

Southern Europe Unraveled: Migrant Resistance and Rewriting in Spain and Italy

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Romance Studies  
in the Graduate School of Duke University

2013

ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the phenomenon of canonical revision by migrant and postcolonial writers in Spain and Italy. By recycling, rewriting or revising canonical works or film movements of the host countries in which they work, these writers call attention to Spain's and Italy's concerted attempts to perform a European identity. In doing so, they simultaneously challenge the literary categories into which they have been inserted, such as "migrant" or "Hispano-African" literatures. Rather, these writers illustrate that these categories, too, work in tandem with other forms of exclusion to buttress, rather than challenge, Spain and Italy's nationalist attempts to overcome their "South-ness" and perform European-ness.

The thesis consists of four chapters, each focusing on a different migrant writer. The first chapter examines how Amara Lakhous, an Algerian-Italian writer, models his novels after the film genre of the *commedia all'italiana* in order to make national and ethnic identity categories look like theater and spectacle. The second chapter analyzes how Najat el-Hachmi, a Catalan writer of Moroccan birth, rewrites a classic of Catalan literature (Mercé Rodoreda's *The Time of the Doves*) to challenge the oppositions between "immigrant" and "native," while also articulating a transnational, feminist critique of patriarchy. The third chapter studies how Francisco Zamora Lobo, an Equatorial

Guinean exile in Spain, re-interprets *Don Quijote* as an iconically anti-racist text. The fourth chapter studies how Jadelin Mabiala Gangbo, a Congolese-Italian writer, recycles Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* in his novel *Rometta e Giulio* in order to challenge the polarized dichotomy of "migrant" and "canonical" writing.

My work both draws on and critiques several, interrelated fields of scholarship, including Southern European studies, Afro-European studies, Mediterranean studies, migrant literary studies, and postcolonial studies, as well as criticism pertaining to specific canonical works these writers revisit in their works. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that a critique of racism or xenophobia in contemporary Spain or Italy necessitates *not only* a critique of the Global South against Eurocentrism, *but also* a simultaneous critique of Europe's North-South divide.

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## Introduction

“Todo norte, por más pretensiones de norte que tenga, es un sur respecto a otro posible norte.”

(“Every north, in spite of its ambition to be a north, is a south compared to another possible north.”)

-Manuel Vázquez Montalbán<sup>1,2</sup>

### I. On Expulsions

At the Fourteenth Hispano-Italian Summit of 2007, former Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero declared Italy and Spain to be “siblings in the Mediterranean and partners in Europe” (“Zapatero y Prodi”). While the idea of “partnership” highlights the two countries’ commitment to contemporary economic and political cooperation, Zapatero’s notion that these countries are “siblings” also calls to mind the ways in which they have “grown up” together over the course of the twentieth century. Both have experienced right wing dictatorships, but transitioned out of them to become stable democracies with a capitalist economic framework.<sup>3</sup> Both received

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<sup>1</sup> From “Presentación: Ser del sur no es ninguna ganga,” p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. In the interest of space, primary sources (such as literary works, critical theory and interviews) will be cited first in the original language, then in English. Secondary sources (such as academic studies and news articles) will be cited only in English translation.

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to Fascism in Italy under Mussolini (1922-43) and to the Franco dictatorship in Spain (1939-75). On one hand, these two regimes were obviously very different, especially in terms of their differing relationships with Fascist ideology and, of course, their duration. However, Gunther, et al observe that both

American economic aid in the years following World War II,<sup>4</sup> and both experienced rapid economic growth in the 1960s. Both were predominantly exporters of migrant labor until the early 1970s, but, since the 1980s, have become migrant-receiving countries. Today, both are members of the European Union and the Schengen agreement, the latter of which allows free movement within the borders of twenty-six European countries.

Yet, as Zapatero reminds us, the two “siblings” have also shared at least one unchanging trait: they are located on the Mediterranean’s northern shore, and hence, on Europe’s southern frontier. As such, Italy and Spain are physically positioned between Europe and Africa, a continent frequently construed as Europe’s *other*. But the liminal position of these “siblings” is not only geographical: their proximity to Africa has significantly affected Europe’s perception of them, both historically and in the present. As Roberto Dainotto has argued, Southern Europe, over time, was constructed as “the sufficient and indispensable internal *other*” against which Europe constituted its identity (*Europe in Theory* 4). Consequently, Southern Europe is often stereotyped as “culturally

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regimes nonetheless formed part of a Southern European “nondemocratic legacy,” which characterized Italy until the 1940s and Spain, Portugal and Greece until the 1970s ( 2). Furthermore, the authors note that in Italy, “democratic consolidation took a full three decades,” while in Spain and Greece it was achieved very quickly, taking “between five and seven years” (2). Thus, the achievement of full democratic consolidation occurred at roughly the same time in both Italy and Spain.

<sup>4</sup>Italy was one of numerous European countries to receive U.S. assistance from the Marshall plan following World War II. Although Spain was excluded from this assistance, in 1953, the U.S. and Spain signed the Treaty of Madrid, thereby ending the isolation of the Franco regime and allowing Spain to receive U.S. aid.

distant” or even “ethnically different” from the North; it is therefore accused of “profliga[cy],” “corruption,” “collective irresponsibility,” and general backwardness (Sambanis). While these stereotypes seemed to wane somewhat over the course of these countries’ twentieth century “Europeanization,” they have been thoroughly resuscitated by ongoing current events, such the Eurozone’s debt crisis,<sup>5</sup> soaring unemployment in Southern Europe,<sup>6</sup> and a dramatic spike in Southern European emigration to Northern Europe and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> The South, in short, has been imagined both historically, and in the present, as a kind of “Africa” within Europe.

But even before the ravages of the debt crisis, Spain and Italy’s longstanding fears of cultural “contamination” from the African continent have, at times, produced eruptions of violence, especially against immigrants. For example, in the early days of February, 2000, race riots broke out in El Ejido, a small Andalusian city in the extreme south of Spain. Between January 22 and February 5, three Spaniards were allegedly murdered at the hands of Moroccan men. This ignited a wave of anti-Moroccan

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<sup>5</sup> It is widely acknowledged that so far, Southern European countries have been “disproportionately impacted” by Europe’s debt crisis (Martin). What is debated, however, is whether the crisis is the result of “the systemic weaknesses of the Eurozone,” or “the South’s profligacy” in contrast to the North’s “prudence.”

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing, several sources report that Southern European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, have witnessed rapidly rising unemployment rates, and that these rates are several times higher than Northern countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland (see Hewitt, Kanter, Patnaude and Horobin).

<sup>7</sup> Several sources note that a noticeable increase of Southern European citizens, especially the young, are choosing emigration as the only viable chance for opportunity; additionally, many are choosing to move to Northern Europe, in particular Germany (see Johnston, Hall, Hustad, and “Southern European Workers”). *El País* observes that Spanish emigration rates to Germany have reached 1960s levels, a period that saw about 2 million Spanish workers move to Northern Europe (Gómez).

sentiment that far surpassed the aggressions that triggered it. Over the course of February 6-8, hundreds of Spaniards protested the presence of Moroccan migrants in their midst. Moroccans throughout the city were indiscriminately harassed, beaten, and persecuted. Many of their houses, businesses and other belongings were set ablaze.

While the race riots of El Ejido were sparked by specific incidents, several social factors predisposed the area to an explosion of ethnic tension. As Juan Carlos Checa and his coauthors note, the price of numerous agricultural products had fallen, creating an economic crisis in the region (126). In addition, the migrant workers who worked in the fields and in the greenhouses were extremely socially vulnerable, as they were heavily exploited by their employers and forced to live in overcrowded and often unsanitary conditions (126-7). Furthermore, the media had repeatedly constructed the presence of migrants in the area as an “avalanche” and a “threat” (127). The result: Moroccans became a scapegoat for economic problems, such as falling prices of fruits and vegetables, and entrenched sociocultural anxieties, such as the return of a Moorish invasion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Checa et al note that extreme right-wing and Neonazi groups from other parts of Spain joined residents of El Ejido in carrying out xenophobic violence, often rallying under the slogan, “Linchar al moro” (“Lynch the Moor”) (127). The term “moro” properly refers to historical Muslims who lived on the Iberian peninsula in the medieval and early modern periods. However, after a long period of *Reconquista*, in which Spain was imagined to be “reclaimed” by Christians from Muslim dominance, the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, ordered all remaining Moors to convert to Christianity or suffer expulsion. In contemporary Spain, the term “moro” is also a pejorative, colloquial term that refers to contemporary Muslim migrants, especially those from North Africa. In her landmark study, *The Return of the Moor*, Daniela Flesler argues that contemporary fears of Moroccan migration in Spain are deeply embedded in the historical discourse of the *Reconquista*, and that today’s migrants are seen as a reincarnation of the historical “moor.”

In the wake of these race riots, the city of El Ejido received much negative attention throughout Europe and the world. As Patricia Dolz observed in a 2003 article in *El País*, the memory of the riots “continues to weigh like a stone slab on this city”; hence, its residents “don’t like to talk about xenophobia” anymore. In her article, Dolz quotes Carmen Caparrós, a former city councilor, as saying that the town’s inhabitants had engaged in “social reflection” so that “what happened in 2000” could never recur. Yet, Dolz also reports that the town’s efforts have mostly focused on hiding the problem: in addition to increasing police vigilance, the town replaced predominantly migrant living quarters in the center of town with prefabricated housing near the greenhouses. Dolz explains that these measures have done little to improve ethnic relations, combat the exploitation of migrant workers, or diminish economic inequality between natives and migrants.

The town’s refusal to deal with underlying problems of racial prejudice and inequality surfaced again in 2007, when Jawad Rhalib, a Moroccan film director, made a documentary called *El Ejido: la loi del profit* (*El Ejido: the Law of Profit*). This film revealed the extremely difficult working conditions for migrant agricultural laborers in the area, including in the years following the 2000 riots. Needless to say, this film was not well received in El Ejido. Because the film was co-financed by Belgium, France and Morocco,

COAG Almería<sup>9</sup> denounced it as part of “a campaign orchestrated from Central Europe to smear the reputation of fruit and vegetable production in Almería” (“Coag denuncia.”) The organization also blamed the Moroccan consulate in Almería for some of the problems shown in the documentary, stating that the Moroccan government was known to “avoid the situation of their neglected minors” (cited in “Los agricultores protestan”). In their 2010 study on xenophobia in El Ejido, Checa and his coauthors concluded that ten years after the riots, the natives of El Ejido continued to harbor “a rather negative feeling toward the immigrant population,” and that this attitude “is manifest in a more extreme way than other places that receive immigrants” (141).

It is extremely telling that, when faced with accusations of racial injustice and exploitative labor practices, COAG pointed its finger in two directions: first, at “Central Europe,” an unambiguous reference to France and Belgium, for financing Rhalib’s documentary; and second, at the Moroccan government for not doing enough to solve its own people’s problems. On one hand, COAG was infuriated that other Europeans—especially those in countries north of Spain—would blemish Spaniards’ reputation by portraying them as racist. The problem, of course, was not actual racism, but the *image* of racism: COAG was afraid that the Almería region might *seem* backward, and hence, less European, to other Europeans. On the other hand, by blaming the Moroccan

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<sup>9</sup> COAG refers to “Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos”, a group that represents the agriculture and livestock industry in the Almería area.

government, COAG sought to shift responsibility for El Ejido's ethnic problems away from Spain, and onto its *corrupt, irresponsible, backward* neighbor to the south. In COAG's eyes, Northern Europe was unfairly trying to make Spain look *less European* by making it look *more racist*; in response, it argued that the *real* culprit was a place *even less European*, such as Morocco.

But what happened at El Ejido was hardly an isolated event. In December 2008, in a small, southern Italian town called Rosarno, two African migrant agriculture workers were wounded in a drive-by shooting as they returned to the abandoned factory they and many other migrants were living in. This incident led many Africans, who were tired of living in squalor and repeatedly enduring racist abuse at the hands of locals, to protest peacefully for several hours. Yet, in January 2010, the incident would repeat itself: again, two African migrants were randomly shot and wounded in what appeared to be a racially motivated crime. This time, the African community's exasperation with rock-bottom salaries, desperate living conditions and racial hatred exploded into three days of violent protest. From January 7-9, hundreds of migrants banded together to block roads and protest in front of city hall; they also broke trash cans and fought with police. They were no longer willing to tolerate such intense exploitation and misery.

Following these riots, racial tensions in Rosarno became so aggravated that thousands of migrants were forced to leave the town; the local government subsequently

bulldozed their dwellings (Greene). Roberto Maroni, Berlusconi's Minister of the Interior, infamously remarked that the clashes were the result of "improper tolerance," suggesting that migrants should never have been "tolerated" there at all (qtd in "Rosarno, demoliti gli accampamenti"). Many speculated that the *'Ndrangheta*, the Calabria region's mafia, was somehow involved in inciting the violence. Yet, as in El Ejido, economic issues were again a crucial element in the equation: *The Guardian* reported that Calabrian citrus prices had been dropping significantly around the time the riots took place (Hooper).

Both the Italian and foreign press repeatedly portrayed the situation of migrant workers in Rosarno and the ensuing race riots as something that could only be imaginable elsewhere in the world, but not in Italy. For example, Carlo Ciavoni of *La Repubblica* noted that, prior to the riots, the fact that migrants relied exclusively on Doctors Without Borders for basic humanitarian assistance made Rosarno resemble places like "Zimbabwe, Myanmar, North Kivu, [and] Darfur." In a similar vein, Carlo Macrì of the *Corriere della sera* compared Rosarno during the riots to a "miniature Beirut"; *The Economist* likened the situation to ethnic cleansing in the Balkans ("Southern Misery"); and Frederika Randall of *The Nation* wrote that it was "like Alabama or Mississippi before civil rights" (22). But perhaps the most memorable comparison came from Luigi Manconi, a center-left Italian politician. In a caustic, but ironic comment, Manconi remarked that, by expelling its migrant community, Rosarno had become "the

only completely white city in the world” (qtd in “Rosarno, demoliti gli accampamenti”). Noting that “not even South Africa under apartheid had obtained such a result,” he then sarcastically wondered: “Who will pick the oranges now?”

Manconi’s remarks are striking because they highlight the fact that racism in Rosarno emerged, to a certain extent, from the town’s own underlying anxieties about its racial and cultural belonging to Europe. By comparing Rosarno to apartheid South Africa, Manconi aligns the town with the Global South, and therefore *against* Europe—for what could be more counter to European values, such as human rights and democracy, than apartheid? Yet, at the same time, the comparison to South Africa makes Rosarno seem *quintessentially* European—for, in light of Europe’s history of (neo)colonialism, slavery and white supremacy, could anything possibly be *more* European than apartheid? Furthermore, by referring to Rosarno as the world’s “only completely white city,” Manconi poked fun at a deeply rooted sociocultural desire present in nearly every society Europe has touched: namely, the desire to be seen as “whiter” than one has always been seen. In doing so, his comment accentuates the historically contested whiteness of people from Calabria, Southern Italy and Southern Europe more generally. Given the entrenched social and cultural imaginary that views Southern Italy as a kind of Africa within Europe, one cannot help but wonder: *even if* Rosarno managed to expel *all* of its migrants, would it really be “completely white”?

While the examples of El Ejido and Rosarno are certainly extreme, they are, perhaps, not exceptional in the contemporary European landscape. The UK, for example, has experienced race riots throughout the twentieth century, with a noticeable frequency in the 1980s<sup>10</sup>; some argue that the widely publicized 2011 riots of Tottenham and London were race-related as well.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the 2005 civil unrest in France, which began in the suburbs of Paris, was also significantly fueled by discontent and alienation amongst the French Muslim community (Craig Smith). Ethnic tensions in Europe have been further compounded in recent decades by the electoral successes of far right, anti-immigrant political parties in numerous European countries.<sup>12</sup> Thus, xenophobia in Europe is a truly continental problem; it can hardly be said to be specific to one country or set of countries. As Marco Antonio Pirrone notes, one significant cause of the spread of European xenophobia is media representation: European television and journalism often represent migration as an “invasion,” as an “emergency,” a problem of “security ... deviance and crime” (103). In the 2000s, especially following terrorist attacks in New

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<sup>10</sup> According to the BBC, following Britain’s Notting Hill riots in 1958, described as “some of the worst racial violence Britain has ever seen,” more race riots followed in Brixton in 1981, including several “copycat riots” (“Long history”). Furthermore, “summer riots became almost the norm in the early 1980s as trouble flared in Bristol, Birmingham and Bradford, culminating in 1985 rioting at north London’s Broadwater Farm .”

