. Such habits have consequently allowed her to gain an encyclopedic knowledge of television series and other programs as well as to develop a form of dependency on the medium. As we shall see later in this chapter, from the first pages, it is clear that the role of television in this novel goes beyond its simple practical function as a medium of entertainment and information. Television is not only her most valuable possession, it is an external organ as necessary for her existence as a heart or liver and without which she cannot function: "Quand même, s'ils nous coupent la télé comme ils nous ont coupé le téléphone, c'est chaud. J'ai que ça [...]." ³⁷² As we will see further down, television is almost like a God for Doria or, rather, like a religion, or, even worse, like a drug, as it guides and gives her solace through tough challenges while providing her with a doorway to escape reality.

Yet, it is my contention that it would be a mistake to characterize the relationship of dependency that exists between Doria and the television set as a form of addiction, such as that described by the narrator in Passi's song. Rather, Doria's constant back and forth between the depiction of her daily life and her references to the televisual world demonstrates a certain lucidity and understanding of the difference between reality (real life) and virtuality (TV). She might be haunted by her television programs like Passi, but her mind is not numbed by the power of television; many times, as we will see, she clearly indicates to the reader when that shift between these two separate worlds takes

³⁷² Guène 150-151.

place. Instead, she has managed to tame it, like a domestic animal, and to turn it into the perfect companion on which she can depend.

B. Of “Transitional Objects” and Companionship.

More than just a decorative object that is part of Doria’s domestic landscape, the television set is treated like a family member and as a companion. For this reason, television appears to be a secondary but still important character, and the place that it occupies practically and symbolically in the novel is that of, in Roger Silverstone’s words, a “transitional object,” that is an object which, according to the psychoanalytical “object relations theory” developed by Donald W. Winnicott, serves to fill in for a child for the absence of a loved one (i.e. the mother) by creating a sense of continuity, stability and trust.³⁷³ In short, television is for Doria an object that has become both the center of her affection and a means to fill a void in her life—specifically the absence of the father. Television, thus, compensates for her absentee father and allows her to forget her pain.

Thus, if we were to pursue the comparison between television’s addicting power and that of hard drugs, it could be argued that television becomes addicting in Doria’s case solely because “addiction,” as pointed out by Silverstone, “is [usually] linked to question of security, separation and desire for communication.” In Doria’s case, the need for security, the fear of separation, her incapability to communicate with other human beings, and her desire to be loved are all linked to the many obstacles that she must overcome daily and traumas experienced in the past, chief among which is the father’s

³⁷³ According to Winnicott’s theory, this “transitional object” is typically the first one given to a child by his mother; it is usually a cuddle toy or a blanket during the first year of his life to replace her during her occupations. During that time the child develops a strong emotional connection with the object which, by symbolically representing the mother, helps overcome the feelings of anxiety caused by her absence.

departure. Indeed, the sudden departure of the “barbu”; the feeling of being rejected because of her gender (her father always wanted a son but his wish was never granted due to his wife’s infertility issues); the social, economic and psychological repercussions of this abandonment (particularly the shame of being a *bâtarde*); the difficulties girls face in the projects: these are the many challenges she must overcome. They are the reason why television becomes a perfect substitute for her father and a good transitional object for her.

Emotionally destabilized and further stigmatized and marginalized at school, within French society and her own community of Ivry-Gargan, Doria’s only solution is to seek refuge in her journal and the television world. Television takes on the role that her father no longer fulfills, providing her with feelings of protection and reassurance. The narrator recalls her father’s departure in the following terms : “Alors un jour, le barbu, il a dû se rendre compte que ça servait rien d’essayer avec ma mère et il s’est cassé. Comme ça, sans prévenir. Tout ce dont je m’en souviens, c’est que je regardais un épisode de la saison 4 de X-Files [...], la porte a claqué [...] ça fait plus de 6 mois maintenant” (10).

Doubtless this memory represents a traumatic moment of the narrator’s life. Each element of this short passage points toward that hypothesis and notably toward the abruptness and the violence of the event as well, as suggested by the short and fast-paced sentences. Also worth pointing out is the other element that makes this event all the more memorable for the narrator, that is to say, the fact that she was watching an episode of the famous American science-fiction drama TV series, *X-Files*. Although a small detail, the

narrator's insistence on correlating her father's departure to a specific television genre and program known for its focus on the paranormal and unsolved cases cannot be overlooked. This reference incontestably underscores the abnormality of the situation, as well as of the mystery still surrounding it. As a result, it also firmly supports our argument concerning the practical and symbolic role of television as a domestic medium. Indeed, if television acts as a "transitional object" (Roger Silverstone) or substitute for her father, it is because it stands out, from the beginning, as both a companion in misery and as an ally upon which she can rely during difficult times, real or imagined. In a passage recounting a dream she had of her own funeral, her father is notably absent but is replaced by Leonardo Di Caprio in his heroic role in the blockbuster movie "Titanic," which she had probably watched on television:

J'y pense à la mort des fois. Ça m'arrive même d'en rêver. Une nuit, j'assistais à mon enterrement. Y avait presque personne. Juste ma mère, Mme Burlaud, Carla, la Portugaise qui nettoie les ascenseurs de la tour, Leonardo DiCaprio de *Titanic*, et ma copine Sarah qui a déménagé à Trappes quand j'avais douze ans. Mon père, il était pas là. Il devait s'occuper de sa paysanne enceinte de son futur Momo pendant que moi, eh ben, j'étais morte. (23)

We could also argue, drawing on Silverstone's work, that television's function in this novel, through its "emotional significance, as [...] a comforter"³⁷⁴ and a companion is to not only bring solace to the character, but also to bring order in the chaos that the father's unexplained departure has brought into hers and her mother's lives. According to Silverstone, "what makes TV such a significant, powerful transitional object" is its "availability," the fact that it is "constantly present" (15). Television, most importantly, is

³⁷⁴ Silverstone 3.

able to create a feeling of trust. For Silverstone, who draws both on Anthony Giddens's concept of "ontological security"³⁷⁵ and D.W. Winnicott's "object relations theory," trust is key. It is, as he reminds us, "the precondition, for ontological security and for our capacity to sustain an active anxiety-controlling engagement in the everyday world [...]."³⁷⁶ This creates confidence, which "in turn implies the ability to manage, counteract or minimize the various threats and dangers that appear to challenge us, both as individuals and as collectivities. It is the *sine qua non* of social life" (Silverstone 6). Television, by playing the role of a transitional object, is able to create that ontological feeling of security, therefore, a feeling of stability and continuity, which are essential for our personal identity as well as for our survival within society.

C. Television as "Space of Gathering" and Socialization.

Television in *Kiffe kiffe demain* is not only Doria's remedy for the absence of her father; it is also an important instrument of communication both for her and her mother, as well as with the other women in the *cit  *. Indeed, television serves as a mediator between her and a mother who has also been traumatized by her own disillusionments of a life in France, among which are her sudden separation from her husband and her having to provide for her family while lacking the necessary skills to improve her socio-economic standing.

³⁷⁵ Quoted in Silverstone's *Television and Everyday Life* (5), Giddens defines the concept of "ontological security" as follows: "[...] the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security [...]. Ontological security has to do with 'being' or, in terms of phenomenology, 'being-in-the-world.' But it is an emotional, rather than a cognitive phenomenon, and it is rooted in unconscious" (Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 92; qtd. in Silverstone: 5).

³⁷⁶ Giddens, qtd in Silverstone 6.

In many ways, Doria's mother's description matches the usual stereotype of the North-African mother figure found in most immigrant and Beur narratives by North African writers: illiterate but resourceful, despondent but courageous, often silenced in a patriarchal system, but still the guardian of the family and of the home country traditions. Nevertheless, her role in succeeding as a traditional mother and maintaining a close relationship with her daughter is made difficult by her demanding schedule as a maid and as a student (she takes night classes). Consequently, the limited time she has to spend with her daughter contributes to their mutual isolation and further complicates their relationship. Yet, despite this gap between mother and daughter, both characters are able to find ways to stay connected. Indeed, in addition to all the moments that daughter and mother seem to share a bond (e.g. shopping, spending time with family), the one that most closely connects them occurs in the comfortable space created around the television set.

It is during their daily domestic routine of television watching that both characters seem to be the closest and at peace, even when that activity is not experienced with the same intensity: "Quand je regarde la télé, maman écoute Enrico Macias et tricote" (151). Although it might appear trivial, the act of watching television does become a valuable bonding moment between both women, that is, a time and space of that strengthens their mother-daughter relationship. For instance, when reflecting on her desire to run away, Doria explains that this eventuality is no longer possible due to her new role in her family. Indeed, she has come to be even more indispensable to this relationship when she was charged with recording her mother's favorite soap-opera *Les feux de l'amour* (*The*

Young and the Restless): “De toute façon, je sais pas si Maman serait d’accord pour que je me casse. Il n’y aurait personne pour lui enregistrer *Les Feux de l’amour*. [...] Ça me rappelle que quand même, y a des gens qu’ont besoin de moi, et ça fait du bien” (73).

Television, thus, does not shape only their relationship; it provides Doria with the reassurance of playing an important role in her family, namely, of being an irreplaceable piece³⁷⁷ of what is left of her family system and, as such, a valuable member of her community. Actually, this daily domestic activity takes on all the significance of a social rite in that it functions as a real moment of communion and bonding between mother and daughter, and also with the rest of the community.

Television helps mediate their relationship with others by creating a “place of gathering” (Paul C. Adam) and socialization for them and the other women in the *cit *,³⁷⁸ whether in front of their own television or invited to watch it at a neighbor’s house. It is a space of construction and strengthening of social links outside of the domestic and private sphere, which progressively allows their social integration. According to Doria, these moments of gathering are the occasion for all of the women to voice their opinion on many topics, but especially on their favorite TV program, *Les Feux de l’amour*: “Les daronnnes de la cit , elles sont toutes   fond dedans. Elles se retrouvent au square pour se raconter les  pisodes que certaines ont loup s. Pire que l’ poque honteuse des boys bands dont on  tait toutes fanatiques” (42).

³⁷⁷ In opposition to being replaced by her father with the new male baby that she imagines the “barbu” must have already welcomed by then. Indeed, the primary reason behind her father’s departure lies in his longtime wish to have a son, which Doria’s mother was incapable of granting him due to her infertility problems.

³⁷⁸ This place can be compared to symbolic space that is the “caf ” for immigrant men.