<sup>11</sup> This is a topic of dispute: for example, while Hugh Muir and Yemisi Adegoke of *The Guardian* argued that “these were not disturbances resulting from conflict between races,” columnist Katharine Birbalsingh of *The Telegraph* asserted that “These riots were about race. Why ignore the fact?”

<sup>12</sup> In a 2007 study, Jens Rydgren writes that: “Since the early 1980s, parties such as the French Front National, the Belgian Vlaams Blok, the Austrian Freedom Party (FP), the Italian Lega Nord, and the Danish People’s Party, among several others, have established themselves in their respective party systems, sometimes with voter shares exceeding 20%,” noting also that “Austria (2000) and Italy (1994 and 2001) have formed governments involving the Freedom Party and the Lega Nord, respectively” (242, *original parenthesis*). Similarly, in a 2007 study, Michael Minkenberg and Pascal Perrineau illustrate an increase in support of radical right wing parties in numerous European countries from 1999 to 2004.

York, Madrid and London, Islamic migration in particular has received a great deal of negative attention: Isabelle Rigoni contends that European media often represent Islam “as threatening, dangerous or subversive, or at least as ‘other’ and alien, and very rarely as a legitimate, personal belief” (476). The notions of essential difference that underlie these representations have, in turn, contributed to what Paul Silverstein terms the “racialization” of migrants in Europe. For Silverstein, immigrants are increasingly imagined “as the European nation-state’s abject, and anthropology’s increasingly preferred, exotic ‘others’” (365).

In my view, part of what makes the events of El Ejido and Rosarno particularly noteworthy is that these case studies uncovered deep-seated insecurities about their societies’ relationship with Europe. Both cases demonstrate their countries’ sociocultural preoccupation with asserting their belonging to what Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to as a “hyperreal Europe.” This idea suggests that Europe is less a concrete entity than a “figur[e] of imagination” that the Third World must aspire to catch up with, or become (27). Yet, the case studies of El Ejido and Rosarno illustrate that the “Third World” is not always *external* to Europe, but can also be *internal* to it. In doing so, they reaffirm Dainotto’s argument that Southern Europe functions as Europe’s “internal *other*” (*Europe in Theory* 4). Located in the southernmost regions of southern countries, El Ejido and Rosarno might be said to occupy a marginalized position within Europe comparable, in some ways, to that of the immigrants they attempted to expel. Hence, we might interpret

these communities' attempts to rid themselves of migrants as a *performance* of European-ness—whether by trying to become as white as possible, as Manconi suggested, or by exculpating themselves of racist backwardness, as did COAG-Almería. These societies' desire to purify themselves of African contamination, on the one hand, or the *image* of racism, on the other, thus arises *not only* as a result of contemporary migrations, *but also* as a consequence of historical European attitudes that have viewed Italy and Spain as *always* tarnished by African *otherness*.

## II. On Welcoming

In Amara Lakhous' critically acclaimed novel, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (*Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator at Piazza Vittorio*, 2006), Ahmed/Amedeo, the protagonist of dubious national origin, muses to himself: "È meraviglioso potersi liberare dalle catene dell'identità che ci portano alla rovina. Chi sono io? Chi sei? Chi sono? Sono domande inutili e stupide" ("It's marvelous to be able to free ourselves from the chains of identity which lead us to ruin. Who am I? Who are you? Who are they? These are pointless and stupid questions") (156/110).<sup>13</sup>

As an Algerian-Italian writer and winner of Italy's 2006 Flaiano prize, Lakhous is one of the most visible representatives of a literary corpus known as Italian "migrant

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<sup>13</sup> Page numbers refer first to the original Italian edition, and second to Ann Goldstein's English translation.

writing.” This term generally refers to literary texts that were written in Italian by authors who immigrated to Italy from other nations, especially poorer ones. The corpus was inaugurated in 1990 and 1991 upon the publication of three autobiographical, migrant-authored, diary-like narratives.<sup>14</sup> Elena Benelli explains that these texts shared several basic characteristics: first, they were all written in cooperation with Italian journalists, who co-wrote or significantly edited the texts; second, their primary thematic content is “the author’s autobiographical experience of migration”; and finally, “they were published, at least at the beginning, by successful publishing houses, such as Garzanti, who probably intuited the profitability and public interest in such a hot topic” (173). Italian migrant writing has since expanded to include writers of extremely diverse national origins. In addition, while early Italian migrant narratives tended toward autobiographical narration, later exponents of this corpus have turned increasingly toward experimentation with a wide range of literary genres, narrative techniques, and subject matter. The corpus’s growth has been further enhanced by the creation of literary awards for migrant authors, such as the Eks&Tra prize in 1995; by the launching of migration-specific literary journals, such as *El Ghibli* in 2003; and, in some cases, through

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<sup>14</sup> The three “foundational” texts of Italian migrant writing include: *Io, venditore di elefanti*, by Pap Kouma and Oreste Pivetta; *Chiamatemi Ali*, by Mohamed Bouchane, Carla de Girolamo and Daniele Miccione; and *Immigrato*, by Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato.

publication by major publishing houses, such as Garzanti, Einaudi, Rizzoli and Feltrinelli.<sup>15</sup>

Because migrant-authored texts often foreground lived experiences of displacement, diaspora, xenophobia and racism, many cultural critics and literary scholars have heralded their ability to offer a welcome, refreshing perspective on ongoing debates about immigration in Italy, Spain or Europe more broadly. For example, Armando Gnisci, one of the first literary critics to study migrant writing in Italy, contends that this writing can enable Europeans “to decolonize ourselves from ourselves” (*Creolizzare l’Europa* 125); that “these writers want to be heard precisely by us” (*Letteratura italiana* 17, *emphasis mine*); and that they are “interlocutors” in a “discussion that can be had together” (“Migranti e letteratura” 24). Similarly, Graziella Parati argues that migrants use literature as a strategy to “talk back” to dominant Italian conceptions of a homogeneous national identity (*Migration Italy*). Responding to the very negative media portrayal of migrants in Italy, Roberto Derobertis adds that “The surfacing of migrant writers... removes migrant bodies from both the oblivion of the news item that only lasts a few minutes, and the compassionate attitude that only sees in the migrant a ‘victim’ to be helped” (“Insorgenze letterarie” 37). In short, because so much discourse about immigrants is produced without their participation, these authors

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<sup>15</sup> Garzanti published Khouma and Pivetta’s *Io, venditore di elefanti* in 1990. Feltrinelli published Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo’s novel, *Rometta e Giulio* in 2001 (studied in depth in Chapter 4); Einaudi published *Rosso come una sposa* by Albanian-Italian writer Anilda Ibrahim in 2008; and Rizzoli published *La mia casa è dove sono*, by Somali-Italian writer Igiaba Scego in 2010.

see “migrant writing” as a way to *welcome* immigrants into the debates taking place about them.

In the Spanish context, the prevalent critical construct that might be compared to Italian “migrant writing” is that of “Hispano-African” literature. While traditionally, this term (along with “Afro-Hispanic”) has referred to the blending of African and Hispanic influences in Latin America, especially the Caribbean, it is increasingly being used to describe literary texts written in Spanish by writers from the African continent, whether Maghrebi or sub-Saharan. Enrique Lomas López designates five major groups of “Hispano-African” literature. The first three comprise writing in Spanish from Spain’s former African colonies, Equatorial Guinea, the Western Sahara and the former Moroccan Protectorate, regardless of whether they were written in the writer’s home country or in exile (92-3). The fourth category comprises works written in Spanish by African intellectuals from other countries, notably Cameroon<sup>16</sup> (93). The fifth category includes writing produced “as the result of migratory currents toward Spain”<sup>17</sup> (93). While Lomas López’s sub-categories comprise a relatively substantial body of works,

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<sup>16</sup> Lomas López explains that “from Cameroon’s Universidad Yaundé I, there has emerged a group of writers and hispanists, all of them Spanish teachers, ... that has been defined as the ‘Generación hispanocamerunesa’ by the critic M’bare N’gom” (93). These writers have chosen Spanish as an alternative to French, the historic colonial language. Lomas López is here referring to N’gom’s 2011 article, “La literatura africana de expresión española.”

<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Lomas López’s taxonomy of Hispano-African writing excludes two texts that, in my opinion, have been central to the emerging corpus of “migrant” or “African” writing in Spain: namely, Pasqual Moreno Torregosa and Mohamed El Gheryb’s *Dormir al raso* (*Sleeping in the Open*, 1994), which is neither literary nor only authored by an African, and Rachid Nini’s *Diario de un ilegal* (*Diary of an Illegal Immigrant*, 2002), which was originally written in Arabic, but achieved fairly significant distribution in Spain after its translation.

Sabrina Brancato nonetheless observes that most of the “Afro-Hispanic literary community” in Spain is “disconnected, fragmented, and barely visible” (“Voices Lost” 6). I, however, would amend this statement: while *many* “Hispano-African” writers have achieved little recognition or distribution of their works, several, such as the Equatorial Guinean Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, have received considerable critical attention (see chapter 3). Similarly, Najat El Hachmi (studied in chapter 2) has received a significant amount of both academic and media attention.

Despite the marginality of the “Hispano-African” corpus, the interest in producing it was motivated by progressive intentions, just as it was with Italian “migrant writing.” For example, the Equatorial Guinean critic Mbaré Ngom has explained that his intellectual investment in promoting “Hispano-African” writing emerges from his desire to combat the “exclusion,” “forgetting” and “ostracism” of these literatures from the larger realm of Spanish literary studies (“Literatura africana” 113). Sabrina Brancato echoes this argument, suggesting that the dominant media representation of Africans as “visibly problematic” has left them “wholly invisible” with regard to their capacity as “agents of cultural renewal” (“Voices Lost” 4). Once again, the notion of *welcoming* the African voice into the literary realm is essential to understanding the relevance of this corpus.

While it is true that “Hispano-African” literature differs from Italian “migrant writing” by specifically privileging the African origin of its writers, rather than their

status as “migrants”, I argue that these two critical constructs deserve to be engaged comparatively. This is because both corpuses are attempts to take serious account of the impact of increasing ethnic and racial diversity on each country’s national literary landscape. In other words, what both “Hispano-African” and Italian “migrant writing” share is a critical concern with the recognition of *otherness*: in both cases, critics have created them to describe the impact of that which is seen as *not Spanish* or *not Italian* on their respective national literatures.

In addition, I argue that there is another level of negation implicit in the construction of these categories: that of *non-European*. At first, this assertion may seem surprising, or even inaccurate: one might counter that Italian migrant writing includes Eastern European writers, especially those from Albania,<sup>18</sup> within its scope. However, this inclusion is dependent precisely on the *contested European-ness* of Eastern Europe: because Italians imagine Albanians to be *even less European* than themselves,<sup>19</sup> Albanians who write in Italian belong to the category of *migrant* literary writing. Hence, the seeming “inclusion” of Albanians under the “migrant” label is really a reflection of their social “exclusion” from prevalent ideas about Italian and European identity. In the case

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<sup>18</sup> There are numerous Albanian writers who are included under the umbrella of Italian migrant writing. Three of the most prominent include the poet Gezim Hajdari, the novelist Artur Spanjolli, and poet/novelist Anilda Ibrahimi.

<sup>19</sup> Nicola Mai argues that, following large waves of Albanian immigration to Italy in the early 1990s, Albanians became very heavily stigmatized in Italian society for a number of reasons. Part of this stigmatization was due to “Albania’s association with Italy’s (fascist and colonial) past and resemblance between Albanian immigration and Italy’s own internal and international migration since unification” (“Myths and Moral Panics” 78). As a result of these associations, Mai argues that Albanians became a new “other” against which Italy could constitute its “new, EU-compatible...identity” (78).

of “Hispano-African” literature, the underlying logic of *non-European* is more transparent: the categorization under one umbrella category of Maghrebi and sub-Saharan Africans, regardless of national origin or migratory status, is clearly a response to the assumption that all Africans are radically, almost irredeemably exterior to European identity.

The idea that the constitution of the category of “migrant writing” or “Hispano-African” literature might be predicated on underlying exclusions, such as *non-Italian*, *non-Spanish*, or *non-European*, is strangely evocative of Lakhous’s previously mentioned novel, which states that identity is like “chains that lead us to ruin.” With this in mind, we must ask ourselves: is it dangerous to include writers like Lakhous in a literary corpus in which *foreign identity* is a prerequisite for entry? If it is truly “pointless and stupid” to categorize people through identity labels, is there something deeply problematic about the construction of a “migrant” literary corpus? In short: does the critical exaltation of Lakhous, or others, as “migrant” writers contradict this category’s stated goal—namely, that of breaking down the barrier between “natives” and “foreigners”?

Lakhous is not the only writer to critique the “chain-like” quality of identity labels, especially with regard to migrant writing. Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo, an Italian writer of Congolese birth, bluntly declared in an interview that: “io detesto essere confinato alla ‘letteratura migrante,’ mi fa schifo anche il nome” (“I detest being

confined by 'migrant literature', even the name disgusts me") (Frabetti 67). Likewise, Najat El Hachmi, a Moroccan-born novelist who won Catalonia's prestigious Ramón Llull prize in 2008, denigrated that region's attempts to celebrate cultural diversity as "pornografía étnica" ("ethnic pornography"), adding that that "El inmigrante no quiere pertenecer a una asociación de inmigrantes, sino a una de vecinos" ("The immigrant does not want to belong to an association of immigrants, but to one of neighbors") (Navarro). Francisco Zamora Lobo, an Equatorial Guinean writer exiled in Madrid, echoed this idea in a more subtle way: in an interview with Mischa Hendel, he diffused rigid, identitarian binaries by suggesting that immigration is "el camino que estamos recorriendo todo el mundo, todo el mundo está inmigrando" ("a path that everyone is traversing, everyone is immigrating") (117).

The notion that something as pleasant-sounding as "migrant literature" could be "disgusting," that celebrating diversity is a form of "pornography," or that "everyone is immigrating," might strike some readers as surprising, unfair, or inaccurate. After all, to erase the perceived difference between "natives" and "migrants," or between "Europeans" and "Africans" might be tantamount to ignoring, and therefore reinforcing, the very real economic, political and cultural asymmetries of power between these different groups. Yet, Lakhous' familiar comparison of identity categories to "chains" might help us make sense of these critiques. If these writers are "chained" to their identities as African, Moroccan, or Algerian, then perhaps their resentment

emerges from what they feel to be a distortion, suppression, or even silencing of their individual literary voices. Perhaps the well-intentioned foregrounding of these writers' origins reduces them to objects of consumption, like pornography, thereby *chaining* their literary works to a particular social function. Perhaps some literary categories have the unintended effect of *cooperating* with other forms of exclusion to segregate, or *chain*, certain writers into an "association of immigrants," rather than an "association of neighbors." In sum, perhaps literary categories such as "migrant writing" or "Hispano-African" are predicated on ideas about who *does*, or *does not* belong in a given society that are not totally dissimilar from the ones that produced the race riots in El Ejido and Rosarno.

To further explore these issues, we must consider how something that might be called "migrant" or "Hispano-African" literature came to exist in Italy and Spain in the first place. First, we must examine these countries' transformation from producers of emigration to receivers of immigration. In the late nineteenth century, the combination of industrialization, urbanization, and the surplus of agrarian labor produced massive waves of emigration from both Spain and Italy. Elies Furió Blasco and Matilde Alonso Pérez estimate that, from the end of the nineteenth century until 1929, approximately 5.5 million Spaniards emigrated across the Atlantic, principally to "hacer las Américas" ("make the Americas"). Following this period, the Nationalist victory in the Spanish Civil War and the consequent ascent of Francisco Franco's dictatorship forced more than

a half million Spaniards into exile (Santos). Later on, in the 1960s and '70s, more than two million Spaniards emigrated to Northern European countries such as France, Germany and Switzerland, primarily in search of work (Kleiner Liebau 79). Italy produced even larger waves of migration during this period: Antonio Golini and Flavio Amato estimate that approximately 5.2 million emigrants left Italy between 1870 and 1900, 8.8 million between 1900 and 1914, 4.4 million from 1914-1941 (the interwar period), and 6.7 million from the postwar to 1970<sup>20</sup> (48-50).

Thus, Spain and Italy remained migrant-exporters until the 1970s. However, these countries' accelerated growth during the 1960s and '70s led their migratory patterns to change significantly. As their economies continued to grow, Spain and Italy, which had previously served as transit countries for migrants en route to Northern Europe, increasingly became alternative destinations in their own right. By the 1980s, both had become recipients of large waves of migration. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, migration to Spain and Italy increased substantially. Désirée Kleiner-Liebau observes that, from 1998 to 2007, Spain's foreign population rose from 1.8% to 8.6% (81). Similarly, Italy's National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) indicates that from 2003 to 2010, Italy's foreign population rose from 2.3% to 7.2%. Today, the countries with the largest migrant communities in Spain include Romania, Morocco, and Ecuador; in Italy, they include Romania, Albania and Morocco.