Through this apparently trivial and quite humorous scene, the intention of the author is clearly to bring forth the normality of life and habits of a generation of women often depicted in the media as prisoners in their own home, suffocating under the weight of their gender, in a world dominated by men and religion (Islam).³⁷⁹ Nevertheless, as we can see, television becomes a pretext for them to escape their isolation and silence. Furthermore, what makes this scene even more interesting is the fact that it pinpoints, on one hand, the fact that immigrants are also the primary consumers of media products and content and, on the other hand, that they are the creators of new cultural practices formed in an exilic context. Finally, it reminds us that, in the case of *Kiffe kiffe demain*, a global medium like television truly functions as a “window on the world” for the disenfranchised and marginalized characters by granting them access to the outside world and other cultures and, as a result, by allowing them to escape their daily routine. To illustrate this point, we can cite the relationship nurtured by Doria's mother with her television set while still living in Morocco. Thanks to the different television programs coming from France and broadcast in her native country, she was able to picture in her mind what life was like “over there”: “ma mère, elle s’imaginait que la France, c’était comme dans les films en noir et blanc des années soixante. Ceux avec l’acteur beau gosse [...]. Avec sa cousine Bouchra, elles avaient réussi à capter les chaînes françaises grâce à une antenne expérimentale fabriquée avec une couscoussière en inox” (21). As shown by this example, and as we will see again in more detail later, even with the help of a makeshift antenna, television, by stimulating their imagination and opening up an

³⁷⁹ Islam, the religion of the Muslims, is a religion that privileges men over women in many aspects of the laws and customs (e.g. marriage, divorce, property rights, education, etc.).

alternative reality (filled with their own fantasies), provides the characters with a way to escape their daily reality whether in the home country or in their Parisian *banlieue*.

Nevertheless, it would be an error to see television in this novel as a pure escape or refuge in a fantasy world. In the case of Doria's mother, reality bitterly hits home when she finally reunites with her husband in France : "Alors quand elle est arrivée avec mon père à Ivry-Gargan en février 1984, elle a cru qu'ils avaient pris le mauvais bateau et qu'ils s'étaient trompés de pays."³⁸⁰ In this novel, the position of spectator is not reduced to a passive experience, as a result of this daily habit; rather, it is a conscious activity.³⁸¹ Doria is far from playing the role of the reluctant witness seen in chapter 2, or of the TV drug addict in Passi's song. As an entertainer, an informer (or misinformer) and, therefore, a purveyor of knowledge, television becomes for Doria a useful lens through which to experience the "real" world and a practical life guide. Likewise, as an interpretative grid, television is a tool through which she can use her critical thinking skills to filter, analyze, decode and understand herself, others and life in general.

II. Screening and Reading Reality through Television: Interrogating Spectatorship Position in *Kiffe kiffe demain*.

A. Television as the New 'Quran.'

That television is an indispensable and vital tool in Doria's everyday life is made particularly clear when she declares that for her television is "le Coran du pauvre" (151).

³⁸⁰ Guène 21.

³⁸¹ In fact, Guène encourages us throughout the novel to question the usual argument according to which television is a drug that opens up a twilight zone that threatens not only to blur the boundaries between the real and the virtual –thus creating a world of simulations (Baudrillard)—but also to provoke a dreamlike state in which the spectator is left comatose, lobotomized, that is, stripped of any critical thinking skills as a result of his daily exposure.

The analogy between the *Quran*, the sacred text of Islam, is obviously quite powerful and requires close analysis. First, this particular quote explicitly associates the televisual medium with a particular socio-economic class; second, it reminisces about one of Marx's famous quotes: "la religion est l'opium du peuple," which in this case would perpetuate the analogy between TV and drugs, thus, underscoring television's stronghold in the narrator's life. Furthermore, by comparing television to a print medium, and a sacred text at that, Guène directly associates the experience of television viewing to an act of reading and textual interpretation.³⁸²

In Doria's world, television is effectively turned into a sacred text whose content may sometimes appear as a mystery for a novice. Remembering a discussion during a medieval history class, she even asserts that such a mystical experience is in many ways similar to that encountered by peasants during church services in the Middle Ages. When incapable of reading the Bible or understanding the priest's sermon, delivered in Latin, the common people's only solution was to "read" the Biblical stories recounted in the figures in the stained glass windows in order to have a better understanding of the word of God:

M. Werbert, mon prof de géo de l'année passée, quand on a étudié la période médiévale, il nous a dit que l'église, les dessins des vitraux, c'était la bible du pauvre, pour les gens qui savaient pas lire.³⁸³

³⁸² It is interesting to note that television encompasses several perceptual experiences through listening, seeing, feeling, as well as cognitive skills through reading and writing.

³⁸³ Guène 151.

Like the Quran, the Bible, or the stained glass windows of a church, television and its texts are represented as functioning as a supreme guide that is able to give Doria, a modern-day peasant,³⁸⁴ the direction she seeks and to provide her with the necessary information for experiencing life. And yet, one shall recall that the Bible or the Quran, although based on historical events for the most part, does not always portray real life events but rather relies on the use of symbols or allegories (i.e. the parables of Jesus) to portray, explain and interpret the world and spiritual truths. From this resource, the TV-Quran, she can find all the references and examples that she needs for her own life learning experiences as well as the grid to screen and interpret events around her. She does so by conveniently choosing her TV-inspired stories according to her needs of the moment, thus skillfully manipulating the “holy” text and us readers by rendering her own exegesis, choosing what serves her beliefs or rejecting what discounts them. She is caught many times using these interpretive skills. For instance, when refusing to go on a winter trip with her class during which she would have learned how to ski, Doria’s sole excuse is to point out how boring such an activity can be in order to avoid admitting that her financial situation is the real reason for her not going. Television is used to confirm her belief: “Le ski ça pue la merde. [...] Je le sais, j’ai déjà regardé des compétitions de ski à la télé” (40). Likewise, when it comes to understanding what an ideal if not perfect family looks like, it is natural that she thinks of the Ingalls family portrayed in the iconic TV series, *La petite maison dans la prairie* (*The Little house on the Prairie*): “Ce que j’aime bien chez eux, c’est que dès qu’il arrive un drame, ils font le signe de croix, pleurent un bon coup, et à l’épisode d’après, on a tout oublié... C’est du pur cinéma”

³⁸⁴ Her mother is also playing that role because of her own illiteracy.

(74). Yet, as illustrated by the last sentence, one immediately notes that, although enjoying being entertained, Doria is clearly aware of the artificiality of the televisual world, which does not seem to bother her.

Actually, television becomes for her a good point of comparison every time she needs models to understand human nature. She does so, for instance, when she describes the personality of other characters, for example her friend Hamoudi, a drug dealer, whom she compares to Antonio Banderas in *Zorro* and to other film heroes. She also uses televisual or cinematic references, like the movie *Grease*, to understand events in her own life such as her rejection by Nabil (of whom she has become fond after a kiss), after his return from vacation in Morocco (146). Likewise, as in Nabil's case, it is also as an expert on television that Doria often makes comparisons between people in her life and famous television or movie characters or hosts. She does not hesitate, for example, to compare her first male social worker ("assistant social") to a famous French television host, René Cabrol, because of their physical resemblance. According to her, "Il ressemblait à Laurent Cabrol, celui qui présentait 'La nuit des héros' sur TF1 le vendredi soir" (17). Also, when commenting on the annoying and almost insulting mannerism that "Mme Dutruc," her new social worker, displays when talking to her mother ("[elle] se grattait le coin de l'oeil avec l'auriculaire"), Doria cynically points out that she was doing it like "les filles qui se mettent du mascara à la télé. Juste pour flamber, pour faire voir ses ongles parfaits [...]" (31). Finally, another example of her referring to the televisual world to judge others and their character can be found in the following passage in which she encounters in the commuter train (RER) a gypsy begger, "un manouche," whose

suspicious-looking facial features immediately remind her of a cartoonish character similar to “le chat dans *Alice au pays des merveilles*” (29).

Doria definitely finds inspiration in the televisual medium and uses it as a guide for her behavior, especially in the time of misfortunes. For instance, when thinking about the way her Aunt Zohra should announce the arrest of her son, Youssef, to her estranged husband, Doria does not hesitate to declare that “[p]our les mauvaises nouvelles, il faut s’inspirer de la télé. Du courage et du tact de Gaby dans *Sunset Beach* quand elle annonce à son con de mari qu’elle l’a trompé avec son propre frère [...]” (93). As we can see, television not only provides models for dealing with the vicissitudes of life—it can teach whoever needs it how to cope with bad news—but also of morality. When deciding what is right or wrong, Doria finds her examples in her favorite TV drama or soap operas. This also explains why she often takes on the role of television critic, judge or even of lawyer, such as TV’s iconic Perry Mason (85): when addressing the “circonstances atténuantes” (47) behind the arrogance of Nabil, her young tutor, which she interprets as a way to overcompensate his own emasculation by an overbearing mother, she cannot help but compare herself to the perspicuous lawyer characters seen on television or in the movies. Boastfully interrupting her narration to draw the reader’s attention to that fact, she exclaims : “Vous avez vu, je fais comme les avocats des films américains qui, pour défendre un client serial killer, violeur et cannibal, racontent toute son enfance, super malheureuse” (47-48).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that individuals, and especially her close relations, are not her only targets; she also uses television to screen society and life in general.

When reflecting on the state of marriage and the deep roots behind the increasing rate of divorces in today's modern society, Doria paints a rather sobering picture of it, despite pointing out some of its positive aspects such as the freedom to choose a mate. According to her, “ La chance de notre génération, c'est qu'on peut choisir qui on va aimer toute sa vie—ou toute l'année. Ça dépend des couples. Dans *Zones Interdites*³⁸⁵, Bernard de LaVillardière parlait du problème du divorce. Il expliquait comment ça augmentait à fond” (42). As we can suspect, it is a picture—and a conclusion—that is certainly primarily influenced by her parents' own separation and that is also reinforced by television which appears, once again in this instance, as a reliable source of knowledge and a grid of analysis of social reality. Rather than just referring to the findings of De La Villardiere's investigation, Doria goes one step further to unlock the mysteries of divorces in French society by offering her own interpretation of the true reason behind them. According to her hypothesis, the real reason behind the decline of marriages nowadays can only be found in the portrayal of marriage by the very popular American soap-opera *Les Feux de l'amour*: “La seule raison que je vois à ce phénomène, c'est *Les Feux de l'Amour*. Dans le feuilleton, ils se sont tous mariés entre eux au moins une fois, si ce n'est deux. C'est des histoires de ouf et ma mère elle suit leurs embrouilles depuis 1989.”³⁸⁶ Thus, for Doria, it is television, through its programs and narratives, which bears the primary responsibility for the poor state of marriage today. Contrary to her, most viewers are not perspicacious enough to critically question and avoid following the models of marriage and divorces portrayed on television. In the case of a soap opera like

³⁸⁵ *Zone interdite* is a French TV newsmagazine broadcast on the most popular private TV network, M6, and presented by TV host Bernard de La Villardière from 1998 to 2005.

³⁸⁶ Guène 42.

Les Feux de l'amour, she implicitly deplores the lack of moral grounding by way of promoting a misguided and licentious image of marital relationships (“des histoires de ouf”) that irremediably influences audiences and causes them to erroneously model their life on what they see.

Although Doria’s critique of television is quite surprising for an “enfant de la télé,” it is my contention that it is also revealing of the ambiguous nature of her relationship with the televisual medium, her use of it and, most importantly, her disposition for critical thinking. Indeed, at first sight Doria’s criticism in this particular passage strikes us as a paradox, particularly for a character whose own *médiaphilie* dominates her life and influences the way she relates to the world and others. Nevertheless, in that precise instance, she is demonstrating a capacity to step back from the televisual world, to unlock its mysteries, and to provide a lucid and critical reading of its content. At the end, it would appear that if any mysteries surrounding the book of television remain to be unlocked, decoded and interpreted, Doria, however much of a novice she might be, has somehow become expert.