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<sup>20</sup> These figures are based on the authors' table on page 50.

Hence, while these countries were once known as “emigration nations” (to borrow Mark Choate’s phrase), they have attracted large scale migrations from all over the world for approximately thirty years. From a cultural studies viewpoint, one of the most significant effects of growing ethnic and cultural diversity in Italy and Spain has been the emergence of migrant-authored literary texts, especially those produced in these country’s “native” language(s).

On one level, perhaps the foregrounding of *otherness* through literary categories such as “migrant” or “Hispano-African” writing is understandable, given the relative newness of these populations in contemporary Italy and Spain. By “welcoming” the newcomers through literature, such categories might be imagined as a remedy to the problems that cause xenophobic sentiment, including the eruptions of such sentiment in Rosarno and El Ejido. Yet, if these critical constructs aim to combat the exclusion of those marked as *other*—namely, the *non-Italian*, the *non-Spaniard*, or the *non-European*—we must examine how, exactly, literature in particular might accomplish such a goal. The idea, of course, is that *new* “migrant” or “Hispano-African” writers have personally experienced migration, racism, and discrimination, which are *new* problems in Spain and Italy. Consequently, their works articulate a “truthful” expression about a collective experience that corrects the “falsehoods” propagated in the media, and other sources of racist discourse. Individual writers are thus called upon to *speak for* an otherwise silent group, which is still too *recent* to speak for itself. In doing so, these categories must

“celebrate” the vast diversity of cultural origins of the numerous writers that comprise them. At the same time, they must at least temporarily overlook the fact that the writers called upon to *speak for* others are an extremely tiny (and usually, comparatively privileged) portion of the “migrant” or “African” communities they represent.

But we are still left to wonder: what relation does the question of *newness* bear to Lakhous’ notion of identity as “chains”? Does the “newness” of migrations in Southern Europe justify the construction of a “truth-telling” project, such as migrant writing? Or does this supposed *newness* merely tighten the leash on historically ingrained, oppressively essentialistic visions of identity?

### III. On Expulsion and Welcoming: The Problem of Southern “Newness”

To evaluate the claim that categories of “Hispano-African” or “migrant writing” are justified because of the newness of foreign populations in Spain and Italy, I will now turn to Sara Ahmed’s notion of “stranger fetishism.” For Ahmed, “stranger fetishism” occurs when an “us” group (whether local, such as a neighborhood, or large-scale, such as a nation or state) defines itself against a “stranger” that is easily recognizable. However, Ahmed contends that stranger fetishism is not overcome by “welcoming” the stranger, as multicultural discourse often does to migrants and ethnic minorities. On the contrary, she argues, multiculturalism, which is grounded on notions of celebrating

cultural and ethnic *others* in a society where they previously did not belong, “can function to assimilate ‘the stranger’ as a figure of the unassimilable” (4). In other words, Ahmed argues, “while ‘stranger danger’ discourse may work by expelling the stranger as the *origin of danger*, multicultural discourse may operate by welcoming the stranger as the *origin of difference*” (4, *original emphasis*). By burdening those deemed to be ethnic “strangers” with the task of being the “origin of difference,” multicultural societies only accentuate the *othering* imposed upon “strangers,” rather than alleviating it. As such, the concept of “stranger fetishism” illustrates that “welcoming” the stranger may not be much different from “expelling” her: either way, she is still regarded as fundamentally unassimilable.

My use of Ahmed’s theory in a Southern European context might raise objections from some readers, given that Ahmed’s insights emerged, at least in part, from her analysis of ethnic and social relations in Britain and Australia, both of which have very different (and much older) relationships with “multiculturalism” than Spain or Italy. Nonetheless, I believe that her theory of “stranger fetishism” can elucidate a great deal about the privileging of “migrant” or “African” writing in Italy and Spain. Let us recall, for a moment, Gnisci’s comments: by stating that migrants “want to be heard by *us*,” Gnisci imposes a strong rhetorical dichotomy between “*us*,” his presumably Italian readers, and “*them*,” the *other* writers whose voice he seeks to spotlight. In doing so, the

writers whose works he puts on a pedestal are praised for their authenticity, but remain excluded from national or European belonging.

Gnisci is not alone in this rhetorical strategy. The title of Lomas López' previously cited article on "Hispano-African" literature is, precisely, "Images of *our* Africans" ("Estampas de *nuestros* africanos," *emphasis mine*). The word "our" in this title clearly refers to Spaniards: the use of Spanish as an African literary language enables an *appropriation* of these writings as *belonging* to the realm of Spanish literature. It also distinguishes African writers that *belong to Spain* from those that *do not*, such as those that write in French, Portuguese or English. Such an act of division and appropriation is even more patently manifest in Javier Reverte's prologue to *Memoria de laberintos* (*Memory of Labyrinths*), a book of poetry published by Francisco Zamora Lobo in 1999. In this prologue, Reverte, a Spanish writer and journalist, laments that Equatorial Guinea, as a former colony of Spain, has not produced any writers as famous as the giants of the French language Negritude movement, such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor. Yet, Reverte takes heart in Zamora's poetry, arguing that this work is not only beneficial to Equatorial Guineans, but also to Spaniards: after all, Zamora's literary accomplishments finally allow Spaniards to "have *our* negritude poet" (8, *emphasis mine*).

Lomas López's and Reverte's rhetorical strategies of *partitioning* and *claiming* various groups of postcolonial African writers under a thinly veiled rubric of Spanish nationalism are disturbingly reminiscent of the partitioning and colonization of the

African continent itself. For both Spain and Italy, African colonialism served as a way to “keep up” with Britain and France’s vast overseas empires and transcend their own “southern” decadence. Yet, as latecomers to the African colonial scene, neither one ever successfully managed to outdo their European rivals. Spain’s interest in African colonialism emerged from the gradual loss of its vast Latin American empire over the course of the nineteenth century. This loss culminated in the Spanish American War of 1898, in which the United States took possession of Spain’s last remaining colonies, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippine Islands. By marking the definitive end of Spain’s days as an imperial power in the Americas, this war was seen as an intolerable national humiliation. “Haunted by the specter” of its lost American empire, Spain turned its colonial ambitions to Africa, seizing the Spanish Sahara (now the Western Sahara) after the Conference of Berlin in 1884 (Loureiro 68). Then, in 1912, it established a protectorate in Morocco (along with France) that would last until 1956. Furthermore, although Spain had controlled the territories of what is now Equatorial Guinea since the Treaty of El Pardo in 1778, it only developed them into a full-fledged colony around the turn of the twentieth century. Jo Labanyi argues that the early Franco regime exploited the image of African colonialism in order to trumpet its capacity to return Spain to its prior days of imperial grandeur (“Internalisations of Empire”).

Italy’s colonial endeavors in Africa followed a very similar pattern to Spain’s. Following its Unification in 1861, Italy believed that it, too, deserved a colonial empire in

order to take its rightful place amongst other major European powers. The acquisition of overseas colonies, it was touted, would return Italy from its present state of weakness and fragmentation to the imperial glory of Ancient Rome. After France frustrated Italian colonial designs on Tunisia by establishing a protectorate there, Italy turned its interests to the Horn of Africa. It annexed Massawa in present-day Eritrea in 1886, acquiring the rest of its Eritrean colony in 1889. However, its attempt to conquer Ethiopia in the first Italo-Abyssinian War led to a humiliating national defeat at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Like the Spanish-American war for Spain, the Italians' defeat at Adwa was perceived as an embarrassment of disastrous proportions (and a great source of pride for later anti-colonial and anti-racist movements<sup>21</sup>). The memory of Adwa would remain so prominent on the consciousness of Italian nationalists that, decades later, Mussolini would use the ruthless Second Italo-Abyssinian War of 1935-6 as a way to avenge it. In "Modernity is Just Over There," Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains that Italy's subsequent efforts at imperial expansion during the liberal period<sup>22</sup> and, especially, during Fascism<sup>23</sup> were

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<sup>21</sup> Because the battle of Adwa was the first time indigenous peoples would successfully repel a European colonizer, it came to be remembered as an iconic moment of African resistance to European colonialism later on in the twentieth century (Levine).

<sup>22</sup> This refers to the period 1870-1914, shortly after Italy's Unification and before World War II. During this time, Italy colonized present-day Eritrea, Somalia and Libya.

<sup>23</sup> Fascism took hold of Italy under Benito Mussolini's leadership from 1922-43. The most significant acts of colonial expansion during this time were the Second Italo-Abyssinian war (1935-6), when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and declared himself emperor, as well as the Italian occupation of Albania. However, Ethiopia would gain its independence from Italian occupation only five years later. After the fall of Mussolini and a brief Nazi occupation, Albania, too, achieved independence in 1944.

attempts to transport Italy out of its perceived state of backwardness and into a new, modern era of renewed European dominance.

Yet, the failure of Spain and Italy's African colonial enterprises only ended up reinforcing, once again, their reputation as backward, Southern countries. After the fall of Fascism and the victory of the Allies in World War II, Italy lost all of its colonial territories, retaining only administrative control of Somalia as a United Nations Trusteeship until 1960. Angelo Del Boca argues that, after the war, the memory of Italian atrocities in Africa was deliberately repressed in public debate, especially through the closing of colonial archives for several decades. Instead, he notes, honest conversation about the topic was replaced by a self-exculpating national mythology in which Italy's colonial endeavors were reimagined as benevolent or heroic. While rigorous academic study of Italian colonialism has flourished in recent decades, Alessandro Triulzi notes that collective memory of Italian colonialism remains "oscillating," in the sense that it alternates between ignorance, ambiguous critique, and strategic appropriation (435). Spain's African empire lasted longer than Italy's, but ultimately fared no better. Although the Franco regime reluctantly recognized the independence of Morocco in 1956 and Equatorial Guinea in 1968, it soon designated all news from Equatorial Guinea as *materia reservada*, or classified material, "in an effort to hide the failure of the

decolonization process”<sup>24</sup> (García Alvite, “Strategic Positions” 150). The status of Western Saharan independence remains unresolved to this day<sup>25</sup>, in large part because of the hasty and incomplete decolonization it received from Spain in 1975—“precisely as the dictator lay dying,” as Susan Martin Márquez notes (“Brothers and Others” 241).

The concerted efforts in both Italy and Spain to suppress public conversations about colonialism point, once again, to the problem of performing European-ness. Because they failed to match Britain and France’s larger, more influential, and longer-lasting African empires, the colonial enterprises that were supposed to make these countries look *more* European only ended up reinforcing their ostensible “southern” inferiority. Coupled with the large waves of emigrants that left Spain and Italy in search of opportunities in Northern Europe, the Americas and elsewhere, for most of the twentieth century, these countries’ image and prestige were far removed from those of Europe’s greatest powers.

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<sup>24</sup> Following decolonization, Equatorial Guinea quickly became a dictatorship under the leadership of Francisco Macías Nguema. The country’s rapid degeneration into brutal, state-sponsored violence and oppression was deeply embarrassing to the Franco regime.

<sup>25</sup> In 1975, the Spanish government agreed to set up a tripartite administration over its territory in the Sahara between itself and this territory’s northern and southern neighbors, Morocco and Mauritania. However, Spain abandoned the territory shortly thereafter, leaving Morocco and Mauritania disputing power over the region with each other and with the Frente Polisario, the Western Sahara’s independence movement. After Mauritania abandoned its claim to power in the region, the area has been mostly controlled by Morocco ever since. However, legitimate authority is still disputed between the Moroccan government and the Frente Polisario, whose main objective continues to be independence. Meanwhile, as a result of Morocco’s ongoing occupation of the Western Sahara, large segments of the Saharawi population have been driven into refugee camps in Algeria since the late 1970’s. Although the current population of the refugee camps is disputed, a 2013 report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that about 125,000 refugees live there (13).

In light of this colonial history, Reverte's desire to claim Zamora's poetry in an effort to match the achievements of the Francophone Negritude movement acquires a rather negative valence. Reading his comment through Ahmed's theory illuminates how the promotion of "Hispano-African" literature can be easily manipulated into a nationalist attempt to "get a piece of the trendy postcolonial pie," as Laura Moss puts it (2). As with African colonialism, what underlies the desire for this "pie" is a yearning to perform European-ness. Such a performance bears a strong resemblance to the aftermath of the El Ejido riots, in which COAG-Almería complained that France and Belgium unfairly *othered* Southern Spain by accusing it of racist exploitation. Put simply, the *expulsion* of migrants in El Ejido, the subsequent *denial* of racism there, and the *welcoming* of Africans through "Hispano-African" literature might all be symptoms of a deeper anxiety in Spain about performing European identity. The same hypothesis could be applied to Italian "migrant writing": if the Rosarno riots brought into relief a clear, exclusionary demarcation between "us" and "them," perhaps critical formulations such as Gnisci's, in which *they* wish to be heard by *us*, are not quite as successful at breaking down that division as one might have hoped. Instead, I argue that, by reifying the native/migrant dichotomy, "migrant writing" can easily be co-opted to serve Italy's past and present objective of asserting its belonging to Europe.

Returning to the notion of *newness*, we can see that although immigration and migrant writing may be relatively "new" phenomena in Spain and Italy, these countries'

anxieties about belonging to Europe, which frame the perception of migration, are not. We are thus left to wonder: if the imposition of labels such as “migrant” or “Hispano-African” can be co-opted to serve Spain and Italy’s longstanding attempts to embody full, “hyperreal” Europeanness, what creative or interpretive strategies might writers and critics use to resist that manipulation? Are “migrant” literary productions perpetually excluded from dominant ideas of belonging, community or canonicity? Can these works, too, attempt to become “European” literature (or Spanish, or Italian, for that matter?) Can “European-ness” ever be satisfactorily performed by *anyone* who has historically been excluded from it? Or, most pressingly: what other projects of re-envisioning “Europe,” or the “nation,” or of claiming belonging to them, are currently underway?

#### IV. On Repetition and Rewriting

In her book on Spanish responses to Moroccan immigration, Daniela Flesler writes:

Moroccans turn into a ‘problem,’ then, not because of their cultural differences, as many argue, but because, like the *Moriscos*, *they are not different enough...* Spanish responses are permeated with the effort of differentiating and separating, in an attempt to trace clear frontiers between the ‘Moors’ and themselves. (9, *original emphasis*)

In this passage, Flesler suggests that the notion of “difference” between Spaniards and Moroccans is one that is created through representation. The “effort of differentiating and separating” is clearly based on *repetition*: it is by *repeating* ideas of essential difference that Spaniards’ exclusionary relationship with Moroccans is constituted and maintained. In making this claim, Flesler’s argument is strongly reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s earlier theorization of the workings of colonial discourse. Bhabha, too, singles out repetition as a particularly important instrument in the fabrication of colonial difference:

Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and *daemonic repetition*. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that *must be anxiously repeated* (“The Other Question” 94-5, *emphasis mine*).

In this passage, Bhabha suggests that stereotypes, which form the underpinnings of colonial discourse, are upheld through *anxious repetition*. The anxiety that motivates the need to repeat stereotypes is precisely, as Flesler put it, the knowledge that the colonizer and the colonized are never “different enough.” Hence, although stereotypes are “fixed,” they are never self-sufficient: they must be endlessly repeated in order to contain the possibility that colonial difference might only be a widely recounted fiction.

Yet, while Bhabha argues that the colonizer *establishes* difference by repeating stereotypes, he also notes that the colonized can *challenge* difference through repetition:

namely, through the well-known concept of colonial mimicry. Although mimicry, or the imitation of the colonizer, may appear to be a form of submission to colonial dominance, Bhabha sees it as having subversive potential: “Mimicry,” he writes, “repeats rather than re-presents”; (*original emphasis*); in doing so, this repetition “marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model” (“Of mimicry and man” 125). In other words, mimicry calls attention to the hollowness and artificiality of colonial discourse, thereby deflating its capacity to establish racial or cultural hierarchies.

I juxtapose Flesler’s and Bhabha’s arguments to illustrate the dual function of repetition in producing, as well as challenging, notions of essential difference. In the context of migration in Southern Europe, one notable form of counterhegemonic repetition is perceptible in the revision of canonical literary or filmic works by so-called “migrant writers.” Earlier in this introduction, I mentioned four writers—Amara Lakhous, Najat El Hachmi, Francisco Zamora Lobo, and Jadelin Mabiala Gangbo—who have expressed deep resistance to clear-cut, identitarian dichotomies such as “native/migrant,” or “Europe/Africa.” Significantly, all four of these writers have turned to canonical revision as a strategy for articulating a critique of identities in their literary works. In his novels, Amara Lakhous has gravitated repeatedly toward the historical film movement known as the *commedia all’italiana*, using it frequently as both a model and a namesake for his literary works. Similarly, El Hachmi’s works are shot through

with laudatory imitation of Mercè Rodoreda, arguably modern Catalonia's best known novelist. Zamora's writings repeatedly allude to and reconstruct the most iconic of all Spanish classics, Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Likewise, in his 2001 novel, *Rometta e Giulio*, Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo whimsically reinvents Shakespeare's tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*.