B. From “Reluctant Witness” to Engaged Spectator: Doria’s Preferred Readings and “Right to Look.”

As part of the generation that identifies itself as “enfants de la télé,” Guène is evidently using Doria to assert her own position on the role of television and its impact on today’s society, especially among audiences from underrepresented groups such as ethnic minorities, immigrants, and suburban youth. As we have seen in previous chapters, television’s impact can be negative on political, ontological, symbolical levels, as well as

on the cognitive level, as previous examples show. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, this cognitive dimension, namely the intellectual process that is comprised in the televisual experience (e.g. active viewing or preferred reading), is brought to the attention of the reader many times. By doing so, Guène manages to illustrate the fact that television viewing can be the time and space of a reading of reality and elaboration of a social discourse which, ultimately, enables the characters (especially Doria) to counter already established and hegemonic discourses on the *banlieue* and its inhabitants.

Television, part of a powerful network that purveys information and misinformation, is depicted in this novel as having both a negative and positive impact on the characters' cognitive abilities and especially their perception and ability to reason well. From Doria's mother who thought that what she was seeing on television was total reality, to the spectators who model their idea of marriage or other behavior on televisual representations of marriage, television seems, on one hand, to have succeeded in limiting their critical thinking skills.³⁸⁷ On the other hand, however, it is worth pointing out, that despite her tough stance on television's negative influence on society's habits and powers of reasoning, Guène, via Doria, shows at the same time that it is not always the case. Doria is the exception to the rule in that she seems to grasp the true meanings behind the messages (i.e. through texts, images, and sounds) of a medium like television. If, to quote Marshall McLuhan, "the medium is the message" (*Understanding Media* 7), Doria demonstrates, although at times unwittingly, a lucid understanding of the personal and

³⁸⁷ With the example of a television program like *Les feux de l'amour*, it is presumed that the viewers of such shows are incapable of critical thinking and, therefore, unable to differentiate between right and wrong, or between the virtual and the actual.

social effects and changes created by a medium like television on her own community and society as a whole.

Considering all of the above, Guène's novel can be said to challenge, from a critical and theoretical standpoint, any presumptions according to which spectators, and in this case, spectators from minority groups, are passive receptacles of media images and texts. Rather, it conveys the idea that relationship of viewer with television is much more complex in the cognitive dimension and cannot be considered as unilateral in the communication circuit: producer→consumer or sender→message→receiver. As we can see with Doria, we are far from the image of a spectator in a trance or naively manipulated by a media and its content. As was previously stated, she is able to differentiate between the virtual and the actual. In the case of the Ingalls family and their family dynamics, which she admires, she is well aware that, although they might project the image of a solid and complete family unit, their on-screen portrayal is just "du pur cinéma" (74) and does not correspond to anything or anybody that she knows in real life. The type of families to which she is accustomed, do not behave like the Ingalls in dire situations; namely, her relatives do not perform the typical Ingall's ritual. In brief, they do not make the sign of the cross ("font le signe de croix"), nor do they have a good cry ("pleurent un bon petit coup") and quickly forget about it at the next episode ("et à l'épisode d'après, on oublie tout").³⁸⁸

³⁸⁸ Guène 74.

It remains important to stress that the spectator's passive consumption of media product is a notion that has already been refuted by many scholars.³⁸⁹ In *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (1997), for instance, Stuart Hall asserts that "[t]he receiver of the messages and meanings is not a passive screen on which the original meaning is accurate and transparent" (10). According to his article "Encoding, Decoding,"³⁹⁰ it is important to remember that "the consumption or reception of the television message is [...] also itself a 'moment' of the *production* process in its larger sense, though the latter is 'predominant': because it is the 'point of departure' for the realization of the message" (138, my emphasis). Indeed, as seen in previous chapters of this dissertation, the fact of looking at an image or reading a book necessarily brings forth the question of its reception and interpretation. Depending on their social positioning, Hall argues, spectators (or readers) are either able to accept the *dominant* or *preferred readings* conveyed by mass media and its texts (through its pre-established encoded meanings or ideology), appropriate, negotiate or resist these codes (*negotiated reading*), or oppose them altogether (*oppositional reading*) by using a different critical framework. For Hall, it is rare that what constitutes the "preferred readings," namely the "set of

³⁸⁹ Among the proponents of an Active Audience Theory are David Morley, Stuart Hall with his *Encoding/Decoding* Model; Flow Katz and Paul Lagarsfeld with the *Two Step Flow* model; J.G. Blumer and E. Katz with the Uses and Gratifications model; Denis McQuail, or David Gauntlett with his interactive idea of a "pick and choose" audience. They opposed the passive audience theories developed in the 1930s with the Frankfurt School, or proponents of the Hypodermic Syringe model or Inoculation model. Active Audience theorists claim that audiences are not just passive receptacles of media messages; rather, they are actively involved in the production of new meanings upon reception of media texts. With these models, the meaning of a text is not unique or inherent. Even when encoded by media producers, the inherent message(s) of a media text, is constantly negotiated, interpreted, and reproduced by the audience.

³⁹⁰ For more details, see Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, eds. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, 2nd ed. (Maldern: Wiley Blackwell, 2012).

meanings, practices, and beliefs” that defines the “everyday knowledge of social structures” of any given society or culture, also remains “univocal or uncontested” (141).

It is a similar pattern of appropriation and contestation or, rather, subversion that we find overall embedded in Doria’s daily habits of screening society through the lens of television. In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, the spectator in Doria is constantly caught in the act of negotiating society’s “preferred readings” or encoded messages conveyed by and through television. As a spectator of the television programs *Zone interdite* and *Les Feux de l’amour*, she is definitively aware of French and American societies’ dominant view on, or representation of, the state of marriage. Nevertheless, in light of what has been accepted as a societal and cultural norm (i.e. divorce) by the media, she still feels compelled to oppose it by giving her own take on reality through her criticisms of the media contents. As a result, she shows that she is able to not only read, but also to decode, then re-encode—that is, to reappropriate and remediate—the hidden messages conveyed by television and other mass media. As another consequence of this faculty, she is able to create new meanings and give her own “preferred reading” or alternative to dominant discourses, all based on her personal experience. Above all, she is able to do it from her particular marginalized socio-cultural positioning as a young female Franco-Maghrebi living in a housing project in the *banlieue*.

This ability, for Hall, is typical of the negotiating reader whose capacity for decoding “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements [...]” (“Encoding” 143). This type of reader “[...] acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational

(situated) level, [he] makes [his] own ground rules-[operating] with exceptions to the rule.”³⁹¹ In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, this faculty is put to task daily as Doria continuously gives her opinion on matters that are usually perceived as parts of the natural social order. She constantly questions society’s expectations for her regardless of whether they operate in the name of tradition or of modernity.³⁹²

Furthermore, despite being French, Guène’s main character, like the other Maghrebi protagonists, is conscious of her difficult position and of the challenges that she has to face daily as the daughter of North African immigrants and, as such, as the dual member of a cultural community and a disempowered and underrepresented group.³⁹³ According to Patricia Geesey, in “Global Popular Culture in Faïza Guène’s *Kiffe kiffe demain*,”³⁹⁴ in the novel, “[t]he protagonists explore their positions in relation to dominant French culture and often express a sense of exclusion they feel as resident of [a] cité” (Geesey 57) that can be social, cultural, and geographical, as shown in the episode of the trip to Paris during which Doria’s mother finally “discovers” the Eiffel Tower. In that passage, Guène succeeds in highlighting how deeply this feeling of exclusion is rooted in the immigrant characters. Although living in a suburb on the periphery of the capital, Doria and her mother had seen the Eiffel Tower only through televised images: “La tour Eiffel, c’était la première fois qu’elle [her mother] voyait en

³⁹¹ Hall, “Encoding” 143.

³⁹² A good example can be found in her desire to choose her own husband and not have one imposed on her at it is customary in North African societies.

³⁹³ Doria’s awareness is made clear every time she expresses her opinion on matters related to the discrimination of North Africans in France or when she encounters prejudice as in the person of her first male social worker.

³⁹⁴ Patricia Geesey, “Global Popular Culture in Faïza Guène’s *Kiffe Kiffe Demain*,” in *Expressions Maghrébines* 7.1 (Summer 2008).

vrai alors qu'elle habite à une demi-heure depuis presque vingt ans. Autrement, c'était à la télé, au JT de treize heures" (125).

It is no surprise that Doria, growing up with such paradoxes, is constantly "[making] her own pop culture discourses" in order to remediate her social and cultural situation, thus "[challenging] the dominant French society's effort to turn her into an 'object' of its discourse" or, we should add, to ignore her and those like her (Geesey 62). Hence, taking on the role of television critic and imposing her own preferred reading has become for Doria a way to create her own cultural reality based on her own experiences and cultural preferences.³⁹⁵ Moreover, by being able to decipher the codes of television and to give her own preferred reading, she is able to escape the position of Rosello's reluctant witness to which other characters in other Beur or *banlieue* novels have been confined. By being an engaged spectator and producing her own alternatives to dominant cultural discourses, Doria is able to (re)claim her voice and "right to look" and thus to assert her subjectivity and position as a creative cultural agent.

The fact that Doria takes on the role of critic and is able to articulate her opinion on matters related to pop culture or society in general--despite being excluded from dominant cultural productions--only serves to corroborate Ella Shohat's and Robert Stam's argument, according to which "[...] spectators can also return the gaze through critical comments or hostile looks" (Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism* 348). This last point is particularly significant for understanding the

³⁹⁵ As pointed out by Geesey, "Television series from the United States can be seen offering a window to an alternate cultural reality, one that exists outside of French or North African cultural contexts" (60).

subject position of a character like Doria and the importance of one's right to look as a spectator-witness, even reluctant,³⁹⁶ from a disempowered and marginalized group.

In a postmodern and postcolonial context where the right to visibility is upheld by institutions of power such as the mass media and where the "subaltern" is often the object of their gaze, the right to look or rather the right to look *back*, is crucial for the subject's survival. This *right to look (back)*, which almost inevitably reminds us of the French expression "droit de regard,"³⁹⁷ generally refers to the right arrogated by an authority to inspect and exert control over things and people. It is a right that can be exercised abusively. According to Jacques Derrida, for whom the "droit de regard" led to "*the invention of the other*," (J. Derrida and Marie-Francoise Plissart, *Droit de regards* xxxvi), this right can be exercised by government as well as by any random photographer who, through his art and use of visual technologies, authoritatively judges what/who can be photographed, looked at, and how to interpret their images.

And yet, to exercise one's "droit de regard" is also to have the ability to question that very same authority. It is the right that can be exercised by those dominated and under the controlling gaze (*sous surveillance*) of the more powerful *Other*. Drawing on visual culture specialist Nicolas Mirzoeff's own definition of that concept in his article, "The Right to Look," this right to look (back) to which I refer here is a "right to look [that] is not about merely seeing. It begins at a personal level with the look into someone else's eyes to express friendship, solidarity, or love" (473). This "right to look claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and

³⁹⁶ According to Rosello, this happens before the reluctant witness starts declining, through the use of different strategies, the stereotypes circulating about him or his group.

³⁹⁷ It is often translated in English as "right of inspection."

collectivity.”³⁹⁸ What it means is that one would be able to examine, control, and decide what, for instance, can be said and shown about oneself, and even when to be seen, as we have observed in the case of the mediatization of immigration. It is about reclaiming one’s voice, one’s look, one’s feeling and, especially, one’s subjectivity and agency. For Mirzoeff, it is a “right to existence” (477); however, this existence can only be truly meaningful if one is able to create one’s own meanings and have them recognized by the *Other*.

This idea goes along with Kelly Oliver’s understanding that the subaltern witness is condemned to a situation of oppression, subordination, or marginalization. Indeed, drawing once again on Kelly Oliver’s work in *Witnessing beyond Recognition*, it is important to underscore how necessary it is for those “othered,” in situations of oppression, marginalization and exclusion, to “[take up] a position as speaking subjects” (7). For Oliver, the only way possible for such changes to take place is through “address-ability” and “response-ability,” in other words, with the ability to address, to respond to and to be responsible. For Oliver, “Address-ability and response-ability are the roots of subjectivity, which are damaged by the objectifying operations of oppression and subordination.”³⁹⁹ The goal is no longer to be a passive and silent witness but to spark change, to play an active role in the relation with the “othering” Other by using these abilities. She argues that “[a]ddress-ability and response-ability are what [she] identif[ies] with the process of witnessing. Subjectivity is the result of [that] process.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Mirzoeff 473.

³⁹⁹ Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* 7.

⁴⁰⁰ Oliver 7.

Drawing on Fanon's work in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Oliver maintains that it is essentially by creating meaning that the process of de-objectification can be started and that victims of oppression (or any type of violence) in constant search and need of recognition by the oppressor can cease to be disempowered. She reminds us that such a pre-disposition was essential for Fanon, for whom "active meaning making and self-creation are necessary to fight oppression [...]" (Oliver 28-29).⁴⁰¹ In Fanon's view, one effective way to break the cycle of oppression and alienation and stop their negative effects on the disempowered subject was through the use of the imagination, the "mind's eyes" (Oliver 39). This nonphysical eye, he explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*, works as a mirror and precisely as a "corrective mirror": "The eye is not merely a mirror, but a correcting mirror. The eye should make it possible to correct cultural errors" (Fanon 178). Beyond its typical image-making capabilities or Evil Eye-like powers,⁴⁰² Fanon saw the imagination, this ability to *see* with the mind's eye, as not just a site of oppression, but also as a site of liberation for the colonial/subaltern subject in the struggle to assert his subjectivity by warding off the powers of the objectifying gaze/eye. Thus, it appears that, for Fanon, as underscored by Oliver, the imagination and the act of imagining were to become a necessary social practice for those oppressed and wanting to reclaim their subjectivity and agency.

III. Imagining, Narrating and Re-fashioning the Self through Television.

⁴⁰¹ Still referring to Fanon, Oliver adds that "the oppressed must learn to be actional and create their own meaning" independently from the meanings that precede him/her already in the world" (28-29).

⁴⁰² As seen in the chapter 3 on the Evil Eye, it was believed that the powers of the "mauvais oeil" also stemmed from the victim's imagination.

With *Kiffe kiffe demain*, one might argue that the situation described by Guène is different from the ones that Oliver or Fanon discuss in their works, that the story is situated during the postcolonial era—and not during colonization, and that its narrator-character is far from being in open and oppressive conflict with a powerful Other.⁴⁰³ Yet, *Kiffe kiffe demain* still remains a good illustration of the power of the imagination and language in promoting social and cultural transformations. As we have already seen, Doria does this through the conscious act of watching/reading, decoding and reinterpreting the content of popular culture products on television or elsewhere with the help of her fertile imagination. By doing so, she is able to break the cycle of exclusion that defines her everyday life and her position as a female subject in her *cit * in particular and French society in general.

It is, henceforth, what I would call the *tele-imagination*,⁴⁰⁴ seen as a “social practice” (Appadurai) and a source and space of (self-) knowledge, that I intend to highlight especially in this last section. More specifically, I intend to analyze the role that the transformative and liberating power of television watching plays in the constitution of Doria as a subject and an “active agent of cultural construction” (Geesey 62). Ultimately, I will show, in the subsequent paragraphs, how Doria’s fertile imagination and own discursive practices allow her, within the space of the narrative, to create a new self and identity which, by virtue of being transcultural is multiple, plastic, and chameleon-like

⁴⁰³ Both Geesey, in “Global Popular Culture,” and Dominic Thomas, in “New Writing for New Times: Faiza Gu ne, Banlieue Writing and the Post-Beur Generation” (2008), point out that Doria, and by extension Gu ne, is far from experiencing a cultural identity crisis as typically experienced by the preceding generation of Beurs and described in many Beur novels. That she is fully aware of her multicultural background and embraces it is shown by her constant references to Moroccan, French, and also American cultures. She does not feel as if she is torn between two cultures, or has “le cul entre deux chaises.”

⁴⁰⁴ I am using this term to outline the role and influence of television in the formation of Doria’s imaginary.

and challenges any fixed, rigid, and essentializing concept of identity, especially where institutionally imposed. Indeed, as we will see, although the imagination becomes the staging ground of her transformation as a subject with multiple identity projects, it is through language⁴⁰⁵ and the production of new identity narratives that these changes, and especially the assertion of her new self, come to realization.⁴⁰⁶

A. The Imagination as a Social Practice and a Tactic of Survival in a Globally Mediated World.

If we accept that the space of the narrative in *Kiffe kiffe demain* becomes not only a space of transgression of power or of resistance and contestation of hegemonic discourses regarding suburban youth and especially women of the Maghreb, it follows that it is also a site of transformation for the subject living in a world more and more globalized and mediated.-Like Passi in his song, we cannot help but notice the fusion taking place in *Kiffe kiffe demain* between Doria and television. As seen earlier, television is much more than a technological apparatus or a random decorative piece in Doria's home; instead, it has become an essential transitional object that manages to replace her missing father. Consequently, it has *virtually* become a trusted companion for the narrator-character and a part of herself. Television's strong hold on Dora's imagination has made it the primary prism through which she screens world, interprets her life and forms opinions (her "preferred reading"). In a way, television has become her

⁴⁰⁵ The role of language, its relation to representation, discourse and power, has long been emphasized, whether by postcolonial theorists or Francophone critics such as Bill Aschroft, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall or Françoise Lionnet.

⁴⁰⁶ It is tempting here to make a connection between Doria's experience with her imaginary and language and what Lacan saw as the difference between the order of the imaginary (realm of the Ego, of the mirror stage) and the order of the symbolic (in that realm, which is also the realm of the *Other*, the constitution of the subject takes place through language).

set of virtual eyes, a sort of prosthetic or, as Marshall McLuhan once declared, an “extension of [herself],”⁴⁰⁷ that is, of her body and mind in that it has helped to produce a being whose existence is strongly (re)mediated by it and the many media with which she interacts.

It is doubtful that, at the time of writing her first novel, Guène had read any of the theories surrounding television’s stranglehold in our lives. Nevertheless, she does pinpoint how important television’s role in our everyday lives has turned out to be and, above all, whether or not we agree on it, how successfully it has managed to pervade and affect our bodies, our minds and, especially, our imagination.⁴⁰⁸ Through its contents, television continues to feed our imaginary and to shape our perception or view of the world and the way we relate to others and to ourselves. It is an experience that concerns everyone in any given society in this global era; individuals from underrepresented and disempowered groups are no exception, for they are also involved in the socio-cultural dynamics that are taking place with and around the television set around the globe. It is no wonder that television has pervaded the cultural and mental fabric of the latest generation of writers like Guène.

Of course, these dynamics as they are described in *Kiffe kiffe demain* are not unique to *banlieue* (or post-Beur) writings; they have already been analyzed by postcolonial studies specialists like Françoise Lionnet who in her study of feminine postcolonial writings points out that these types of narratives generally “also reflect the

⁴⁰⁷ According to McLuhan in *Understanding Media: The extension of Man* (New York; Scarborough: New American Library, 1964), any medium is an “extension of ourselves.”

⁴⁰⁸ To critics, television viewing, and especially the radical form of binge-watching, is responsible for many things, including damaging our brains, increasing the risks of poor health habits, and influencing our body-image usually in a negative way.

dynamics engendered by the global system and its local manifestations.”⁴⁰⁹ For Lionnet, in our postcolonial and globalized era and highly mediatized societies it is crucial to take into account both the nature, conditions, impact, and significance of such ongoing socio-cultural changes, and also the position of the postcolonial subject *vis-à-vis* them.

According to her, there is in mainstream society a recurrent failure to acknowledge postcolonial subjects as “active creative agents capable of transforming the practices that they come to adopt [...]” (Lionnet 11). Lionnet clearly supports as well the position that they are too often perceived as “passive” recipients (Hall) or as victims of political, social, cultural and even technological transformations. As a consequence, they always find themselves confined to the role of “objects” rather than subjects or agents. Yet, these narratives, like Guène’s novel, allow us “to understand better the unique perspectives of subjects who are agents of transformation and hybridization in their own narratives—as opposed to being the objects of knowledge, as in the discourse of social sciences” (Lionnet 8).⁴¹⁰ In fact, this novel becomes the space of elaboration of new identity configurations partially made possible by the imagination and television.

According to the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, in a world dominated by global capitalism, the globalization of technologies of communication and information, and the omnipresence of different forms of media in our lives, it is more than ever essential to consider the role of imagination in knowing and understanding our own culture and that

⁴⁰⁹ Lionnet 3.

⁴¹⁰ According to Lionnet: “the processes [of adaptation, appropriation, and contestation] are the ground upon which contemporary global culture can begin to be understood, defined, and represented, and postcolonial writers encode the everyday realities and subjective perceptions of a numerical majority whose cultural contributions are still considered to be products of minority voices. By reproducing the changing cultural practices of the majority as it negotiates the conflicts between tradition and modernity, writers create a space for themselves within the dominant discourses while simultaneously articulating a problematic that is increasingly becoming accepted as a quasi-universal process” (6).

others. For Appadurai one should understand that “[t]he world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life” (31). Regardless of whether it is perceived as a negative or positive faculty or how we define it, imagination has become, in response to the global issues that characterize today’s world, a new space of social and cultural innovation, exchange and transformation that needs to be accounted for. Imagination, he claims, is “central to all forms of agency.”⁴¹¹ To support his argument, he provides us with a definition of “imagination” which, in addition to departing from the classic definitions of imagination, takes into account its concrete and transformative role in our daily lives in a context of globalization:

The image, the imagined, and the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination is a social practice*. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (this not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.⁴¹²

As we can see, this conception of the imagination clearly emphasizes the productiveness and performative nature of such a faculty in our life as it allows us to see the world differently from what we are used to. Along the same lines, in the *Imagination and the*

⁴¹¹ Appadurai 31.

⁴¹² Appadurai 31.