In this dissertation, I argue that these writers use canon revision as a form of "repetition" that undermines rigid identity categories such as exclusive nationalisms, the native/migrant binary, and even "Europe" itself. Given that Western "classics" are treated as representatives of particular national (or European) identities, I argue that these writers' imitation, or "mimicry," of these canonical works destabilizes and denaturalizes the essentialistic nationalisms and cultural hierarchies that these "classics" are often invoked to represent. By invoking a strategy of *repetition*, these writers do not fundamentally alter or destroy the canonical works they rewrite, but rather, highlight these classics' condition as always, already subject to reinterpretation, revision and rewriting. In doing so, they propose the possibility of *radically rewriting* not only exclusive nationalisms and Eurocentrism, but also the xenophobia and racism that these identities produce.

However, some readers might point out that there is nothing really new about the claims I am making. After all, postcolonial criticism has already shown us for decades that canonical revision is a relatively common form of anti-colonial, anti-racist,

or anti-Eurocentric critique. (We might think of numerous postcolonial rewritings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*<sup>26</sup>). What, then, might be so interesting about another group of writers who are simply re-enacting a tried and true strategy?

To answer this question, I must first point out that most discussion of postcolonial canonical rewriting has focused specifically on the Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial contexts. This tendency is noticeable in two seminal discussions of postcolonial canonical revision: namely, John Marx's article, "Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon," and Bill Ashcroft's book, *The Empire Writes Back*. These studies' emphasis on Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial literatures is indicative of a more general tendency in postcolonial studies, in which the former empires of Britain and France receive more scholarly attention than those of other countries. While the sheer size and influence of these former empires justify, to some extent, the academic attention bestowed upon them, I suggest that the Anglo/Francocentrism of postcolonial studies also reinforces dominant ideas of what does, and does not, constitute "Europe." More specifically, I argue that, by promoting the assumption that "Anglocentrism" or "Francocentrism" are synonyms for "Eurocentrism," academic postcolonial studies also promotes the idea that "Britain" and

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<sup>26</sup> John Marx notes that, because of *The Tempest's* location on an unnamed island, it has been a particularly important source of inspiration for Caribbean writers; similarly, he notes, "V.S. Naipaul's grim *A Bend in the River* (1979), Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969)..and Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* (1997) are among the fictions to borrow from Conrad's tale" (90).

“France” are synonyms for “Europe.” For most critics, when a postcolonial Anglophone writer critiques “Britishness,” she is simultaneously critiquing Eurocentrism—for “Britishness” is considered a foundational pillar of Western hegemony. Similarly, a Francophone writer who critiques French imperialism is—obviously—critiquing Europe at the same time, because France, after all, has historically occupied a hegemonic position as a producer of European culture and identity.

Thus, postcolonial studies frequently reifies, if unintentionally, the historic chasm between ideas of Northern and Southern “European-ness.” As a result, I argue that the question of “postcolonial” critique in Southern Europe requires another layer of analytical complexity. Here, I am not referring to the fact that many migrant or exiled writers in Spain and Italy do not hail from these countries’ former colonies: I take it as a given that “borrowed” or “indirect” postcolonial critiques (i.e., Algerians in Italy, or Tunisians in Spain) are just as legitimately “postcolonial” as “direct” exchanges between ex-colonial subjects and their former colonizers. Rather, I am referring to the fact that, because of Europe’s North-South divide, a critique of Spanish-ness or Italian-ness *does not necessarily* also constitute a critique of Eurocentrism. On the contrary, given Europe’s designation of its South as an “internal other,” I maintain that to challenge *only* the nationalist narratives of modern Spain and Italy might actually work in tandem with Eurocentrism. For, as COAG-Almería cogently pointed out, the mere act of denouncing Spain or Italy’s racism over the centuries might only serve to reify these countries’ *other-*

ness within Europe, thereby allowing the rest of Europe (especially Northern Europe) to congratulate itself for its civility. Thus, I argue that because Lakhous, El Hachmi, Zamora and Gangbo's works emerged from Spanish, Catalan and Italian literary milieus, we must *not necessarily* equate a critique of "Italian-ness" or "Spanish-ness" to a critique of Europe's past or present (neo-)colonial dominance. Instead, we must search for the *relationship* between their dual critiques of national and European identities, given the asymmetry often imposed between the two.

With this methodological distinction in mind, I argue that these writers' works illustrate that xenophobia and racism emerge from their host countries' attempts to *transcend their perceived South-ness and perform European-ness*. I argue, in other words, that the writers I have selected in this study demonstrate that the "anxious repetition" of identitarian dichotomies, such as "native/migrant" or "Europe/Africa" binaries, in the societies of their "sibling" hosts is the product of these countries' insecurities about overcoming their exclusion from a larger, European identity.

In chapter 1, I analyze how Amara Lakhous critiques Italy's assertions of Europeanness by accentuating the fundamentally theatrical quality of Italy's claims to European belonging. I argue that Lakhous models his novels, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (*Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator at Piazza Vittorio*, 2006) and *Divorzio all'islamica a Viale Marconi* (*Divorce, Islamic Style on Viale Marconi*, 2010), after the *commedia all'italiana* specifically in contrast to Neorealism, the film movement most often

imagined as representative of Italian national identity. By defending the theatricality of the *commedia all'italiana* over Neorealism's pretense to objectivity, Lakhous proposes that migrant writing, too, should accentuate its own theatricality rather than reify its supposed authenticity. In other words, because the *commedia all'italiana* highlights the theatricality of social life, Lakhous illustrates its suitability for revealing the *performed* nature of ethnic, national and gender identities, and therefore, the possibility of radically re-envisioning the Eurocentric, xenophobic and sexist world in which we live.

Chapter 2 examines Najat El Hachmi's critiques of Catalan nationalism, itself a discourse that strongly desires to portray Catalonia as quintessentially "European" by distancing it from the rest of Spain. I argue that El Hachmi's work uncovers a contradiction between two aspects of Catalan nationalist exceptionalism: first, that Catalonia's exceptional, "European" tolerance of foreigners makes it superior to the rest of Spain; and second, that its exceptional, "European" gender equality makes it superior to the supposedly misogynistic cultures of Morocco and the Muslim world. I first offer an overview of her interviews and her autobiography, *Jo també sóc catalana*, in order to illustrate her critique that "integrationist" nationalism disguises the underlying *othering* of Moroccans. I then analyze her award-winning novel, *L'últim patriarca* (*The Last Patriarch*, 2008), which I consider to be a rewriting of Mercè Rodoreda's classic novel, *La plaça del diamant* (known in English as *The Time of the Doves*, 1962). By recycling Rodoreda's novel, El Hachmi makes her Muslim female protagonist's struggle against

patriarchal tyranny appear uncannily similar to the story of Colometa, the protagonist of *Diamant*. In establishing a parallelism between Moroccan and Catalan feminist resistance, El Hachmi articulates a transnational feminist critique; deflates Catalan nationalist claims of exceptional treatment of women and foreigners; and attacks the oft-invoked stereotype that Muslim societies are too sexist to be assimilable in Europe.

Chapter 3 analyzes how Francisco Zamora Lobo, an Equatorial Guinean writer exiled in Spain, reimagines Cervantes' *Don Quijote* (1615) as a tool for anti-racist critique in three works from three different genres: a collection of essays entitled *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca* (*How to be Black and Not Die in Aravaca*, 1994); the poem "Estefanía," from *Memoria de laberintos* (1999); and the novel, *Conspiración en el green* (*Conspiracy on the Green*) (2009). In each text, Zamora capitalizes on the *Quijote's* intertwining of fiction and reality in order to represent historically ingrained forms of racial violence and oppression as fictions that can be re-envisioned and rewritten. In particular, I argue that Zamora represents Spain's present-day problems with racism and xenophobia as the result of its repeated attempts to assert its belonging to Europe throughout the centuries; thus, both Spanish and Equatorial Guinean nationalisms are also portrayed as mutable, malleable fictions.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines Jadelin Mabiala Gangbo's novel, *Rometta e Giulio*, as both a rewriting of Shakespeare, as well as a parody of Italian migrant writing. I argue that *Rometta e Giulio* is a metaliterary reflection about how "migrant" writers must

negotiate the tension between being confined to a label such as “migrant writing,” on one hand, and reaching Shakespearian literary heights, on the other. While these two poles are initially presented as opposites, I argue that the novel reveals them to be mirror images of each other: both, after all, reify authorial voice through “genius” (Shakespeare) or “authenticity” (migrant writing). The protagonist’s anxiety about transcending the “ghetto” of migrant writing and achieving literary canonicity mirrors Italy’s own anxieties about overcoming its “south-ness” and performing European identity. Hence, Using Franco Cassano’s theories of the Mediterranean, I argue that the novel represents the Italian South and the Mediterranean as metaphorical proposals about how to liberate oneself from the jail-like binary between “ghettoization,” on one hand, and the anxious pursuit of literary glorification, on the other.

In approaching these four writers comparatively, my work builds on several overlapping fields of research, including Peninsular Spanish studies, Italian studies, Afro-European Studies, and Mediterranean studies. As I mentioned earlier, Spanish and Italian cultural studies have predominantly framed these writers in terms of either “Hispano-African” or “migrant” writing, respectively. In the Spanish context, Daniela Flesler, Parvati Nair, and Lara Dotson-Renta have all done important cultural studies work on Moroccan migrations in Spain (although only Doston-Renta’s study specifically engages writers of Moroccan origin). Similarly, Equatorial Guinean literary studies is emerging as a field within Hispanism, especially under the leadership of Equatorial

Guinean scholars and writers such as Donato Ndongo and Mbare Ngom , as well as U.S. Hispanists such as Benita Sampedro and Michael Ugarte. Comparative engagement of Moroccan, Equatorial Guinean, and other African writing in Spanish (i.e., “Hispano-African” studies) has been undertaken by Sabrina Brancato and Cristián Ricci. Susan Martin Márquez’s book, *Disorientations*, brings all of these strains together by comparatively examining discourses of Spanish *other*-ness, the legacy of Spanish colonialism in Africa, and contemporary migrant writers of African origin in Spain.

In Italian studies, Armando Gnisci and Graziella Parati’s seminal studies on Italian “migrant writing” have proved foundational for practically all subsequent scholarship.<sup>27</sup> Following their lead, Italianists have produced abundant work on “migrant writing,” especially in the form of edited volumes. Major essay collections include: *Borderlines: Migrant Writing and Italian Identities (1870-2000)* (ed. Loredana Polezzi and Jennifer Burns, 2003); *Nuovo immaginario italiano: italiani e stranieri a confronto nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (ed. Maria Grazia Negro and Maria Cristina Mauceri, 2009); *National Belongings: Hybridity in Italian Colonial and Postcolonial Culture* (ed. Derek Duncan and Jacqueline Andall, 2010); *Certi confini: sulla letteratura italiana della*

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<sup>27</sup> Gnisci’s book, *Il rovescio del gioco* (1993) was the first to take account of the phenomenon of migrant literature in Italy. Later studies on this topic would include *La letteratura italiana della migrazione* (1998) and *Creolizzare l’Europa: letteratura e migrazione* (2003), as well as numerous essays. Graziella Parati’s monograph, *Migration Italy: the Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (2005), is also regarded as a seminal study in this field, especially in the U.S. Parati has also published several essays, an edited volume, *The Cultures of Italian Migration: Diverse Trajectories and Discrete Perspectives* (2011, coedited with Anthony Julian Tamburri), as well as two anthologies of Italian migrant writing in English: *Multicultural Literature in Contemporary Italy* (2007, coedited with Marie Orton); and *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy* (1999).

*migrazione* (ed. Lucia Quaquarelli, 2010); *Leggere il testo e il mondo: vent'anni di scritture della migrazione in Italia* (ed. Fulvio Pezzarossa and Ilaria Rossini, 2011); and *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (ed. Caterina Romeo and Cristina Lombardi Diop, 2012). Other significant essays have been written by Roberto Derobertis, Lidia Curti, Barbara Spackman, and Federica Mazzara, to name only a few.

The study of migration within a particular national context has both strengths and weaknesses. On one hand, a strong background in Spanish or Italian studies has endowed much of the above-cited analysis of how writers respond to the dominant representations of themselves in Spanish or Italian society with a great deal of historical, cultural and literary depth. Yet, studying migration through the lens of “national” cultural studies also has its limitations. Through Ahmed’s analysis, we have seen how the use of national or linguistic borders to frame migrations risks reifying migrant or African identity as an “other” upon which the nation reasserts its identity, thereby turning a gesture of “welcoming” into an act of “exclusion.” I argue that this *othering* is exacerbated in Southern European countries because of the *othering* already imposed on them by Northern Europe. Similarly, by focusing on a single national or language tradition, the nation-specific approach can easily miss important transnational trends, which only a cross-lingual and cross-national approach can bring into focus.

In an attempt to surpass these shortcomings, scholars have recently developed two other important critical lenses in order to address questions of migration and

postcolonialism in contemporary Europe: namely, Afro-European studies and Mediterranean studies. Allison Van Deventer argues that Afro-European literature is a “provisional category” that enables an analysis of “how the idea of Europe is interrogated, negotiated, transformed and rewritten by its minority and migrant authors” (4). Sabrina Brancato echoes this idea, maintaining that “the “transnational and transcultural” works of Afro-European writers “problematize what the two continents mean to each other, how they interact and give place to new syncretic cultural formations” (“Afro-European literatures” 11). However, this category, too, has its limitations. Van Deventer points out that Afro-European studies has predominantly been concerned with the notion of “Afro” as blackness: most studies produced under this framework use *race* as their primary analytical category, and thus, tend to focus on questions of black identity in Europe (especially Northern Europe).<sup>28</sup> Brancato highlights other problems inherent in proposing such a category, such as the question of how to analyze non-black Africans (such as white Africans, or those from the Maghreb), and the potential simplification that underlies an effort to group all Africans in Europe under a

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<sup>28</sup> Studies that focus predominantly on questions of black identity in a comparative European perspective include Tina Camp’s *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* and Michelle Wright’s *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*. Both of these studies focus on black identity in northern European countries. Several studies include at least some analysis of race and immigration in Southern European countries, but do not theorize a transnational North/South European perspective in their overall analysis. These include Fatima El Tayeb’s *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*; Alison Van Deventer’s *Euroblack: Race and Immigration in Contemporary Afro-European Literature*; as well as edited volumes such as *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (ed. Darlene Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton and Stephen Small) or *Europe in Black and White: Immigration, Race and Identity in the ‘Old Continent’* (ed. Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, et al.).

single umbrella term. Yet, unlike many proponents of Afro-European studies, Brancato calls attention to Europe's North/South divide, noting for example, that countries like Spain and Italy share a quality of "racial in-betweenness" (9), that Afro-European writers in Spain or Italy tend to have less visibility than in Britain or France, and that, unlike in Spain or Italy, the larger minority populations of France and Britain create the conditions for an "Afro-European" readership. In making these claims, Brancato illustrates that "Afro-European" studies must not only take account of Africa's internal diversity, but also Europe's: as with Africa, any comparative analysis of Europe must not only compare individual nations, but must also consider Europe's own, deeply rooted, transnational fractures and hierarchies.

Emerging alongside Afro-European studies is the field of contemporary Mediterranean studies. While Mediterranean studies is a vast field that comprises a wide array of historical and cultural contexts, the most relevant strain for my work is that which deals with migrations in the contemporary Mediterranean. The main strength of a "Mediterranean" approach is its necessarily comparative emphasis on the plurality of cultures, languages, and literary connections that traverse the Mediterranean's European and African shores. As such, I am particularly drawn to Claudia Esposito, Edwige Tamalet Talbayev and Hakim Abderrezak's formulation of a "Mediterranean Maghreb," which they articulated in a special issue of *Expressions maghrébines*. These scholars choose a plurilingual, Mediterranean approach to the

Maghreb in order to decenter the “disciplinary logics” that usually frame this region’s literatures: namely, those of *Francophonie* and Arabic literature (Tamalet Talbayev 9). In doing so, they seek to analyze the increasing plurilingualism of the Maghrebi literary diaspora, which includes languages such as Spanish, Catalan, Italian, and Dutch. While the authors conceived this strategy for studying the Maghreb in particular, I contend that it is also useful for studying Europe: by displacing the centrality of *Francophonie* and Anglophone studies, a Mediterranean purview can also displace what I consider to be the Anglo/ Francocentrism of postcolonial studies more generally. In doing so, a Mediterranean critical lens also invites reflection on Europe’s North/South divide in the context of migration studies. However, just as the “Afro-European” approach lends itself predominantly to questions of blackness, a Mediterranean focus tends to emphasize literary cultural connections between the Maghreb and Southern Europe. In doing so, Mediterranean studies can easily miss important connections between “Euro-Maghrebi” writers and those who hail from non-Mediterranean diasporas (i.e. sub-Saharan Africans).

My belief in the importance of a comparative perspective leads me to draw simultaneously on the strengths of national cultural studies, Afro-European studies and Mediterranean studies. The comparative aspect of my approach resides not only in my choice to examine writers based in Spain and Italy, but also in my decision to analyze writers who hail from *both* the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so, my

intention is not to lump all of these writers under a single rubric of *otherness*, but rather, to illustrate the parallel ways in which writers designated as *other* within Southern Europe challenge those processes of exclusion, while simultaneously calling for a reformulation of national, European, and global hierarchies between North and South. Thus, I hope to contribute to Spanish studies, Italian studies and Afro-European studies by demonstrating the relevance of Europe's internal North/South divide for analyzing evolving conceptions of both national and European identities. I also hope to enrich to the field of Mediterranean studies by showing how the Mediterranean can be a useful conceptual approach for analyzing writers who do not necessarily hail from the Mediterranean basin itself (see chapter 4 on Gangbo).

I also hope to contribute to these fields by drawing attention to the question of canonical revision. While this topic has been frequently addressed in Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial studies, as well as in individual studies of the authors I have selected, my project is the first to address canonical revision by so-called "migrant writers" from a transnational, Southern European perspective. I believe that my comparative perspective, in addition to my engagement with several fields, will shed important insights about the multi-layered complexities of *other-ing* in contemporary Europe. As I hope to show, a comparative analysis of Lakhous, El Hachmi, Zamora and Gangbo will demonstrate that it is only by understanding the linkages between North/South divides at both the European and global levels that racism, xenophobia,

and other forms of exclusion imposed on migrants in Southern Europe can truly be abolished.

## 1. Remaking the *Commedia all'italiana*: the Theatricality of Identities in the Novels of Amara Lakhous

The year 1990 witnessed the publication of three texts that would become the foundational narratives of Italian migrant writing: Salah Methnani's *Immigrato* (*Immigrant*, co-written with Mario Fortunato); Pap Khouma's *Io, venditore di elefanti* (*I, the Elephant Seller*, co-written with Oreste Pivetta); and Mohamed Bouchane's *Chiamatemi Alí* (*Call Me Alí*, co-edited with Carla de Girolamo and Daniele Miccione). These texts garnered attention for their presumably authentic representation of the experiences of Italy's growing immigrant community. In fact, Khouma and Pivetta's text, *Io, venditore di elefanti*, is now frequently taught in Italian grade schools to introduce students to questions of multiculturalism, race and immigration.

However, the celebration of texts such as these obscures the power dynamics inherent to the creation of this literary corpus: namely, the construction of the "migrant voice." Pivetta and Khouma's text, *Io, venditore di elefanti*, provides a demonstrative case in point. As an autobiographical story narrated in first person, the text reads as though Khouma, a Senegalese immigrant, is speaking directly to the reader. Yet, in the introduction, Pivetta reveals that the book is based on conversations he had with Khouma, which Pivetta later transcribed and organized in narrative form. Pivetta mentions his attempt to preserve these conversations' "spontaneità e immediatezza"

("spontaneity and immediacy"); yet, because the text is structured as a coherent, linear narrative, we can only wonder how "spontaneous" his rendition of their conversations is (9). Methnani and Fortunato's *Immigrato* was written in a very similar way: as Fortunato explains in the introduction to the 2006 edition, that he, like Pivetta, fashioned a narrative out of oral conversations between himself and Methnani, a writer of Tunisian origin. Elizabeth Wren-Owens convincingly argues that the "orality (and filtering)" of both *Immigrato* and *Io* illuminates a great deal about how "the migrant voice is shaped and controlled" (169, *original parenthesis*).

But Wren-Owens also notes another interesting fact about *Immigrato*: in the 2006 introduction, Fortunato explains that the narrative *Immigrato* was conceived when the newspaper, *L'espresso*, commissioned Methnani to write an article about immigration from the perspective of "un vero immigrato... senza filtri né mediazioni giornalistiche" ("a real immigrant...with no filtering or journalistic mediation) (Wren-Owens 170, Fortunato iii). However, Fortunato explains, because Methnani's Italian was "lacunoso" ("halting"), Fortunato wrote the piece but was listed as the editor, while Methnani was named the author (iv). Shortly thereafter, numerous publishers contacted Methnani, desiring to turn the article into a book, which was also co-written with Fortunato. But Methnani is not the only so-called "migrant writer" to have been directly solicited for his "authentic" perspective. As Sabrina Brancato notes, Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo was personally asked to submit a short story to the *Eks&Tra* literary prize for migrant

writers—even though he does not see himself as an immigrant at all (“Afro-European literatures” 9).

We are thus faced with two striking facts: first, Kouma and Methnani’s narratives were presented as “authentic” in spite of being co-authored by Italians; second, Methnani and Gangbo were explicitly sought out by a newspaper, a publishing house, and a literary prize committee in order to tell (and sell) their “migrant” stories. In an essay entitled “Lontano dalla lingua madre” (“Far away from my mother tongue”), Methnani himself expresses a keen awareness of the contradictions inherent in the idea of pressuring migrant authors to tell their stories, which are presumed to represent the experiences of other migrants. Although he acknowledges the positive potential of counteracting the silence imposed on the migrant community as a whole, he also describes the responsibility of speaking for others in these terms: “come Gesù Cristo, mi sembra di portare pure io una croce” (“like Jesus Christ, I feel that I, too, am carrying a cross”).

Methnani’s comparison of himself to Christ carrying the cross is deeply ironic. Such a comparison demonstrates that the burden of being sought out, designated as a representative of others, and called upon her to articulate a narrative of collective suffering can be, in itself, a source of suffering. The pressure exerted upon writers like Kouma, Methnani and Gangbo to “tell the truth” of their stories is extremely reminiscent of Foucault’s analysis of “confessions” in *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1*.

According to Foucault, the subject's desire to "extract" the essential truth of her life and experience "from the depths of [her]self" is actually a manifestation of larger structures of power that compel her to do exactly that (59). Reading Foucault's notion of the "confessional subject" in the context of U.S. multiculturalism, Rey Chow argues that multicultural discourse requires ethnic subjects to "confess" or perform their identity. For Chow, the performance of minority identity in response to a social command to do so can create the false illusion of resistance to oppression, while actually upholding the structures of inclusion and exclusion that keep oppressive systems in place. In Chow's words,

When minority individuals think that, by referring to themselves, they are liberating themselves from the powers that subordinate them, they may be actually be allowing such powers to work in the most intimate fashion—from within their hearts and souls, in a kind of voluntary surrender that is, in the end, fully complicit with the guilty verdict that has been declared on them socially long before they speak. (115)

Chow's analysis of U.S. multiculturalism is applicable to the context of immigration in Italy. For us critics, consumers, and/or publishers of migrant writing, the concept of coercive mimeticism cautions us against using a vision of "migrancy" that will *perform the work that we want it to perform*. Similarly, we must beware of inadvertently silencing migrant writers by invoking them to *say what we want them to say*.

Algerian-Italian writer Amara Lakhous has been especially critical of the ways in which Chow's notion of "coercive mimeticism" has been at work in Italian migrant writing. Best known for his 2006 novel, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio*

(*Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*)<sup>1</sup>, he is also the author of three other novels: *Le cimici e il pirata* (*The Bedbugs and the Pirate*, 1999, republished as *Un pirata piccolo piccolo* in 2011), *Divorzio all'islamica a Viale Marconi* (*Divorce Islamic Style on Viale Marconi*, 2010), and *Contesa per un maiale italianissimo a San Salvario* (2013). In numerous interviews, Lakhous has been extremely vocal about his opposition to what he perceives as a dominant trend toward the “autobiographical,” the “realist,” or—to use Foucault’s term—the “confessional” in Italian migrant writing. In this chapter, I argue that Lakhous’ works re-adapt the *commedia all’italiana* in direct contrast to Neorealism, the film movement most often associated with Italian national identity. By denouncing the Neorealism’s injunction to *tell the truth*, Lakhous challenges the reification of migrant authenticity, showing how this “authenticity” only serves to further Italy’s nationalist impulse to assert its European identity. At the same time, by embracing the theatricality of the *commedia*, he calls attention to the fundamentally *performed* nature of national, racial and European identities, thereby signaling the possibility of radically revising and reshaping these identities.

## 1.1 *Amara Lakhous on Coercive Mimeticism*

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<sup>1</sup> *Scontro di civiltà* was initially published in Arabic in 2003 under the title, “How to Be Suckled by the She-Wolf Without Getting Bitten.” It was re-written in Italian by Lakhous himself. *Le cimici e il pirata* was republished in 2011 under the title, *Un pirata piccolo piccolo*.

In his lecture at a 2001 conference on migrant writing, Lakhous stated:

Uno scrittore immigrato deve parlare di alcuni argomenti ... c'è una ricetta, come per fare una pizza. Lo scrittore immigrato è tenuto, per essere pubblicato, ad attenersi alle regole, ad affrontare temi come il disagio, la violenza, la sofferenza, il razzismo... e mi chiedo: ma anche a costo di cadere nella cronaca? Non è possibile rimanere ancorati a certi schemi!

(An immigrant writer must talk about certain topics...there is a recipe, like making a pizza. The immigrant writer, in order to be published, is required to stick to the rules, to confront themes like poverty, violence, suffering, racism... and I wonder: but even at the cost of writing 'the news'? It is not possible to remain anchored to certain schemes!)

Here, Lakhous critiques, in no uncertain terms, what he feels are the expectations of the literary market about what an immigrant writer is supposed to write. In his view, not only have expectations of migrant writers been reduced to formulaic conventions, but such conventions are reminiscent of a "pizza" — an appealing commodity that is easily produced, instantly recognizable and rapidly consumed. Similarly, Lakhous' reference to the "news" ("*la cronaca*") suggests that such conventions render migrant writing not entirely dissimilar from the negative media discourse it was created to contest.

Lakhous would again challenge the expectations of the publishing world in a 2005 interview for the online magazine *El Ghibli*, which was conducted by fellow migrant writer Ubax Cristina Ali Farah. Ali Farah, having already referred to Lakhous' idea of the underlying "recipe" of migrant writing, asked him to clarify his oft-repeated comment that he was "re-writing" his new novel in Italian rather than translating it from

Arabic, the language in which he first wrote it.<sup>2</sup> In his response, Lakhous emphasized that his “re-writing” of the text, which included minor changes to characters and certain cultural references, was also a form of resistance to the “colonization” of having someone else translate his work. He remarked: “Credo che la decolonizzazione consista in questo, nel non lasciarsi colonizzare da altri. Voglio essere io il comandante della nave. Sono io che decido quali modifiche apportare al mio testo.” (“I believe that decolonization consists of this, of not allowing yourself to be colonized by others. I want to be the captain of the ship. I am the one who decides what modifications to bring to my text.”) Later on in the interview, he added that, because “essere dipendenti da altri fa parte del progetto coloniale,” (“being dependent on others is part of the colonial project”), migrant writers who need significant editorial intervention are in need of their own “decolonization” from such interference.

Given that Lakhous made these remarks before becoming a bestseller, his comparison of editorial interference to “colonialism” highlights a marked asymmetry of power between the status of editors and publishers as gatekeepers of the Italian cultural establishment, on one hand, and his own status as a (still relatively obscure) migrant writer, on the other. This comparison implies that there is something profoundly self-serving about the kind of migrant writing some editors and publishers wanted writers

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<sup>2</sup> The novel he was referring to was *Scontro di civiltà*, which, in 2005, had been published in Arabic under a different title, but had not yet been published in Italian.

like Lakhous to produce: for some members of the Italian publishing industry, producing a certain kind of migrant writing actually helps to protect certain established cultural hierarchies, such as those that distinguish “Italian literature” from “migrant writing.” Furthermore, the idea that migrant writing might constitute a “colony” within Italian literature implies that something about migrant writing *glorifies* the Italian literary canon: just as Italy’s colonial endeavors in Africa were an attempt to enable Italy to “keep up” with the imperial efforts of its Western European neighbors, so, too, can migrant writing allow Italian literature to “keep up” with the growth of postcolonial literatures in other European languages.

Hence, Lakhous’s interpretation of migrant writing as a form of colonialism strongly undermines Armando Gnisci’s argument that migrant writing enables its Western readers “to decolonize ourselves from ourselves” (*Creolizzare l’Europa* 125). According to Lakhous, migrant writing does not necessarily *decolonize* Western literature or society, as Gnisci would have it, but might even work in tandem with already extant forms of cultural and aesthetic “colonization.” As such, for Lakhous, migrant writing is in need of its own *aesthetic decolonization* from the literary industry.

One might rightly point out, of course, that Italian migrant writing has produced a wide variety of writers and texts over the last two decades, and that the “pizza recipe” that Lakhous described in 2001 no longer characterizes the corpus as a whole (thanks, in part, to Lakhous’ own works). Yet, in a 2010 interview with Claudia Esposito, conducted

shortly after the publication of his novel, *Divorzio all'islamica*, Lakhous again reiterated these views: "I think that it is wrong to dramatize themes of immigration. Others have done it, people don't care. It is now a condition of society ... So if you tell the 'story of an immigrant', he arrived, they treated him badly, then he cried ... no one cares. This is pretty much the reaction. So it is counterproductive" (10). In this interview, he characterizes the "immigrant story" as a cliché that, like "the news" he mentioned earlier, is easy to superficially consume and dismiss.

But why does Lakhous so insistently reject the "autobiographical" dimension of migrant writing? In his 2011 interview with Daniela Brogi, Lakhous stated that: "uscire dall'identità è una grandissima opportunità... Pensando alla letteratura, all'arte, si tratta allora di ricostuire un immaginario: ricostruire... il nostro sguardo sugli altri e su di noi. È dannoso esasperare le differenze, occorre cercare i punti in comune, gli elementi di condivisione." ("Exiting from identity is a great opportunity ... Thinking of literature, of art, is about reconstructing an imaginary: reconstructing ... our gaze on others and on ourselves. It is harmful to exacerbate differences, we must search for common points, shared elements") (8). As this remark demonstrates, Lakhous views "identity" as a constraining factor that a successful migrant writer — or, perhaps, any writer — must learn to transcend. For him, the transcendence of identity is not *just* a way to destabilize the idea of a homogeneous nation, as Parati suggests, or to liberate Westerners from their delusions of superiority, as Gnisci proposes. Rather, the desire to escape identity is

also a resistance to the expectations that some writers be expected to *perform* their “migrant-ness” in particular ways. It thus seeks to undermine the ways in which a literary performance of migrancy can be co-opted to protect established cultural, aesthetic and literary hierarchies.

## 1.2 *Neorealism vs. Commedia all’italiana in Scontro di civiltà*

Lakhous’ search for aesthetic decolonization from coercive mimeticism is strongly perceptible in his second and most successful novel, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (2006). This novel, a bestseller in Italy, led Lakhous to be named the “literary revelation of the year” by the magazine *Café Babel*, and went on to win major national literary prizes such as the Premio Flaiano in 2006 (Sforza); it has also received more scholarly attention than any of his other novels. It is thus one of the most widely read and highly acclaimed examples of Italian migrant writing. This novel introduces us to a fictional Algerian immigrant, Ahmed, whose identity as an immigrant is unclear to those who share his apartment building in the multiethnic Roman neighborhood of Piazza Vittorio. In fact, many of the novel’s characters, which include a hodgepodge of both Italians and immigrants, have misinterpreted his name, “Ahmed,” to be a Romanized abbreviation of the Italian name “Amedeo,” and hence, believe him to be Italian.