Novel, John Su reminds us how since the 1960s “[t]he emergence of modern notions of imagination was inseparable from a longing to effect radical social change” (1).

According to Su, this longing has been shared by many Anglophone postcolonial writers (e.g. Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) who conceived their recourse to, and promotion of, imagination in their writings as not just a simple way to counter, subvert or resist dominant discourses on the colonized Other, but also to educate their readers by “validating African cultures and traditions as sources of genuine knowledge” (7). In a world dominated by capitalism these writers’ project was to ultimately instill hopes in their African readers. Thus, for Su, to bear in mind the epistemological dimension of the imagination is equally important.⁴¹³

Literature has always accounted for the ongoing cultural transformations that our societies experience and, in regard to the postcolonial novel, those experienced by subaltern/non-Western *Other*. Again, according to Su, one should keep in mind that the imagination “is not an autonomous, free-floating faculty producing images divorced from the contexts in which an individual lives; rather, the images produced by the imagination are shaped by a person’s social location and, thereby, the systems of knowledge and belief to which the individual is exposed (12).”⁴¹⁴ The use of the imagination in the literary works of postcolonial or even postmodern writers have helped to create new realities, new identities that challenge, as we have already pointed out in the general introduction, “traditional conceptions of history and culture, literature and

⁴¹³ Lionnet 7. Let us also note that, according to Su, “[...] the emergence of the imagination as an explicit topic of discourse in contemporary fiction comes as a response to epistemological crises opened up by the perceived consolidation of an imperialist form of capitalism as the dominant world-system” (vii).

⁴¹⁴ According to Su, the imagination is not an “unchanging phenomenon,” it is “historically produced” (5).

identity”(Lionnet 7) As a consequence, “[t]hey create new paradigms that represent, through innovative and self-reflexive literary techniques, [...] displacements from the margins to a metropolitan center, and intercultural exchanges.”⁴¹⁵

Likewise, in *Fictions de l'intégration* Sylvie Durmelat asks us to take into account the imagination's undeniably active and performative role in the elaboration of new subjectivities and what she calls a new “fiction de l'intégration.” For Durmelat, these fictions are born from our daily interactions with the medium of television and its influence on our imaginary. Taking the example of the Beur novel, Durmelat maintains that, from a literary and sociological point of view, this type of fiction is “créatrice de nos réalités qu'elle façonne. Elle est révélatrice et transformante à l'égard de la pratique quotidienne” (198). Thus, with respect to the influence of media technologies on our imagination and experience of reality, a medium like “[l]a télévision ne peut plus être seulement envisagée comme une technologie de la représentation qu'elle offre, mais demande à être appréhendée en fonction des médiations culturelles et des conduits et processus qu'elle permet en même temps que des disruptions qu'elle opère [...]”⁴¹⁶ In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, these disruptions, mediations and constructions of new realities are constant within the space of the narrative, as the results of Doria's active *tele-imagination*. Divided up into short diary-like chapters, the narrative is particularly fragmented due to Doria's constant back and forth between her retelling of simple events, her memories, dreams, television references and own fantasies which disrupt the flow of

⁴¹⁵ In the same line of argumentation, Su asserts that “[l]ess a mimetic or creative power, the imagination increasingly becomes characterized in contemporary Anglophone literatures as a knowledge-producing faculty crucial to countering ideological mystification” (vii).

⁴¹⁶ Durmelat 198.

the story. By opting for this narrative technique and by referring to real television programs, Guène not only manages to blur the frontier between reality and fantasy, but also, as television keeps mediating Doria's relation to the world, to highlight the creative power of the imagination.

As an avid consumer of media products and a lucid critique of the televisual world (she is able to decode and interpret television messages), Doria's inventive mind is responsible for creating, within the space of the narrative, alternative realities where facts and fictions, and reality and virtuality, regularly collide. A good example of such alternative realities can be found toward the end of the novel when, reeling from the shock of the announcement that her friend Hamoudi has found a new love, the teenager is immediately projected into another dimension.⁴¹⁷ In that world, she finds herself in the middle of a television show, specifically, on the set of the famous French television program featuring investigative reports, *Sept à Huit*: "Lila et Hamoudi! J'ai cru que j'allais faire une crise d'asthme. Comment ils ont pu me faire ça ? J'ai eu l'impression de me retrouver dans un reportage de la une, dans l'émission " Sept à huit " présentée par les Ken et Barbie intelligents de la télé " (135). In the lines that follow, she recounts her "experience" as she starts imagining how a show like that one might portray her during a live broadcast: "Ça commence comme ça: Quinze ans et déjà désenchantée. Pour elle la vie n'est qu'une brève illusion."⁴¹⁸ Later, she proceeds to imagine the storyboard of the show, including the key moments of the televisual production, such as the opening

⁴¹⁷ This, of course, reminds us of a similar situation in Passi's song who, as mentioned in the introduction, finds himself in a twilight-zone dimension.

⁴¹⁸ Guène 135.

sequence during which she is introduced or the moment she appears on the screen to tell her deplorable life story: “Là, on me voit apparaître à l’écran, le visage flouté et la voix déguisée, genre dessins animés. Je me tourne vers la caméra et je commence à tout débiller [...]” (136).

Her fantasy goes even further when she starts imagining the reaction of the “voix-off” (voice over) to her testimony as he (the “voice over”) suddenly realizes that his life has been as depressing as Doria’s, “une brève disillusion” (135) and his efforts at work a waste of time: “elle a pas tort la gamine[...].C’est vrai ça, on a des vies de merde, j’crois bien que je vais arrêter de faire la voix off à la télé, c’est un métier de chiotte, on a aucune reconnaissance [...] j’en ai marre, je suis à bout [...]” (136-137). The similarity between himself and Doria, who is also described during the opening sequence as a “déception pour ses parents, particulièrement pour son père [...]” (135), does not stop there. Like his “real” counterpart, one event is the catalyst of many others. In Doria’s case, each of her projections into an alternative reality or trip into the televisual world is linked to a particularly memorable event. Thus, we soon realize that, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, her projections into that imagined world are nothing but a way to cope with the ugliness of her daily reality—in short, a survival tactic.

And yet, it is within a constant state of tension between the real and the virtual that we must situate Doria, who often compares her life to a sitcom or to reality TV program. It is no wonder why, during a conversation with her psychologist, Madame Burlaud, about one of her dreams (“le rêve de l’atlas”), Doria starts suspecting her of working for television, after the psychologist linked the event to a previous “épisode”:

Elle appelle carrément ça un épisode. Si ça se trouve Mme Burlaud, elle est pas vraiment psy. Elle travaille peut être dans le cinéma et s'inspire des foutaises que je lui raconte pour un sitcom. Burlaud, je suis certaine que c'est un pseudo [...]. Elle fait partie de l'équipe de scénaristes qui bosse pour AB Productions. C'est ça la vérité... Le concept a peut-être déjà été lancé et la série, elle cartonnerait et commencerait à être diffusée dans le monde entier. (72)

Questioning the true meaning and purposes of her life, Doria is certain, with a high degree of fatalism, that her destiny is in the hands of a bad scriptwriter. For her, life is like a movie, and everybody's actions follow a precise script; everything is already written:

Quel destin de merde. Le destin, c'est la misère parce que t'y peux rien. Ça veut dire que toi que tu fasses, tu te feras toujours couiller. Ma mère, elle dit que si mon père nous a abandonnées, c'est parce que c'est écrit. Chez nous, on appelle ça le mektoub. C'est comme le scénario d'un film dont on est les acteurs. Le problème, c'est que notre scénariste à nous, il a aucun talent. Il sait pas raconter de belles histoires. (19)

Notwithstanding this scriptwriter's (the *Mektoub*) irony, when not finding “nice stories” and alter egos in her life or in the novels that she reads—whether it is in a Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* (19),⁴¹⁹ now considered a classic novel, or in popular romance novels (“romans à l'eau de rose” [72])—Doria manages to find ways to create her own thanks to her fertile tele-imagination and her diary. Not wanting to end up like those “millions de fans,” “anonyme et couillonnée” by the system,⁴²⁰ not satisfied with the *Mektoub*'s script and eager to be in control of her own life and finally recognized by the public and her peers, she becomes time and again her own scriptwriter and, as such, the

⁴¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that Doria actually identifies with Ben Jelloun's Moroccan female character whose life story is to some degree similar to that of Guène's narrator due to their fathers' strong desire to have a son and the negative consequences of their rejection on their self-esteem and identity.

⁴²⁰ Guène 72.

“télé-commandant” (Passi) or director of her own life-story movie. She manages to do it by mainly getting her inspiration from the TV and movie characters that inhabit her imaginary and the many television programs through which she lives vicariously. Borrowing from these sources, Doria finds in them a solution to remediate the ills and gaps of her life through the constant rewriting of the script of her life.

B. *Kiffe kiffe demain* as a “Talking-cure”: Remediating and Refashioning the Self through Narration.

In the introductory chapter of the collective work *Narrative and Media* (2006), Helen Fulton rightfully points out that “[i]n a world dominated by print and electronic media, our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narrative. Feature films and documentaries tell us stories about ourselves and the world we live” (1). Guène’s novel reminds us of the constant processes of remediation and transformation at stake in our daily exposures to, interactions with, and uses of media technology. According to media specialists, in addition to feeding our imagination media provide us with the scripts for our daily routines and the stories which we reproduce, transforming them so that they become our personal stories. This point is also one of the key arguments used by Appadurai when he underlines the crucial role played by the *mediascapes* in our daily lives:

[m]ediascapes, whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. (35)

In *Kiffe kiffe demain*, this dynamic and transformational process are omnipresent throughout the entire novel. It is within the liminal but creative space of Doria's imagination—a space populated by images from the televisual world and reminiscent of postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha's "third space,"⁴²¹—and through the act of storytelling, specifically through writing, that most important transformations affecting Doria come into being. Indeed, it is in that space that Doria is able to remediate her life, thanks to her imagination and the many narratives provided by television and other media that help her to reinvent, retell, and make sense of the world and at the same time to find a cure for her ills.

Patricia Geesey underscores the therapeutic function of televisual viewing when she declares that *Kiffe kiffe demain* is nothing but Doria's "talking cure." It is "[...] a non-stop account of her life at home, at school, and in her part of the cité" (Geesey 59). We note that it is following a psychotherapy session with Madame Burlaud that we first encounter Doria who subsequently explains that the initial idea of seeking treatment for her apparent "depression" originated primarily with her schoolteachers: "C'est le lycée qui m'a envoyée chez elle. Les profs, entre deux grèves, se sont dit que j'avais besoin de voir quelqu'un parce qu'ils me trouvaient renfermée [...]" (9). It is precisely because of her inability to communicate with others and her apparent withdrawal—both symptomatic of her difficulty to cope with the absence of her father--that these sessions became necessary. Nevertheless, when compared to the sessions with Madame Burlaud during which she is expected to talk out her problems but still fails to open up to Madame

⁴²¹ See introductory chapter for a brief definition of Bhabha's concept.

Burlaud, it is evident that Doria feels more comfortable confiding in her diary than in her psychotherapist. Usually silent in her everyday life, Doria finds that keeping a journal is a better and more efficient way to give voice to her inner self, while externalizing her most intimate dreams, pains and hopes. Indeed, one reason for this logorrhea might be due to the fact that, as with television, she finds in her journal another space of trust and comfort as well as a good therapist.

Within that space, through the stories that she tells the reader as she writes them down, she is free to be herself or whoever she dreams of or with whom she identifies, all based on the plots, characters, and situations provided by her television set. Doria not only often identifies with the characters by comparing their life situations to hers, she also wishes to take their place so that she can be someone radically different from herself—or so the following passage suggests: “Parce que des fois, j’aimerais trop être quelqu’un d’autre, ailleurs et peut être même à une autre époque. Souvent je m’imagine que je fais partie de la famille des Ingalls dans *La Petite Maison dans la prairie*” (73). The story of the Ingalls becomes an inevitable point of reference by which she understands the shamefulness of her situation : “C’est la honte parce que je trouve que dans cette série, ils sont mieux habillés que moi. Alors qu’ils habitent un microvillage tout pourri et que le père c’est un gros fermier. Rien que le sweat que je porte en ce moment, même l’abbé Pierre il en voudrait pas” (74).

Moreover, it should be noted that the continual process of storytelling and especially fiction-making based on televisual scripts and her imagination is one of the main features that defines the character of Doria during this “therapy.” As seen earlier,

writing down her own preferred reading of televisual content or of society in her journal is the only vehicle by which, as a minor and a woman, she can voice her opinions on important matters in a world where she is expected to be the object of discourse and, thus, excluded from any decision-making process.

By modeling her life on the televisual world and popular culture and, thus, making her own “films,”⁴²² Doria intends to rewrite her destiny in order to contradict both the “Mektoub” and society’s expectations concerning her, whether it is within hegemonic French society or among the Maghrebian community. Many examples can be found throughout the narrative of her efforts to beat the odds, even if she does not entirely succeed. For instance, she fantasizes about choosing a good father based on the ideal father figure portrayed by Tony Danza in the famous American Tv series *Madame est servie* (*Who’s the Boss?*): “J’aurais bien aimé changer de père et récupérer Tony Danza dans *Madame est servie*, mais il est déjà pris” (119). In addition to that example, one may refer back, once again, to the episode on Western society’s stance on marriage. In a passage preceding her critique of it, Doria fantasizes about what her future husband and wedding might be like; it is a fantasy which, by her own confession, she had nourished since childhood. She imagines her future husband as an extraordinary man, the opposite of the type of men to whom she is accustomed, be it her father, Nabil or any random French man. According to her, such a husband would have to be as resourceful and smart as the fictional American hero, MacGyver, whom she considers to be the perfect embodiment of masculinity:

⁴²² By so doing, she is constantly making readers her personal audience.

Quand j'étais plus jeune, je rêvais d'épouser le type qui ferait passer tous les autres pour de gros nazes. Les mecs normaux, ceux qui mettent deux mois à monter une étagère en kit ou à faire un puzzle vingt-cinq pièces et marqué " dès cinq ans " sur la boîte, j'en voulais pas. Je me voyais plutôt avec MacGyver. Un type qui peut te déboucher les chiottes avec une cannette de Coca, réparer la télé avec un stylo Bic et te faire un brushing rien qu'avec son souffle. Un vrai couteau suisse humain. (41)

Compared to her hyperbolic vision of the ideal man, Doria's conception of the perfect marriage is a rather traditional, romantic and very westernized one, with the "robe blanche avec plein de dentelle partout, un beau voile et une longue traîne d'au moins quinze mètres."⁴²³ It is a very "normal" image which, without doubt, is probably directly drawn from the typical portrayal of wedding ceremonies to be found in film or television, especially the American version.

Yet, notwithstanding the improbability of her wedding taking place like the one depicted above, especially with the absence of the father, Doria still sees hope in the ongoing social and cultural transformations that have marked her generation, particularly the new generation of Franco-Maghrebians' stance on marriage which goes against the traditional Magrebi and Muslim view on that institution. As a young girl of Moroccan origins, she is particularly elated at the idea of being able to choose her own husband: "La chance de notre génération, c'est qu'on peut choisir qui on va aimer toute sa vie" (42). Such a modern and western view of marriage, one that is based on free will and romantic love, evidently departs from the traditional Islamo-Maghrebi view of marriage shared by older generations, which customarily favored the practice of arranged

⁴²³ Guène 41.

marriage. This difference in mentality between generations⁴²⁴ and, especially, Doria's modern view on relationships between men and women, is also brought up during the episode of the wedding of Aziz, the neighborhood grocery shop owner, and her mother's former suitor. When Aziz decides to marry a woman he brought back from Morocco, Doria's reaction to the sudden wedding immediately betrays her convictions about love, her opposition to arranged marriages, and her strong desire for social and cultural changes when it comes to the position of Maghrebi women in today's French society⁴²⁵: "Rachida [...] nous a dit qu'Aziz allait épouser une fille du Maroc. Je comprends pourquoi il y a autant de filles célibataires ici. Si maintenant les hommes commencent à se lancer dans l'import-export... C'est dommage que chez nous les mariages ne se passent pas comme aux Etats-Unis [...]" (109).

Despite all of the above, Doria's desire to change the order of things that cements her fate, as the daughter of Magrebi immigrants, might probably be the strongest when

⁴²⁴ This passage highlights particularly the fact that this new generation of North African men and woman of the 2000 decade has somehow managed to overcome the cultural identity crisis or ambivalence—the fact of being torn between two cultural systems (France vs the Maghreb, Western modernity vs “tradition”), each with its own beliefs and traditions—that plagued the previous two generations. With their exposure to global culture, their westernization is on the way to being complete, and their desire for social change increased. For further information, see, for instance, Alec Hargreaves in “Beur Fiction: Voices from the Immigrant Community in France: (1989); Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (eds), *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (1997); Mireille Rosello and Richard Bjornson “Beur Nation: Toward a Theory of ‘Departenance’” (1993); Susan Ireland in “Negotiating Gender with the Work of Women Writers of Maghrebi Immigrant Descent” (2001).

⁴²⁵ In “The Beur Women as Postcolonial Fugitive in France,” Touria Khannous argues that “Beur women experience the double culture (Western and traditional) between which they are caught as fraught with tension. [...] As French consumers, Beur women are encouraged to become more liberal and more modern. As Arab and Muslim women, they are expected to adhere to their traditional values. [...] Daughters of North African immigrants have managed to resist their colonizers and assume agency. [...] Being placed in the double culture of Islam and France, they deploy their paradoxical subaltern position in attempt to forge a new identity for themselves” (111-112).

she expresses her dreams of becoming an accomplished actress⁴²⁶ who wins the prize for best actress at the Festival de Cannes⁴²⁷:

Je devrais peut-être faire ça à fond. Jouer la comédie. Faire du cinéma, c'est la classe quand même. Je connaîtrais la gloire, l'argent, les récompenses... Je me vois déjà au festival de Cannes prendre la pose et sourire au troupeau de photographes en train de me flasher, habillée comme Sissi dans *Sissi impératrice*. [...] Robert de Niro m'appellerait pour me remettre le prix d'interprétation féminine. [...] Le public debout. Moi, face à tous ces gens. Ovation ! (141-142)

In a socio-cultural context in which ethnic minorities are often mis- or underrepresented in the media, and as such excluded from the “play of cultural power” (Simon Cottle), Doria’s dreams and constant role-playing or identity-borrowing certainly defy any imposed social or cultural roles in which mainstream society or her own close-knit community might have ever wanted to confine her. She exemplifies not only the cultural diversity of this new generation of Franco-Maghrebians, but also the desire to be recognized as an active part of “the global village” (McLuhan). As noted, by serving as a window opening onto the world and giving Doria access to a broad array of cultural references, different beliefs and traditions, as well as models for her personal life, television and the viewer’s imagination become the sites of creation of new identity projects that defy any notion of borders. What is more remarkable is that, by being multiple, proteiform, and “plastic” (Hall),⁴²⁸ those identities ultimately give birth, with

⁴²⁶ In several passages, she expresses her refusal to be relegated to a low-wage job such as employee of a fast-food restaurant, supermarket cashier, or hairdresser (see page 140), thus rejecting the professional stereotypes too often associated with ethnic suburban youth.

⁴²⁷ A prize won only once by an actress of North African origins: Isabelle Adjani.

⁴²⁸ This goes against the essentialist conceptions of identity and culture as authentic, essential and pure. Although it has traditionally been believed that identity was about sameness (from latin *idem= the same*),

Doria, to a hybrid subject whose identity is essentially transcultural⁴²⁹ and transnational. Stuart Hall reminds us that Identity and Culture are discursive and social constructions. Cultural identities evolve according to time and space; identity is not something static or essential, but rather, it is the fruit an ongoing and interactive process (identification): “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ (Hall, “Cultural identity and Diaspora,” 222). Instead of simply being, we become whom we say or what we want to be [...].”⁴³⁰As spectators, it is a process with which we are too familiar. Because we constantly borrow and reappropriate references, ideas, or images from the televisual world, it is irrefutable that spectatorship has come to play an important role in the production of identities. For media studies specialists and especially proponents of reception theory, media texts are also responsible for constructing the spectator as much as this latter is responsible for playing a role in his own production.

Thus, once again, we can only agree with Shohat and Stam’s statement when they affirm that “spectatorship can become a liminal space of dreams and self-fashioning [...].” (355). Indeed, as exemplified by Doria who freely borrows her identities from the *mediascape* of television to suit each new situation, spectatorship and “its psychic chameleonism can be said to definitely [allow] ordinary social positions [to be]

most critics agree now that, far from being something fixed, given, and unique, identity, evolves, changes, is constructed and multiple. Rather than “identity,” we should say “identities.” “[...] identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiple” (Hall, *Questions* 4).

⁴²⁹ See introductory chapter for a definition of the term transculturation, or *transculturación*, coined by Cuban poet Nancy Morejón.

⁴³⁰ Hall 225.

temporarily bracketed.”⁴³¹ Within the *mediascape* of television and the space of the narrative, Doria is allowed to transgress social and cultural barriers already imposed on her by dominant society. It is by role-playing, by adopting what Jonathan Ree calls “artificial voices,” that Doria is able to define her personal identity and refashion herself.⁴³²

Viewed from this perspective, Guène’s novel provides readers and critics alike with a unique opportunity to reflect on the cultural role of the mass media as well as on the social function of narrative and language in identity construction. If the scripts that the media broadcast are an important part of who we are from a cognitive and ontological point of view, so are the narratives that we make up (about) ourselves; they respond to our primal need to make sense of the world and reality. Consequently, it is important to note that although “reality exists outside language, [...] it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse.”⁴³³ Telling stories, Fulton points out, is a distinctly human activity, for “[a]s long as human beings have had the power of speech, they have been speaking in narratives [...]” (1). Narratives are representations constructed according to our situations (time, place, society), and as such serve to translate our experiences. They are, Frith argues, “central to our sense of identity” (122). Story-telling based on Doria’s mediated experiences is, therefore, critical to the success of the remediation process; it is also a crucial part of her (self-)construction as an active member of society.