Lakhous' novel, which is explicitly modeled after the film genre of the *commedia all'italiana* and Carlo Emilio Gadda's classic crime novel, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto della via Merulana* (*That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana*), initially presents us with an unsolved crime. A character known as the Gladiator (an Italian named Lorenzo Manfredini), the novel's most blatant racist, has been mysteriously found dead outside the elevator of the apartment building in Piazza Vittorio where Ahmed/Amedeo and many other characters live. The discovery of his body near the elevator is significant because the elevator is a central source of conflict between the building's ethnically diverse residents: the characters constantly bicker over who should be allowed to use it, and under what circumstances. The police, in their attempt to find the criminal, use circumstantial evidence to designate Ahmed/Amedeo as a prime suspect. Because most of the characters, both immigrant and Italian, feel a special affection for Ahmed/Amedeo, they are shocked by the police's conclusion. Yet, by the novel's end, a series of plot twists leads to the definitive discovery of Ahmed/Amedeo's innocence. Instead, the murder was perpetrated by Elisabetta Fabiani, another resident of the building, who wanted to exact revenge on the Gladiator for kidnapping her beloved dog, Valentino, and subjecting him to dog fighting, which resulted in the dog's disappearance and death.

The novel is narrated in an alternating structure: in the odd chapters, a given character presents his or her version of the facts, while in the even chapters,

Ahmed/Amedeo offers a “wail” or “howl” (“*ululato*”) in which he mixes his thoughts about the previous chapter’s narrator with his own reflections on the impossibility of truth and his overwhelming desire to forget his past. As the novel develops, we learn that the source of his melancholic obsession with forgetting stems from his need to overcome the traumatic loss of his wife, Bàgia, who was murdered by Islamic extremists in Algeria.

Although its title ironically recalls Samuel Huntington’s idea of a “clash of civilizations,” *Scontro di civiltà* illustrates that the real “clash” does not occur between different cultures, but rather, between different ways of seeing the world. This “clash” of perspectives is most potently demonstrated by Lakhous’ representation of the tension between two key moments in Italian film history. The first of these is Neorealism, an internationally influential film movement of the immediate postwar era which emphasized the gritty realities of poverty, urban strife, and social marginalization through techniques that aimed to re-create reality objectively. The second is the *commedia all’italiana*, a comic genre of the 1950s and ‘60s which critiqued Italian social and cultural customs by representing them as outlandish and outrageous. Lakhous’ novel most succinctly portrays the tension between these two movements’ strategies for articulating social critique through a debate between the protagonist, Ahmed/Amedeo (arguably an alter-ego of Lakhous), and Johan Van Marten, a Dutch exchange student who studies film history. Although Johan Van Marten believes Neorealism is Italian

cinema's greatest contribution to world cinema, Ahmed/Amedeo asserts the superiority of the *commedia all'italiana*.

Johan, who lives in the same building of Piazza Vittorio as Ahmed/Amedeo and other characters, is deeply in love with Neorealism because he views it as “la miglior risposta al cinema di Hollywood” (“the best response there’s been to Hollywood”) (118/85).<sup>3</sup> His unbridled adoration for Neorealism leads him to view all the other characters who live in his building in Piazza Vittorio as potential characters in a Neorealist-inspired film he intends to make about contemporary Rome. As a result, he relentlessly pressures each of his neighbors to participate in his film. For example, he promises the film’s lead role to Parviz, an Iranian refugee, but then incessantly harasses him with personal questions, saying: “ho bisogno di tutte le informazioni sulla tua vita per il mio film” (“I need all this information about your life for my film”) (28/24). He also refers to Benedetta Esposita, the doorwoman from Naples, as “la nuova Anna Magnani” (“the new Anna Magnani”)—that is, a reincarnation of Neorealism’s most iconic actress (44/34). This comment outrages Benedetta because Magnani was Roman, not Neapolitan (even though she, in turn, mistakes Johan for Swedish). And when Maria Cristina González, a Peruvian caretaker, insists that she must lose weight before accepting a role, Johan replies: “Io odio il cinema di Hollywood perché tradisce la realtà.

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<sup>3</sup> All English translations of Lakhous’ novel *Scontro di civiltà* are taken from Ann Goldestein’s 2008 translation. The page numbers indicated in parenthetical citations refer to the Italian edition first and the English edition second.

Non dimagrire. Il grasso ti fa più bella” (“I hate Hollywood cinema because it betrays reality. Don’t lose weight. Being fat makes you more beautiful”) (98/70).

The irony of Johan’s response to María Cristina is glaring. As his condemnation of “betraying reality” demonstrates, his preference for Neorealism over Hollywood is obviously based on Neorealism’s attempt to portray reality “objectively” and “truthfully,” which he contrasts with the escapist, patently fictional worlds that Hollywood film usually imagines. Thus, Johan’s viewpoint mirrors the most conventional interpretation of Neorealism, which, according to Neorealist screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, posits that cinema ought to show viewers “the real things, exactly as they are” (217), and that the key difference between American cinema and Neorealism is the latter’s “hunger for reality” (218). Yet, as the novel shows, Johan’s desire to represent reality unproblematically is profoundly contradicted by his impulse to coerce his neighbors into performing or embodying the plot of a “Neorealist” film. By romanticizing his neighbors’ “authenticity,” he not only distorts them, but performs a radical “othering” of them. In conjunction with Ahmed/Amedeo’s numerous reflections about the impossibility of truth in his “wailings,” Johan’s obsession with interpreting his surroundings in a Neorealist light highlights the gravely flawed nature of attempting to represent reality “faithfully” —even if such a representation is motivated by good aesthetic or political intentions.

At a certain point, Johan casually runs into Ahmed/Amedeo. Johan tells us of their encounter:

L'ho visto uscire dal portone del palazzo con sotto il braccio il film *Divorzio all'italiana*, gli ho chiesto il nome del regista e lui mi ha risposto: 'Pietro Germi. Questo film è il capolavoro del cinema italiano.' Gli ho detto che preferivo i film del Neorealismo e a quel punto mi ha guardato con un sorriso...Quel giorno abbiamo discusso a lungo sulla condizione del cinema italiano...Amedeo sosteneva che la commedia all'italiana ha rappresentato il livello più alto della creatività di questo popolo, perché ha messo in evidenza i paradossi, ha unito tragedia e commedia, ironia e critica seria" (119).

("I saw him come out of the street door of the building with the film *Divorce Italian Style* under his arm, I asked him the name of the director and he said, 'Pietro Germi. This film is the masterpiece of Italian cinema.' I told him that I preferred the neorealist films and at that point he looked at me with a smile...That day we had a conversation about the state of Italian cinema...Amedeo maintained that Italian-style comedy represents the highest level of Italian creativity because it emphasizes paradoxes, combines tragedy and comedy, humor and serious criticism.) (85)

This passage illustrates how Ahmed/Amedeo's penchant for the *commedia*, with its irony and dark humor, challenges the reductive and essentializing gaze through which Johan, with his "Neorealist" intentions, interprets his environment. By arguing for the *commedia's* preeminence over Neorealism, Amedeo suggests that any representation of "truth," and, consequently, any social critique that is derived from such a representation, are necessarily doomed to failure. In contrast, the *commedia's* strategy of articulating "serious criticism" should be seen as superior because it "reveals paradoxes" rather than brushing over them, and uses the irony of humor as an instrument of social critique.

The debate about Neorealism and the *commedia all'italiana* that we witness in *Scontro di civiltà* is strongly reminiscent of Lakhous' rejection of what he calls the "pizza recipe" formula of migrant writing. Johan van Marten's repeated attempts to force his neighbors into embodying his vision of a Neorealist film bear a striking resemblance to Lakhous' comments in interviews about the demand for migrant writing to be an autobiographical narration of suffering. Accordingly, Johan's Neorealist gaze may be read as a symbolic manifestation of Rey Chow's concept of coercive mimeticism. Just as multicultural discourse's "calling" of ethnic subjects to "perform" their identity can unintentionally reinforce oppressive structures, so, too, does Johan's insistence that his neighbors "perform" their perceived authenticity enact a radical "othering" of them, thereby nullifying the desire for social awareness that Neorealism was envisioned to fulfill. Thus, Ahmed/Amedeo's resistance to Neorealism, on one hand, and his consequent praising of the *commedia's* creativity and originality, on the other, stand in for Lakhous' "real-life" resistance to the autobiographical trend of migrant writing and his resulting search for aesthetic "decolonization."

But how, we might ask, does Lakhous' homage to the *commedia all'italiana* constitute a resistance to the "coercive" gaze of Neorealism? In other words, what specifically about the *commedia* genre makes it a better model for Lakhous' vision of migrant writing than Neorealism? Maurizio Grande helps us to answer these questions in his analysis of the genre. He contends that the power of the *commedia all'italiana* to

articulate social critique lies precisely in its ability to “[condemn] the excessive closeness between daily life and cinematic spectacle” (45). In other words, the *commedia all’italiana* captures the “movie-ness” of reality, emphasizing the ways in which the dramas produced by mainstream, sociocultural conventions may be read as spectacle or performance. Millicent Marcus makes a similar point in her study of one of the *commedia all’italiana*’s most admired classics, *Sedotta e abbandonata* (*Seduced and Abandoned*, 1964). This film narrates the seemingly absurd, yet not entirely implausible story of a young Sicilian woman whose lover refuses to marry her because she is not a virgin, even though he himself was the one who took her virginity. As Marcus puts it, “*Seduced and Abandoned* is not only good theater, it is also *about* theater—the theatrical nature of Sicilian public life in general, and the theatrical maneuvers necessitated by the honor code in particular” (*Italian Film* 239).

As Grande and Marcus demonstrate, the *commedia all’italiana* neither attempts to *essentialize* reality (like Neorealism), nor to *escape* it (like Hollywood). Rather, this genre sought to shed light on the constant deployment of “costumes,” “masks” and “performances” that governed social behavior in the cultural contexts it represented. Marcus’ comparison of this genre to “theater” is particularly compelling: as this remark demonstrates, the *commedia* emphasizes reality’s resemblance to cinema and theater by demonstrating the “staginess” of normative conventions and identities—that is, by representing those conventions and identities as *theatrical*. I argue that Lakhous borrows

the *commedia*'s representation of reality as "theatrical" in order to portray ethnic and national identities, such as "Italian," "immigrant," or "Arab", as similarly "staged" and subject to revision in his *commedia*-inspired novels.

Critical interpretations of *Scontro di civiltà* have only begun to point at its "theatricalization" of ethnic, national and cultural identities. Several scholars have justifiably gravitated toward what Grazia Negro calls this novel's "utopian dream... of creating a multiple, liquid identity." For example, in her recent article on the representation of space in the novel, Graziella Parati uses Agamben's concept of "l'essere qualunque" ("whatever being") to contend that "Lakhous's novel creates a temporary space in which the protagonist can imagine himself as that 'whatever being' who can walk, access, and exit, showing irreverence toward those limitations and legal borders that others have set" (433). The interpretation of Ahmed/Amedeo as someone who manages to transcend social and spatial conventions, even if only temporarily, also underlies Norma Bouchard's observation that this character "problematizes received markers of identity upon which claims of authenticity, legal status, citizenship and nationality are made" (113-14). Yet, I would argue that Bouchard's reference to "received markers of identity" moves a step closer to understanding identity as "theatrical": this choice of words not only describes identity as hybrid, unstable, or "liquid," but as *performed* through culturally constructed *signs* that render it recognizable.

Roberto Derobertis further develops the representation of identity and its “signs” in this novel. He writes:

What the novel puts into question is the very idea that subjectivity can be reduced to a mere identification, whether it be determined by a name, by a language, by a passport or by belonging to a territory. Names, transit, memory and translation, in their literal and metaphorical meanings, are at the center of the narration, in which the emphasis on the process of ‘identity’ construction is decidedly marked. (“Storie fuori luogo” 221)

In this passage, Derobertis discusses the “marking” of identity construction by signs such as “name,” “language,” and “passport.” Although signs such as these have been endowed with meaning by culture, they are only symbols of what they signify—in this case, the “essence” of a stable, national (or “non-national”) identity. In fact, I would suggest that one of the novel’s principal sources of humor is its exaggerated emphasis on signs and symbols of identity. For example, the conflicted relationship of Parviz, an Iranian refugee, to his Italian environment is demonstrated by his simultaneous hatred of pizza and his addiction to Chianti wine—both of which, I would argue, are clear culinary symbols of “Italian-ness.” Similarly, Benedetta Esposito, the doorwoman who aggressively defends her Neapolitan identity, constantly invokes San Gennaro (St. Januarius), who, as the patron saint of Naples, is *the* quintessential sign of *napoletanità*; yet, she nonchalantly mistakes Parviz for an Albanian, María Cristina (a Peruvian) for a Filipina, and Johan van Marten (a Dutch student) for a Swede.

I argue that the representation of identity in terms of signs is crucial to interpreting not only this novel, but its follow-up, *Divorzio all’islamica*. In both of these

novels, the (mis-) articulation of identity through signs and gestures results in the detachment of these signs from their normal signifiers and, consequently, their temporary re-signification. This detachment and reassignment of signs from the identities they signify ultimately results in a “camping-up” of ethnic and cultural identities in a manner which, as I will show, is analogous to drag shows, or other gender-bending spectacles. In other words, as we will see in the next section, these identities are deliberately *theatricalized* in order to demonstrate their *artificiality* and potential *re-signification*. As stated before, this theatricalization of reality is the principal reason Lakhous borrows so heavily from the *commedia all’italiana*: just as the Italian *commedia* critiqued social customs by showing their underlying staginess, Lakhous critiques the essentialism of national and ethnic identities by making these identities look like a theatrical performance that is subject to change and reformulation.

### **1.3    *Theatricality as Political Resistance***

A theoretical definition of theatricality will enable us to explore the relationship between signs and identity in Lakhous’ novels more deeply. Erika Fischer-Lichte offers the following interpretation of this term:

Theatricality may be defined as a particular mode of using signs or as a particular kind of semiotic process in which particular signs (human beings and objects of their environment) are employed as signs of signs - by their producers, or their recipients. Thus a shift of the dominance within the semiotic functions

determines when theatricality appears. When the semiotic function of using signs as signs of signs in a behavioural, situational or communication process is perceived and received as dominant, the behavioural, situational or communication process may be regarded as theatrical. (88)

In this passage, Fischer-Lichte argues that the essential characteristic of theatricality is when “signs...are employed as signs of signs” —in other words, when signs call attention to their own status as signs, rather than transparently pointing to the thing they signify. This transformation of the sign’s function constitutes a “shift of the dominance” in the normal relationships between signifiers and the things they represent. If we recall Derobertis’ reading of Lakhous, we may conclude that the “signs” of identity that he mentions—“name,” “language,” “passport”—are endowed with “theatricality” because the novel calls attention to the fact that they are just that: merely signs. In Lakhous’ novels, characters often invoke signs such as these to illustrate their identity, yet misread those very same signs when interpreting the identities of others. As a result, the novels highlight not only how signs function, but how they *mal*-function. The novels’ constant attention to signs disrupts the automatic way in which we normally read people as belonging to a particular “national” or “ethnic” identity, and thus, opens up the possibility for those signs of identity to be re-signified. The previously discussed film debate thus serves as a lens through which to read the novel’s representation of signs: Neorealism, with its insistence on “objective reality,” symbolizes a conventional, stable relationship between a sign and the identity it points to, while the *commedia*

*all'italiana*, through its ostentatious theatricality, teaches us to question that relationship by effecting a divorce between signs and the identities they usually signify.

Lakhous' use of theatricality to deconstruct identity parallels queer theory's vision of "theatrical resistance" as a political strategy. In "Critically Queer," Judith Butler distinguishes between the "performativity" of our everyday performance of gender, on one hand, and the potential of theatricalized performance for feminist and anti-homophobic resistance, on the other. Performativity, she notes, describes the way in which we are socially compelled to embody culturally determined behaviors; thus, the performativity of gender identity is something that "none of us choose, but which each of us is forced to negotiate" (161). The fact that we are *compelled* to perform gender means that it is impossible for anyone to exist completely outside of it: the best we can do is "negotiate" its performative elements, that is, the "signs" through which gender is constituted.

However, Butler also explores the ways in which "theatrical" actions can resist performativity's coerciveness. For example, she argues that the word "queer" is a form of "theatrical" resistance because it "*mines and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*" (157-8, *original emphasis*). As a homophobic insult that was re-signified into an empowering category, the word "queer" demonstrates how "the homophobic 'law' ... can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies" (158). Butler also locates the possibility of resistance to performativity in the "theatrical rage"

of early 1990s queer activism. For Butler, the “rage” that is expressed by “traditions of cross-dressing, drag balls, street walking, butch-femme spectacles...die-ins by ACT UP, kiss-ins by Queer Nation,” among other manifestations, is “mobilized by the injuries of homophobia,” and thus, stands up to “the epistemic resistance to AIDS and to the graphics of suffering” (158). Thus, just as the word “queer” calls attention to, and re-signifies, the homophobic discourse that produced it, so drag and other “theatricalized” performances of alternative gender and sexual identities divorce the “signs” of normative identities (clothes, makeup, hair, gestures) from the identities themselves (“man,” “woman,” “straight,” etc.). As Butler demonstrates, the divorce between signifier and signified challenges sexism and homophobia by calling attention to the disciplinary mechanisms of gender performativity and by undermining the normative meanings of gender-related signs.