⁴³¹ Shohat and Stam 355.

⁴³² Jonathan Ree, “Funny voices, Punctuation, and Personal identity,” 1055; qtd in Simon Frith, “Music and Identity” 122. See Simon Frith, “Music and Identity” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*: 108-127.

⁴³³ Hall, “Encoding” 139.

Finally, we should not overlook the fact that television and the imagination have become for Doria the springboard for adopting a new and more positive view of life. Thanks to them, a disempowered subject like Doria can assert her subjectivity and position as a social and cultural agent within society. That she can enjoy life on her own terms is particularly obvious toward the end of the novel when, ignoring the remaining negative aspects of her daily life, Doria decides to renounce her habitual fatalism conveyed by the term, *kif-kif*, a leitmotiv in the novel. She exchanges *kif-kif*, a North African dialectical Arabic expression meaning “all the same” or “same old thing” for “*kiffe kiffe*,” an expression formed from the French slang *kiffer*, which means “to like,” in order to highlight her positive mental state and readiness to change her fate: “Maintenant, kif-kif demain je l’écirais différemment. Ça serait kiffe kiffe demain, du verbe kiffer. Waouh. C’est de moi” (188). Thus, like the title of the book suggests, Doria’s outlook for the future completely changes, by the end of the novel, from fatalism and pessimism to being more optimistic to the point of envisioning herself, not just as a personal agent but also as a social agent ready to change the world: “Moi, je mènerai la révolte de la cité du Paradis. Les journaux titreront « Doria enflamme la cité » ou encore « La pasionara des banlieues met le feu aux poudres ». Mais ce ne sera pas une révolte violente comme dans le film *La Haine* [...]. Ce sera une révolte intelligente, sans aucune violence, où on se soulèvera pour être reconnus, tous” (189).

Conclusion

In addition to shedding light on the process of identification experienced by the new second-generation immigrants in contemporary France, one may conclude that *Kiffe*

kiffe demain successfully draws to our attention the fact that this generation is no longer waiting to be given an opportunity for potential recognition; they just seize it. They no longer need to be represented (by another party), they can actually speak for themselves. By re-defining both the terms of their own representations and of their experience in and with the world, they actively reclaim their authoritative voice as individuals and speaking subjects, rather than simple objects of discourse or “reluctant witnesses.” As I have attempted to show in this chapter, television watching, the practice of which engages the creative imagination through the elaboration of counter-narratives, has become one of the daily tactics used by Doria to circumvent her situation.

It has been my contention that Faïza Guène’s novel shows, in many ways, both the powerful role the mass media plays in our lives, as well as how the power of language⁴³⁴ and the imagination favors the emergence of our sense of self (subjectivity) and identity(ies). Furthermore, *Kiffe kiffe demain* reiterates the idea of literature as a site of power where the former colonized or subaltern subject can disturb, question, and destroy the ideological and canonical authority of hegemonic powers by using media as his tools. Thirdly, it demonstrates how complex and contradictory or hybrid the concept of identity is in an increasingly globalized world thanks to the mass media, television being especially important in our case. With *Kiffe kiffe demain*, Guène successfully establishes not just how “identities are inevitably shaped by narrative forms,” but also

⁴³⁴ The role of language, its relation with representation, discourse and power, has long been emphasized, by postcolonial or Francophone critics such as Bill Aschroft (*The Empire Writes Back*), Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall or Françoise Lionnet. It is recognized that language has been used as a powerful means of oppression by the colonial forces. In another vein, as shown by Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, it is through his ambivalent use of language that the colonized can disturb the discursive authority of the colonizer.

how identity, although “always somehow constrained by imaginative forms [...] is also freed by them [...]” (Frith 122).

In our highly mediated world, imagination is not just about fantasy or simple image-making, it has become an indispensable social practice which allows us to better know and interpret reality while creating narratives about others and ourselves. As shown previously, Doria’s tele-imagination acts as a site of liberation of the Self and also of contestation and transgression of societal and cultural order. Far from just borrowing from television or passively absorbing the dominant culture and its practices, the subaltern/non-western media consumer is able to resist, subvert and reappropriate them in ways that allow him/her to assert agency and claim subjectivity. As with Doria, television, like any other mass media, plays an important role in the characters’ process of identification and self-representation. Television, in that way, can be compared to music, which, Frith concludes, “constructs our sense of identity through the direct experience it offers of body, time, and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narrative.”⁴³⁵

To sum up, one might say that television, as portrayed in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, appears as not just a piece of technology, an object, an enemy, or a source of conflicts; rather, it has become a companion, a comforter, a therapist, and more importantly, a cultural practice that has pervaded our lives (Jonathan Bignell, Barker, Hall, Baudrillard, Durmelat, Appadurai).⁴³⁶ Its influence on the way we not only represent but also imagine

⁴³⁵ Frith 124.

⁴³⁶ See Jonathan Bignell’s *Postmodern Media Culture* (2000).

the world has become determining; the television set and its content are a precious resource that is part of our cultural landscape and is constantly refashioning who we are. As illustrated by Doria, it has helped create a subculture⁴³⁷ distinct from the national culture (Hargreaves, *Post-colonial Cultures*) and essential for her survival⁴³⁸ as a young woman and daughter of immigrants, living in the margins of society, in the symbolic space that is the *banlieue*.

⁴³⁷ Another pertinent example of the influence of television on the global (sub)culture that has emerged from the banlieue can be found in Rachid Djaïdani's *Boumkoeur*.

⁴³⁸For Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, hybrid cultural identity and cultural difference is even a matter of survival; hence he calls culture "a strategy of survival which is both transnational and translational" (172).

Conclusion: Of Immigrants, the Media and the Transmutational Power of Literature in the Visual Era

In this dissertation, I have sought to answer the following overarching questions: what does it mean to be an immigrant in a postmodern, postcolonial and media-saturated society? What are the modalities and effects of the relationship between immigrants and the mass media, especially a powerful media like television? Are immigrants only confined to the role of victim? What role does literature or writing play in a world where the hegemony of images is undeniable and immigrants emerge as the new subalterns? How do Francophone immigrant writers address the complex and often tense relationship between immigrants and the mass media? My goal has been to contribute to the larger literary and socio-critical debate surrounding the issue of the representation of the Immigrant as a new social, media and literary figure of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. Thus, as I was attempting to answer the preceding questions, I came to the following conclusion: the Immigrant is a *Homo Mediaticus*. Starting with this bold appellation, which I borrow from media theorist, Massimo Ragneda, I intended to account for the fact that the Immigrant is a media and mediatized figure, that is, an object of media and other types of discourses as well as a media user. As such, he is what Nicolas Mirzoeff calls a “visual subject,” that is, someone “who is both the agent of sight [...] and object of discourses of visibility [...]” (55). He is the product of his visibility; his subjectivity and social position depend on it. When framed through the media angle, the same can apply: the Immigrant is constantly shaped by or through his interactions with

the mass media. He is socially and symbolically constructed through both his representations in the media and own consumption of media texts and technology.

Taking into account those dynamics to understand the politics of identity specific to the immigrant, I supported the idea of a move away from a conceptual approach only based on the notion of “representation,” which is usually used to circumvent the interconnection between immigration, literature and the media, in favor of an analytical framework based on the concept and processes of remediation and/or what Knut Lundby refers to as *mediatization*. It would, in effect, be reductive to only think of our relationship with the media as unilateral and a simple relation of producer to consumer; rather, it is a multilateral and much more complex question. It is true that the media (new or old) play an important role in the way our societies function; yet, media users are far from being simple receptacles. The media, as resources, entail new social and cultural practices that help shape the way we represent ourselves, our identities and imagination. The same can be said of the writers’ imagination and the fabric of their narratives. Nevertheless, while remediation, as a critical concept in Media studies, usually designates the reappropriation or blending of an old media in or by a new media, it should be noted that my own use of the term seeks to highlight how media culture and technology, television in particular, function as a remedy and springboard for agency for most of the immigrant characters in the novels under examination in this dissertation.

By using a two-pronged analysis that posits the Immigrant as both object and subject in a mediated world, I have aimed to highlight the fact that immigration has become a much discussed and highly visible issue in our modern societies. Taking the

examples of the second- or third-generation North African immigrants in France— known as the *Beur* generation in the 1980s-1990s but now simply referred to as “jeunes issus de l’immigration” or “jeunes de banlieue”—and of undocumented emigrants (*Harragas*) trying to reach Europe from North Africa, I have reminded my readers how immigration events can set off a media frenzy or huge debates between pro- or anti-immigration groups. In such a climate, the Immigrant plays the role of the “poster child” for one group and scapegoat for the other. In my general introduction, I have attempted to trace the genealogy of the close relationship between Beur culture and literature and the French media. I have then pointed out how the emergence of a Beur culture and literature, products of what I called the *visible generation*, was tightly linked to the politicization and coverage by French media of major immigration-related events from the 1970s onward, such as the famous 1983 “marche des Beurs” or the 2005 French riots. Likewise, in recent years the increasing death toll of “Harragas” on both sides of the Mediterranean has ineluctably drawn media attention worldwide and been the springboard for the emergence of a new literary category known as *illiterature*, a term coined by Francophone literature and cinema specialist Hakim Abderrezak. As I show in my first two chapters, immigration has become a spectacle, feeding the voyeuristic inclinations of many. At times of socio-economic or political crisis, such as what we have been experiencing in the last years, the Immigrant becomes this cross-examined, overly observed and talked about hunted *species* in and for the media. During times like these, we, the public, are constantly swamped by a flow of images generously furnished by the media. Photographic and televisual images, including online videos of immigrants, dead

or alive and caught in a multitude of dire situations have become part of our daily life. Yet, for all their visibility, immigrants remain invisible, faceless and nameless presences; they become altogether the *Immigrant*, a metonymic and spectral figure born from the interstice of images and words and also of the virtual and the real. The Immigrant, in a media-saturated world, appears to be none other than an image-being, the (pale) copy of an original, its remanence, that is to say, a trace, which keeps haunting the public's mind. Of course, such a claim ineluctably reminds us of Bernard Stiegler's own understanding of the essence of "the image" and the difference between the "mental image" and the "image-object," when he states the following in "The Discrete Image," an essay on the invention of digital photography and cinema:⁴³⁹

If without the mental image, there is not, has never been, and will never be an image-object (the image is only an image insofar as it is seen), *reciprocally*, without the objective image, despite what one might think, there is not, has never been and will never be a mental image: the mental image is always the *return* of some-object, its *remanence*—both as retinal persistence and as the hallucinatory haunting or coming back [*revenance*] of the phantasm—an effect of its permanence (148 italics in original)

Such dynamics characterize what I consider as the *hauntology* of the Immigrant, a neologism which I borrowed from French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, and which I analyzed further in chapter one to support my claim of the Immigrant as a hunted/haunting media figure. There, drawing from popular culture, scientific, as well as Derridean and Barthesian theoretical concepts of the "Specter," I proceeded to investigate the spectral origins and essence of the Immigrant as a haunting figure. If a general

⁴³⁹ Bernard Stiegler, "The Discrete Image," *Echographies of Television*, Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler: 147-163.

observation were to be made, it is probably that, as in the wink of an eye, the Immigrant, like a specter or *revenant*, disappears as quickly as it appears on our screen. It is virtually a case of *praesentia in absentia*. Given this phenomenon, he is neither here nor there, and neither entirely visible nor invisible. As such, he is both Self and Other, different/*différent*, like a *revenant*. His (neither nor) essence falls under what Derrida calls the logic of the *out of joint*, or *logic of disjuncture*, which I also call logic of the subcontrarian, as nothing that concerns him is absolutely neither false nor true, but is both at the same time.

Furthermore, taking a closer look at media discourses on, and media images of, immigration in France or in the Mediterranean region, I posited that the Immigrant, like the specter or *revenant*, is caught in a never-ending movement of repetition and reproduction. Immigrants, especially those from the global south in general, and North Africa in particular, are bound to a long chain of stereotypes and, therefore, to a broad spectrum of often reproduced negative images which leave a deep imprint in the western collective imagination precisely because they substitute fiction or virtuality for reality. Such a substitution is also due, I noted, to the terminological vacuum that surrounds the word immigrant itself. Because of this vacuum, the words “immigration” and “immigrant,” from a semiotic and symbolic point of view, have become negatively charged not only in the media and public discourses but also in the collective imagination, where immigrants have become synonymous with social problems. In the public eye and through the *lens* of the camera, the Immigrant remains a perfect figure of alterity and strangeness, as he uncannily inspires fear and fascination.

As we can see, the role, power, and responsibility of the media in blurring the frontier between *reality* and *virtuality* and in shaping the public's view of and feelings about the phenomenon that is global migration and its central figure, the Immigrant, is thus not to be ignored. According to Erik Bleich, Irene Bloemraad and Els de Graauw in their opening statement in the recent article, "Migrants, Minorities and the Media: Information, Representations and Participation in the Public Sphere"⁴⁴⁰ (2015), it remains important to highlight "the critical role of the media in modern liberal democracies," that is, how "the media inform the public, provide a communicative bridge between political and social actors, influence perceptions of pressing issues, depict topics and people in particular ways and may shape individuals' political views and participation" (857). Such concerns and critique about the power of words and images, and especially their power to preserve life or inflict death, is at the center of my second chapter, which unravels, through the work of Moroccan writer, Youssouf Elalamy, *Les Clandestins*, and the trope of death, the process of spectralization to which immigrants are subjected. This chapter also seeks to question the ethical dimension and responsibility of media covering the human tragedy taking place in the Mediterranean. Inspired by a true media report on the death of twelve Harragas trying to reach Europe, *Les Clandestins* resurrects a group of Harragas by examining the reasons leading to their life-changing decision to *burn*, that is to say, to leave homelands and identities behind, before the tragic moment responsible for their death at sea. Bringing the dead back to life, thanks to the power of fiction, the narrative then turns into a haunted space that acts both as a space of resurrection and site

⁴⁴⁰ Erik Bleich, Irene Bloemraad and Els de Graauw, "Migrants, Minorities and the Media: Information, Representations and Participation in the Public Sphere," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41.6 (2015): 857.

of burial for those who, alive, were already living-dead, whether as pariahs in their own society or *clandestins* (illegal emigrant) and, as such, as “ready-made for haunting” (McKinney). In the case of *Les Clandestins*, the haunting is triggered by a photograph taken by a Spanish photographer and later published in a French newspaper, whose account of the tragic event trivializes their death in the worst fashion. Thanks to Elalamy’s powerful ekphrastic writing, this textually absent photograph is meticulously described by the narrator, who allows the readers to *visualize* the dead bodies the same way that they are seen by the Spanish photographer. Hence, by reappropriating the images and discourses produced/reproduced by the very same media that have objectified, dehumanized, disembodied and spectralized the Immigrant, Elalamy, as other North African writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun in *Partir* and Salim Jay in *Tu ne traverseras pas le détroit*, have turned their literary works into “haunted spaces” through which the repressed, the forgotten, the silenced, and the concealed, that is, those generally excluded from the means of representation, can come forth to claim a voice and finally be seen for who they are really.

This need for recognition and visibility is also what drives Mirzoeff’s “visual subjects.” It is the path toward more agency and freedom in a system where the visual subjects’ bodies—in our case immigrants’—are under constant control and surveillance by the all-powerful and all-seeing gaze of the media and society. This gaze, I argue in my third chapter, is similar to the mythical “Evil Eye” which, according to popular culture around the world and in psychoanalysis, is capable of inflicting harm on its victims from a distance. It is also very similar to Michel Foucault’s panoptic gaze or to the white

colonizer's destructive gaze that Frantz Fanon so brilliantly described in *Black Skin, White Masks*. This "Evil Eye" or gaze is at the source of an oppression or symbolic violence, which affects most of the Beur characters in Nacer Kettane's *Le sourire de Brahim*, Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Les raisins de la galère*, Leïla Sebbar's *Shérazade* and Rachid Djaïdani's *Boumkoeur*, and against which they need to protect themselves. Hunted or ignored by the media, the characters of Brahim, Nadia, Yaz, and Shérazade physically and mentally suffer from a range of ills going from depression to alienation, paranoia or scopophobia—the fear of being looked at, stared, or simply of drawing attention to themselves. In many instances, these characters find themselves in the role of what Mireille Rosello has called the "reluctant witness," forced to ignore, pretend to accept or simply to decline the stereotypes that keep haunting them. It is a crucial moment that can be defined as a *failed mirror stage* or moment of *disidentification*, as the characters find it hard to recognize themselves in the mirror of the media. As they struggle to free themselves from that oppressive dynamic, the characters' only way to freedom and to more agency as whole subjects is, indeed, to either radically refuse their stereotypical social or media image and identity or reappropriate them in a bid to redefine them on their own terms.

The move to reappropriate the very same stereotyping discourses and images disseminated in the media is one that we also find reproduced in *Kiffe kiffe demain*. Faïza Guène's famous banlieue novel—an appellation that the writer herself finds too reductive—is illustrative of younger generation of "immigrant" writers' increasing interest in popular and visual culture. Their representation of the media is a significant

departure from a traditional discourse on media adopted by the previous generation. In this novel, a media like television is no longer the enemy but a valuable resource. Guène's novel allows us to reflect not only on the role of television as a technology and a commodity but also on its social, cognitive and symbolic dimension. I have shown that television, in *Kiffe kiffe demain*, assumes the role of a companion, a medium for social integration as well as a space of gathering or a "zone of contact" for the characters. In many ways, *Kiffe kiffe demain* is the perfect example of the extent to which the "mediascape" of television keeps influencing, shaping, and feeding our imagination and identities. As a social and cultural practice, the televisual imagination displayed by the main character Doria becomes the space of both resistance to the predetermination of social life and creation of new identity narratives. Television viewing, which for Doria is like reading her personal *Quran*, becomes a moment of an intense process of remediation and of empowerment. The immigrant character embodied by the young Doria is no longer a passive consumer of media texts or a simple victim of the media, but an individual in control and fully practicing her "droit de regard" ("right of inspection") and capable of decoding media texts. By doing so, she is able to reverse the existing social and political equilibrium. From the shadows on the margins of society, that is of from her *cit * and the privacy of her home, Doria subjects society to her gaze and judgment. In many ways she becomes an invisible agent very much similar to the "living ghost" described by Esther Preen in *The Spectral Metaphor*,⁴⁴¹ or the figure of the "Law" or specter, described by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. It is, effectively, a moment that is

⁴⁴¹ Esther Preen, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghost and the Agency of Invisibility* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

reminiscent of what Derrida, in his analysis of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, describes as the "visor effect," which falls under the principle or mechanism of "hauntology." To put it briefly, it is that determining and uncanny moment when one knows that one is being watched but cannot see who is watching. Conversely, the "visor effect" is none other than the result of the power of the gaze of someone or something watching (us) from the shadows. It is the effect created by the one who sees without being seen, just like the "Thing" described by Derrida or the specter of the king, Hamlet's father, hidden by the visor of his armor. Consequently, one may argue that in front of her screen, Doria acting out the drama of the Immigrant exerts that same power when applying her "droit de regard." Without being caught, her visor gaze allows her to escape the panoptic gaze of the authoritarian state and society. Likewise, this armor could easily be compared either to Doria's notebook, in which she writes down her observations of the outside world, or more globally to the space of fiction or literature.

Thereafter, I conclude that such a claim certainly brings up the question of the role of writing in the age of surveillance and simulacra (Baudrillard). In a world dominated by what Donna Wilkerson-Barker refers to as the "culture of the simulacrum" in *The Space of the Screen* (2008), the importance of writing and the role of writers in addressing the pitfalls of the relationship between spectator—in our case, the Immigrant—and tele-technologies remains a relevant question. For Jenaro Talens in "Writing against the Simulacrum," it is in regard to the relationship between reality and the simulacrum that the "political role of writing and theory continues to be important

against those who think that the predominance of the images will make the discourse of words disappear” (20).

In direct competition with the mass media or with the fields of social sciences, which are the disciplines *par excellence* that study social activity and humanity, literature—if simply understood as an institution (a set of practices, texts, and rules), an art of language or simply as fiction (work of the imagination)—is concerned with and reflects the mechanism, the codes, and practices that define our societies. As a medium and a social mirror, literary fiction functions as witness to the human experience in ways that should not be underestimated. The novel is a privileged place in which to “interpellate the world” (Talens 2, sic). A discursive form and product of its time and society, deeply anchored in the real, the literary text records the political, economic and socio-cultural changes and advancement of societies; it provides a space in which to reflect on the issues linked to such developments and can serve as a tool to promote political, social and cultural changes. Thus, as in the case of African realist fiction, the literary text can be considered as a sociological document with a valuable ethnographic dimension. As stressed by Francophone African literature specialist, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, in “Travel, Representation, and Difference, or How Can One Be a Parisian?”: “[I]f the literary text is an aesthetic object, it is also a sociological text, for it records social changes, reveals mentalities, reproduces power relations, and sometimes constructs the very discourse of power [...]” (27). This remark is particularly relevant since, despite the doubts seemingly expressed by Gayatri Spivak in her famous 1985 essay entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” literature, such as postcolonial literature, has been a privileged

medium for those who have been silenced by hegemonic powers. It allows them to “speak for” themselves, that is, to “represent” themselves, to be heard and to be seen while asserting their identity and differences. Literary fiction has thus provided those relegated to the periphery of power a space where they can resist, deconstruct, and subvert dominant and negative narratives and representations about them.

Finally, this distinguishing feature of literature directly touches upon the political power of writing that often is manifested through the form of a *littérature engagée*. Throughout this dissertation I have endeavored to show that immigrant literature in all its various forms offers one of the most interesting examples of the potential of literature to promote and effect changes thanks to the novel as a vehicle for political *and* social engagement. Thus it is fair to conclude that each of the novels of my corpus has in its own way managed to demonstrate not only the political and transmutational power of the narrative, but that writing, as a medium, still has its place in an era too prompt to celebrate the death of literature in a media-saturated world.

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