The utility of “theatricality” for queer and feminist activism illustrates this concept’s political relevance to Amara Lakhous. As we noted before, his literary goals not only include challenging anti-immigrant prejudice, but also resisting the coercive mimeticism associated with being a “migrant writer.” Just as theatricality offers queer and feminist activists a way to call attention to disciplinary mechanisms of oppression based on gender and sexual identity, so it also allows Lakhous to call attention to the “chains” he associates with the performance of national and ethnic identity—both within the context of everyday life, as well as within the context of migrant writing. The

theatricalization of identity is an especially potent tool of resistance in light of gender and queer theory's notion that some identities, such as gender, cannot be fully erased, but only "negotiated." In other words, just as Butler signals the impossibility of fully uprooting gender, Lakhous' fictional worlds are not inhabited by characters who exist completely outside the realm of ethnic and national identity categories. Rather, he deflates the coercive power of these identities by highlighting the artificiality and malleability of their constitutive signs, and consequently, by imagining the possibility of strategically shifting *between* performances of identity.

#### **1.4 *Unravelling Words and Names in Scontro di civiltà***

In light of Butler's ideas about the political utility of theatricality, let us now turn to specific examples of how the novel uses theatricality to critique the fixity of national and ethnic identity categories. As we have seen, Lakhous' explicit privileging of the *commedia all'italiana* over Neorealism as a model for his own literary work serves a key purpose: it demonstrates his interest in theatricalizing ethnic and national identities rather than trying to portray them according to external paradigms of "realism." Similarly, it also illustrates his resistance not only to anti-immigrant sentiment, but also to the "coercive mimeticism" he perceives in common assumptions about what migrant writers should write. In this section, I will focus my analysis on two cases in which the

novel explores linguistic signifiers and their relationship to identity. In the following section, I will contrast these cases with the novel's most prominent non-linguistic signifier: namely, Ahmed/Amedeo's repeated "wailing."

One of the most hilarious examples of how linguistic signs malfunction in their referencing of identities occurs between Parviz, the Iranian refugee, and Benedetta, the Neapolitan doorwoman. In his narration, Parviz tells us:

Guaglio' è la parola preferita di Benedetta. Come sapete, guaglio' vuol dire cazzo in napoletano... Ogni volta che mi vede andare verso l'ascensore, si mette a urlare: 'Guaglio!' Guaglio!' Guaglio!' In Iran siamo abituati a rispettare i vecchi ed evitare le parolacce. Per questo, invece di rispondere all'offesa con un'altra offesa come fanno in tanti, mi limito a una breve risposta: 'Merci!' ...A proposito, sapete che merci è una parola francese che significa grazie? Me l'ha detto Amedeo, che conosce il francese molto bene. (17)

(*Guaglio'* is Benedetta's favorite word. As you know, *guaglio'* means 'fuck' in Neapolitan...Every time she sees me head for the elevator she starts shouting, '*Guaglio!' Guaglio!' Guaglio!'* In Iran, it's customary to show respect for old people and avoid bad words. That's why, instead of answering the insult with another insult, I confine myself to a brief response: '*Merci!*' ...By the way, you know that *merci* is a French word that means 'thank you'? Amedeo told me, he knows French well.) (17)

The misunderstanding that takes place here revolves around the word "guaglio'," which, in Neapolitan dialect, is a way of saying, "Hey, you!" But Parviz mistakes the term for an insult, and thus feels offended even though Benedetta has said nothing explicitly offensive to him. His response, "merci," is an attempt to compensate for his lack of Italian language skills with a word that is not Italian, but is, in his view, *close*

*enough*. He knows Benedetta is Italian, but he hopes that she will understand his use of French to diffuse her perceived rudeness politely.

However, as her version of the story indicates, Benedetta clearly does not understand:

Io dico che chillo albanese è il vero assassino. Questo disgraziato fa lo scostumato quando lo chiamo Guaglio'! Non so come si chiama, e a Napoli siamo abituati a dire così, però lui mi risponde con male parole nella sua lingua. Non mi ricordo esattamente quella parola che dice sempre, forse *mersa* o *mersis*! Insomma l'importante è che questa parola vuole dire cazzo in albanese e si usa per insultare la gente. (48)

(I say the Albanian is the real murderer. That good-for-nothing is rude when I call him *guaglio*! I don't know his name, and in Naples that's what we say, but he answers with a nasty word in his language. I don't remember exactly that word he always says, maybe *mersa* or *mersis*! Anyway the point is, this word means 'shit' in Albanian and is used as an insult.) (36)

Like Parviz, Benedetta mistakenly believes that what she doesn't understand is an insult.

Although he hopes to communicate with her by using a language that is *close enough* to hers, she reads his utterance as *not even close* to anything she recognizes. Since she wrongly assumes Parviz to be Albanian, she assumes that his incomprehensible utterance is an Albanian word. And because her view of Albanians is decidedly negative, the only conclusion that she can draw is that, of course, he is insulting her.

Benedetta's prejudice against Albanians is not pure fiction. Rather, it mirrors a strong wave of anti-Albanian sentiment that gripped Italy during the 1990s. As Russell King and Nicola Mai observe, large waves of Albanian migration to Italy following the fall of that country's communist dictatorship in 1991 caused the Italian news media to be

hyper-saturated with images of Albanian migrants. During this period, they write, “pictures of the impossibly crowded ships containing the Albanian refugees desperate to escape a country collapsing into political and economic chaos became part of the global iconography of migration” (1). Although Albanian migrants were initially seen as “‘deserving’ political refugees,” they would soon be heavily scapegoated for a host of social problems in Italy (101). This shift in the dominant representation transformed Albanians into “a strategically exploited ‘constitutive other’ within the renegotiation of a viable national identity” (101). In other words, they became viewed as a kind of “opposite” against which Italians sought to define themselves.

This context is important to understand the social commentary that underlies the humorous linguistic snafu between Parviz and Benedetta. Not only does the misunderstanding between them effectively divorce the utterances in question from their intended semantic meanings, it also problematizes the relationship between linguistic signs and ethnic identities. For Benedetta, the use of the word “guaglio” outside of a Neapolitan-speaking context (she does, after all, live in Rome) is part and parcel of her militant desire to perform her *napoletanità*. This performance is insistent and uncompromising: as she reveals elsewhere in her narration, she loves the actor Totò and his films because Totò was born in Naples; she likes when people refer to her by the nickname “la Napoletana”; and she names her son “Gennaro” after the patron saint of Naples, whose intercession she constantly invokes. Her aggressive performance of

identity through a repeated enactment of “signs” of Neapolitan culture is theatrical in and of itself. But it is theatricalized even further by Parviz’ mistake: by misinterpreting the word “guaglio,” Parviz unwittingly calls attention to the fundamental artificiality and arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier (“guagliò”) and the identity it signifies (“being from Naples”).

Similarly, Benedetta’s misunderstanding of Parviz’ “merci” emphasizes the distorting nature of her understanding of identity. Because of the heavy anti-Albanian prejudice she has absorbed from the Italian media, Benedetta has come to identify Albanians as radically “other”, as though being Albanian were the polar opposite of being Italian. As a result, hearing Parviz utter a linguistic sign that registers in her mind as “other” only reinforces her perception of him as an “other.” Although Parviz uses the term “merci” apart from any connotations of ethnic or national identity, Benedetta cannot help but attach connotations of ethnic identity to it: she stubbornly re-signifies the sign “merci” to indicate an identity (“radical other”) that Parviz had no intention of communicating.

Our previous discussion of Neorealism and the *commedia all’italiana* will clarify this episode’s relationship to the novel’s overall goals. We will recall that Johan’s “Neorealist” gaze performs a kind of radical “othering” of his neighbors by calling on them to perform their “authenticity.” Benedetta’s insistence on attaching ethnic and national identities to linguistic signifiers such as “guaglio” or “merci” is a kind of

inverted manifestation of this gaze: while Johan reifies the “authenticity” or realness of others, Benedetta is obsessed with the cultural authenticity of her own *napoletanità*. Yet, Benedetta’s performance of “authenticity” is just as staged as the “authenticity” that Johan attempts to coerce from his neighbors: the novel presents both of these gazes as a fundamentally untenable vision of the world. Just as the *commedia all’italiana* resists such simple notions of “realness” by emphasizing the theatricality of daily life, Lakhous also calls attention to the constitutive signs that underlie the performance of identities that Benedetta essentializes. On one hand, the status of “guaglio” as a signifier of *napoletanità* is frustrated by Parviz’ misinterpretation; on the other, Benedetta’s hard-headed reading of “merci” as a sign of radical alterity (here represented by the label “Albanian”) is represented as both amusing and absurd.

A similar clash between a linguistic signifier and its meaning occurs in the case of certain characters’ names. In his narration, Iqbal Amir Allah, a Bangladeshi who also lives in the same building as the others, laments the fact that he is caught between competing visions of what an “authentic” Muslim should be. On one hand, Sandro Dandini, the Italian owner of the neighborhood bar, ignorantly believes Iqbal to be a false Muslim because Iqbal does not practice polygamy. On the other, Abdallah Ben Kadour, the Arab fish vendor also known as Abdu, criticizes Iqbal because his last name, “Amir Allah,” means “Prince of God” in Arabic, which, according to Abdu, makes Iqbal a “miscredente” (“heretic”) because he fancies himself “superiore a Dio” (“superior to

God”) (64/48). As we can see, Abdu’s application of strict doctrinal conservatism to someone’s name reveals his intention to perform Islamic “authenticity.” As a fundamentalist Muslim, his search for “authenticity” is reminiscent of Benedetto Esposito’s militant performance of *napoletanità*, as well as of Johan Van Marten’s attempt to coerce his neighbors into performing the “authenticity” of Neorealism. Hence, Abdu embodies the widespread penchant for representing cultural authenticity as fixed and stable, which, as we have seen, the novel works adamantly to dismantle.

Ironically, Abdu’s insistence on strictly interpreting names according to their linguistic meanings (“Amir Allah” = “Prince of God”) calls attention to an unavoidable conflict in the way names function as signifiers. Given that names not only refer to individuals, but often are derived from words with semantic meaning, Abdu forces us to ask ourselves: which of these “meanings” takes precedence in a name-sign—the semantic meaning of the word, or the identity of the individual? And what relationship do names have in the proper performance of collective identities (such as those of ethnicity, nation or religion)? Although Abdu intends to present the meaning of names as anchored in semantics, he inadvertently reveals their meaning to be much more slippery.

Iqbal’s understanding of names is similarly naïve. Outraged at Abdu’s accusation of unfaithfulness to Islam, Iqbal maintains that his name represents nothing other than his individual identity. At first, this position might seem to mirror the novel’s

overall theme of resistance to coercive collective identities. Yet, Iqbal's belief that a name unproblematically signifies an individual identity is turned on its head when he realizes that his long awaited *permesso di soggiorno* (residence permit) has reversed his first and last names. Although the mistake is ultimately corrected with Ahmed/Amedeo's help, his anxiety that the misrepresentation of his name on his *permesso di soggiorno* might have serious consequences—such as invalidating his marriage, or resulting in his imprisonment on false terrorism charges—uncovers the novel's complex critique of how names are constructed and interpreted as signs of individual "uniqueness."

On a first reading, this episode clearly calls attention to the underlying absurdity of the power that has been endowed to the *permesso di soggiorno*. The erroneous reversal of Iqbal's first and last names accentuates the fact that this document is nothing more than a piece of paper and that its production is vulnerable to human error. In spite of its fallibility, the *permesso* is nonetheless invested with the ability to classify a human being as "legal" or "illegal," "married" or "unmarried," or even "good" or "bad." But further reflection indicates that the novel's commentary extends far deeper than exclusively criticizing the power of the *permesso*. In light of the tug-of-war between Abdu and Iqbal over what names "really" mean, this novel presents names as fundamentally polyvalent signifiers: rather than having a fixed meaning, they are caught between multiple, competing interpretations. Although both Iqbal and Abdu doggedly defend the fixity of what they believe a name means, their irresolvable disagreement illustrates that such

fixity of language and identity does not, and cannot exist. The reversal of Iqbal's first and last names on his *permesso di soggiorno* only reinforces this viewpoint. Although Iqbal believes that his life would be turned upside down if his name were reversed, the whole situation only emphasizes the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifiers that comprise his name – "Iqbal," "Amir," and "Allah" – and the complex entanglement of identities, memories and performance that constitute *who he is* as an individual.

Thus, the narrations of Iqbal and Abdu problematize all the conventional readings of names. Although names are often taken as a sign of a collective identity (ethnicity, nationality, religion), that reading can collide with the individual identity a name is supposed to signify simultaneously. And yet, the situation of Iqbal's *permesso di soggiorno* demonstrates that even the relationship between a name and a body is fundamentally arbitrary and malleable. Although Iqbal's need to maintain his sense of security in his individual identity is ultimately fulfilled when Ahmed/Amedeo intervenes, the novel suggests that this sense of security is little more than a comforting illusion. It is especially paradoxical that Ahmed/Amedeo, of all people, is the one who resolves the problem: as a person caught between two names and identities, his character hardly suggests that a single, properly ordered name can keep one's life in check.

The extreme theatricalization of not only collective identities, but also of *individual* identities that we witness in the narrations of Iqbal and Abdu is very thought-provoking. But equally compelling is the novel's suggestion that we need a sense of identity to "comfort" or reassure ourselves that our lives will not spin out of our control. And this, perhaps, leads us to the true utility of the concept of theatricality. Although Lakhous is clearly searching for ways to "uscire dall'identità" ("exit from identity"), he also seems to recognize, as Butler does with gender, that it is impossible to completely shed identity categories. Theatricalizing identity allows him not only to highlight the artificiality of identity, but to find a "way out" of its clutches: as our analysis of the character Ahmed/Amedeo will show, the "way out" is not to *lose* one's identity altogether, but to *fluctuate theatrically* from one identity to another.

### **1.5 *Theatricalizing Roman Identity: Ahmed/Amedeo's Re-Reading of the She-Wolf***

The novel's central character, Ahmed, is an Algerian who can pass for Italian. The murder investigation astounds many characters by revealing that he is, in fact, an immigrant: after all, as several characters observe, he performs the signs of "Italianness" better than "real" Italians. Benedetta, for example, remarks that "Amedeo parla l'italiano meglio di mio figlio Gennaro" ("Amedeo speaks Italian better than my son Gennaro") (44/34), while Sandro Dandini, a born-and-bred Roman, states that Amedeo "conosceva

questa città meglio di me" ("knows this city better than I do") (133/94). His performance of "Italian-ness" is all the more convincing because no one knows about his life prior to arriving in Rome except for one person: Abdu, who comes from the same neighborhood in Algiers as Ahmed. By revealing the story of how Ahmed's wife was tragically murdered, Abdu's narration, which is one of the novel's final chapters, unveils a central mystery surrounding Amedeo's *ululati* ("howlings"). Namely, it allows us to connect Ahmed's obsession with forgetting to his need to overcome the traumatic experience of his wife's death and to rebuild a new life for himself in Rome.

Even so, Ahmed's "howling," which Claudia Esposito refers to as a "travelling signifier," clearly contrasts with the other signs of identity we have examined so far, such as words and names (3). The difference, of course, lies in the fact that the "howl" is a non-linguistic vocal utterance: as such, it self-consciously embraces the polyvalence of its own meanings rather than privileging any single "correct" interpretation. In her reading of *Scontro di civiltà*, Grazia Negro connects the "howl" to the novel's original title in Arabic, which in English may be translated as: "How To Be Suckled by the She-Wolf Without Getting Bitten." This title makes clear reference to one of Rome's most widely recounted founding myths, according to which the orphan Romulus, Rome's future founder, and his infant brother Remus were suckled as infants by a she-wolf. Although the Italian title of the novel is distinct from its Arabic counterpart, the question embedded in the novel's Arabic title nonetheless appears several times in the Italian text.

For Negro, Ahmed/Amedeo's "howlings" work in conjunction with the text's references to the "she-wolf" and her milk to articulate a re-reading of this iconically Roman myth.

Cristina Mazzoni's study of Rome's she-wolf as a visual and figurative icon will provide essential context for understanding Lakhous' re-reading of this myth. Although the most famous visual incarnation of this myth is the *Capitoline She-Wolf*, a statue dating from the fifth or fourth century BCE now held in Rome's Capitoline Museums, the beast's image is ubiquitous throughout Rome: it can be found on public monuments and museums, on Fascist art and architecture, and even on banal public objects such as "trashcans and utility hole covers" that belong to the Roman municipality of today (226). Although Mazzoni argues that "as a sign, the 'she-wolf'...has no special allegiance to a single, unbroken meaning," her analysis of the symbol's numerous manifestations throughout different historical periods illustrates that the image has often been used to imagine the continuity of Roman identity over time (7).

As Mazzoni demonstrates, one of the most striking re-appropriations of "she-wolf" imagery occurred during Fascism. Mussolini employed the image of the she-wolf, along with many other examples of Ancient Roman iconography, to connect the supposed glory of his own regime to that of Ancient Rome. For Mazzoni, his ultimate goal in doing so was "to highlight the profound Romanness of the Italian people, their *romanità*" (159). Recalling Ben Ghat's argument that Fascist Italy attempted to restore the lost glory of Ancient Rome *and* usher in a new era of European dominance through

its colonial endeavors in Africa, we might add that the Fascist discourse of “romanità” is also bound up with a performance of European-ness: given Italy’s marginal political and economic position in Europe for decades after Unification, the Fascist embrace of “romanità” was an attempt to surpass this marginalization and outperform other European powers at European-ness.

Yet, although Fascism may have tried to “tame” the she-wolf by controlling her meaning to indicate an essentialized concept of “Roman” (or European) identity, its symbolism was nonetheless open to interpretation, being “two-sided, at the very least” (71). Mazzoni writes: “On the one hand, the image of the *Lupa* presented the she-wolf as ferocious defender of her territory...It is the Roman people as a whole, not just a pair of infants, whom she is intent on protecting. On the other hand, the *Capitoline She-Wolf* is a loving animal mother who transgresses species boundaries to lick and feed two abandoned human twins” (71). In the Arabic title of *Scontro di civiltà*, Lakhous capitalizes on precisely this duality of interpretations: he presents the she-wolf as the mother who “suckles” her human children, but also as a fierce defender of her territory who may “bite” them.

But why, exactly, are Amedeo’s chapters called “*ululati*” (“howling”), and what relation does this have to the iconography of the founding myth of Rome? I argue that the “howling,” in conjunction with the novel’s other references to the story of Romulus, Remus and the she-wolf, serves to theatricalize not only “Roman” identity, but also the

use of “Roman” identity to perform European-ness. To accomplish this, Lakhous accentuates the she-wolf’s status as a multi-layered sign: he reads the wolf and the orphans as a floating allegory of the numerous “roles” between which Ahmed/Amedeo continually shifts in his fictional world.

The first role is that of mediator, analogous to that of mother: Ahmed/Amedeo embodies the role of the she-wolf, and consequently, of the city of Rome, as “mother” that provides “nourishment” to “orphans.” In this version of the allegory, the “orphans” represent immigrants that have been uprooted from their native cultures, and the “milk” represents the things they seek: a sense of community; belonging; citizenship; home. Amedeo’s role as “mother” and “mediator” to other immigrants is played out repeatedly throughout the novel. When Parviz sews his mouth shut in defiance of the government’s rejection of his application for refugee status, Amedeo embraces him “come fa una mamma con il figlio che trema dal freddo” (“the way a mother embraces her child who’s trembling with cold”) (26/23). Consequently, Amedeo’s intervention results in Parviz being successfully granted asylum. Similarly, María Cristina purposefully chooses the stairwell of the apartment building to cry about her frustrating life situation “perché Amedeo non usa l’ascensore. È l’unico che mi chiede come sto, io gli racconto i miei problemi e piango tra le sue braccia” (“because Amedeo doesn’t use the elevator. He’s the only one who asks me how I am, I tell him my troubles and cry on

his shoulder") (90/65). And, as we have seen, Iqbal turns to Ahmed/Amedeo to resolve the problem of his erroneous *permesso di soggiorno*.

Thus, Ahmed/Amedeo combines his performance of a maternal role with a performance of "Italianness": he provides migrants who feel disoriented, confused, and lost with the "nourishment" of human companionship and understanding that they can't seem to find anywhere else. It is significant that Ahmed, an immigrant, performs this "nurturing," "maternal" role toward other immigrants better than any Italian character in the novel. By outperforming Italians at their own national identity, Ahmed/Amedeo not only highlights the artificiality of nationalism, but also dislodges the historically imposed linkage between Italian nationalism and a performance of Europeanness.

However, the allegory of the she-wolf nursing human infants lends itself to other interpretations. After all, Ahmed/Amedeo is an immigrant himself, and therefore also plays the role of "orphan" in search his own sense of belonging and home. His "howlings" make this apparent. At one point, he uses a "howl" to reflect about whether or not "integration" of immigrants into Italian society is even possible, given the fact that Italians themselves lack a cohesive sense of national identity (116/83). Later, when a taxi driver compliments his knowledge of Roman streets by telling him, "sei stato allattato dalla lupa!" ("You were suckled by the wolf!"), Amedeo wonders if he is a "bastardo" like Romulus and Remus, or if he is a "figlio adottivo" ("adopted son") of the

city of Rome (142/101). These musings illustrate Amedeo's uncertainty over his own "integration": has he been fully "adopted" by his beloved city, *Mamma Roma*? Similarly, he also compares himself to a "neonato" ("newborn") in need of milk, writing that "l'italiano è il mio latte quotidiano" ("Italian is my daily milk") (155/109). Amedeo's vision of the Italian language itself as a form of nourishment mirrors comments that Lakhous has made in interviews, such as when he told Claudia Esposito he was "still a minor when it comes to Italian literature" (5). The idea of Italian language and culture as a source of "nourishment," even in spite of that culture's abundant human shortcomings, illustrates Lakhous' underlying hope in the possibility for immigrants, including himself, to achieve a sense of belonging and community in their "adopted" land. Furthermore, recalling Mazzoni's observation that the she-wolf "crosses a species boundary," his comparison of the Italian language to nourishment *for immigrants* also suggests an important border-crossing: namely, the Europe/Africa divide. In doing so, this comparison illustrates his hope that the corpus known as Italian literature might be divorced from its desire to represent Eurocentric cultural superiority, which is a significant contributor to racism and xenophobia in Italy.

And yet, as his "howling" indicates, Ahmed/Amedeo is not *only* an *im*-migrant, but also an *e*-migrant: in spite of the mystery surrounding his life before migrating to Italy, his life-story as an Algerian bubbles to the surface through his "howling," even though he often finds the memories of that life to be traumatic and painful. By

articulating repressed memories—specifically, a traumatic experience that occurred prior to his migration—Ahmed’s “howling” constitutes his performance of his role as “emigrant.” “Howling” is the only way that Amedeo allows himself to feel and express the pain not only of having lost his wife, but of having lost his native land and culture. But why might we consider “immigrant” and “emigrant” as distinct roles? As Franco-Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad argues in *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, European discourse on migration too often “mutilates the migratory phenomenon by ignoring part of it,” namely, the “part” of migration that happens before migrants arrive in Europe (178). In other words, the fullness of migrants’ lives is ignored when “immigrants” are seen only as foreigners in someone else’s native land; the complexity of their life-experience is truncated by a discourse that tends to frame them only as a “problem” for their host societies.

Thus, Lakhous’ re-reading of the founding myth of Rome divorces the image of the she-wolf from the symbolism usually associated with her: Rome’s continual, unchanging identity from antiquity to the present; and, in particular, the instrumentalization of the memory of Ancient Rome identity to assert European dominance. Ahmed/Amedeo reads the she-wolf theatrically in three different ways: as a projection of his maternal role toward other migrants; as a symbol of the “mothering” he seeks from Rome as an immigrant himself; and as a traumatized subject who “howls” over losing his wife and native land. Recalling Lakhous’ resistance to being confined by

identity categories, as well as the novel's insistent rejection of representing the "authenticity" of reality, we can also observe that Ahmed/Amedeo does not allow himself to be constrained to any one of these roles (or even to either name, "Ahmed" or "Amedeo"). Instead, he escapes essentialization as "immigrant," "emigrant," or "native mediator" by continually switching between these theatricalized roles.

Ahmed/Amedeo's unraveling of the she-wolf's symbolism parallels the novel's reflections about the clash between Neorealism and the *commedia*. In this novel, Neorealism functions as a "sign" of an essentializing gaze: a gaze that seeks to read language, identity, and "authenticity" as fixed and stable. But, if the she-wolf can be detached from her own essentialized meaning and re-signified with other roles, what happens to Neorealism when we theatricalize its search for unmediated "reality"? For Lakhous, the result of such an experiment would be the *commedia all'italiana*—which, as the novel more than adequately demonstrates, is hardly as uniquely "Italian" as its name might suggest.

## **1.6 Divorzio all'islamica and the Feminization of the Commedia all'italiana**

Lakhous' reconfiguration of the *commedia all'italiana* is not only limited to *Scontro di civiltà*. Rather, his 2010 novel *Divorzio all'islamica* is also heavily inspired by this historic film genre. Set in 2005, this novel is narrated in alternating chapters by two

protagonists, Christian/Issa and Safia/Sofia. Christian is a Sicilian man who, having spent his life learning and studying Arabic, has learned to speak it with native-like proficiency. One day, an undercover agent known as “Giuda” recruits Christian to participate in an investigation of a terrorism plot in Rome. Supposedly, the plot is based out of a call center named “Little Cairo,” which is located on Rome’s Viale Marconi and is predominantly frequented by Arab migrants. Christian’s job is to use his “Mediterranean” appearance and perfect Arabic to pretend to be a Tunisian immigrant, “infiltrate” the migrant community, and obtain information about the conspiracy to stop it before it happens. He soon finds himself living a double life: known as “Issa” to his new community, he finds a job in a pizzeria with a supervisor named Said, an Egyptian migrant (known to Italians as “Felice”), and moves into a small apartment shared with numerous other Muslim immigrants.

Issa/Christian will eventually intersect paths with his boss Felice’s wife, Safia, also an Egyptian migrant, but who is known to Italians as “Sofia.” Safia/Sofia is growing progressively more frustrated with her marriage to Felice because she feels suffocated by the traditional domestic role she is expected to fulfill. An avid consumer of cinema, especially Italian cinema, she dreams of becoming a hairdresser while still living in Egypt. Unbeknownst to her husband, she begins to develop a neighborhood clientele in Cairo; when she joins her husband in Rome, she continues to work clandestinely as a hairdresser. She comes to know Issa/Christian one day at an outdoor food market, when

Issa defends her against a racist Italian attacker. The two begin to feel a strong romantic attraction to each other. Meanwhile, as her marital problems escalate, her short-tempered husband repudiates her three times—which, in this context, amounts to divorce. Each time he repudiates her, he repents and takes her back, which, according to Islamic tradition, is enough to restore the marriage.

However, the third divorce is particularly serious because, as tradition dictates, the third time is definitive and cannot be revoked by the couple's will alone. The severity of this third divorce is accentuated by the fact that Felice beats Safia while repudiating her. Although he begs forgiveness, Safia/Sofia decides that she would rather remain divorced than re-marry him. In spite of Felice's desire to re-establish their marriage, the novel presents Islamic tradition as stipulating that there is only one way to undo the finality of the third divorce: the repudiated woman must marry another Muslim, consummate the marriage, then divorce him. Only then will she be free to re-marry her first husband again. Felice chooses Issa/Christian to be the Muslim that Safia marries and divorces. Safia takes advantage of this arrangement to carry out her own plot: her intention is to marry Issa and not divorce him, thus freeing herself from her unhappy marriage to Felice and remaining with the person she truly loves.

Before this can happen, however, a series of plot twists leads Giuda, Christian's boss, to ultimately inform him that the entire terrorist plot was a fictitious story that he and his team of secret agents concocted. The idea was to test Christian to see if he

possessed the necessary skills and personality to eventually work with them on similar, “real-life” projects. Giuda tells Christian that he passed all the tests except the “woman” test—he should never fall in love with a woman while on a “mission.” The love story which had developed between Issa/Christian and Sofia/Safia is left unresolved. The novel also ends without telling us whether Christian accepts Giuda’s offer to join his team in fighting the “War on Terror.”

As we can see, *Divorzio all’islamica* bears a number of similarities to its predecessor, *Scontro di civiltà*. Like *Scontro*, *Divorzio* features a protagonist who is capable of ethnic “passing”: just as Ahmed/Amedeo is an Algerian who allows himself to be read as Italian, so, too, does Issa/Christian successfully perform the role of a Tunisian immigrant, even though he is really Italian. It is also striking that the protagonists of both novels (along with numerous other characters) have dual names. This, it would seem, reiterates the commentary Lakhous makes in *Scontro di civiltà*, in which identity, whether individual, national or ethnic, is seen as shifting, constructed and theatrical. *Divorzio* also seems to follow *Scontro*’s lead by paying conspicuous homage to the *commedia all’italiana*. The most obvious evidence of this can be found in the numerous structural similarities that *Divorzio all’islamica* shares with its namesake, Pietro Germi’s classic film *Divorzio all’italiana* (*Divorce, Italian Style*). The film narrates the story of a Sicilian man who has grown unhappy with his current wife and wants to marry a younger woman. However, he is unable to escape his current marriage due to the legal

and religious prohibition of divorce. He thus hatches a plot to kill his wife, frame the murder as a “crime of honor,” serve a minimal jail sentence, and be free to marry the younger woman. Hence, both novel and film feature protagonists who circumvent the seemingly intractable, traditional laws and customs surrounding marriage and divorce in order to obtain the end result they desire.

However, I would argue that an essential difference distinguishes *Divorzio all'islamica* from both the film *Divorzio all'italiana* and the novel *Scontro di civiltà*. In *Divorzio all'islamica*, it is not only the *man* who manipulates the laws to his advantage, but also the *woman*. This is an indication of what I interpret to be one of *Divorzio all'islamica*'s most fundamental objectives: to address the patriarchal logic embedded in Muslim women's social roles and the silence regarding their sexuality both in traditional Arab culture, as well as in Italian discourses about immigration. Although certain elements of *Scontro di civiltà* might justifiably be interpreted to represent a comparably “feminist” perspective, I argue that *Divorzio all'islamica*'s insistent reflection on social norms concerning gender and sexuality from the perspective of a female protagonist prioritizes its feminist critique in a more marked way.

Lakhous' re-imagining of the *commedia all'italiana* to include a female perspective thus attempts to fill in the silence of women that historically characterized the genre. Maggie Günsberg argues that the *commedia all'italiana*, which relied heavily on male actors to create an “Everyman” effect (such as Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Alberto

Sordi, and Marcello Mastroianni), consistently reinforced “the exclusion of the feminine point of view” (62). Referring specifically to *Divorzio all’italiana*, Günsberg writes that Marcello Mastroianni’s “ever-present, fantasizing voice-over” privileges his perspective while silencing that of his soon-to-be-murdered wife (63). Although the second wife’s youth and overt sexuality demonstrate the “easier consumption and commodification of the female body” in the context of Italy’s economic miracle, the film’s final image, which shows the new wife flirting with another man, highlights the “attendant problems of making female sexuality harder to police” (88). The film thus underscores both new possibilities and anxieties regarding women’s roles in an increasingly commercialized world. The film’s open ending, which suggests the possibility of patriarchal culture being undermined without explicitly showing that happening, is mirrored by the radically open ending of *Divorzio all’italiana*. The fact that the love story between Safia and Issa is left unresolved not only avoids a cliché, Hollywood-style “happy ending”; it also avoids suggesting that the deeply entrenched patriarchy of European and North African societies is easy to uproot.

In sum, Lakhous’ re-reading of the *commedia* reframes the anxiety about women’s changing social roles during Italy’s economic miracle to examine them in the context of Arab migration to Italy. One of the novel’s central questions is: how can Sofia/Safia navigate between competing visions of gender, religious, and cultural identity? Returning to our previous discussion of theatricality, which emphasized how signs refer

to their own status as signs, I argue that Lakhous' feminization of the *commedia* serves to theatricalize the role of *woman*, and specifically, of the Arab-Muslim-migrant-woman, albeit in a different way than in *Scontro di civiltà*. In *Scontro di civiltà*, the *commedia* serves primarily as an oppositional force to resist the essentializing gaze associated with Neorealism: if Neorealism attempted to capture the "authenticity" of reality, the *commedia* accentuated its theatricality. In *Divorzio all'islamica*, the *commedia* acquires a new role: it functions as a sign of the process of re-signification itself. Lakhous "divorces" this genre from its traditional viewpoint of the Italian "everyman," and "re-signifies" it such that it may frame Safia/Sofia's negotiation with gender, religious, ethnic and national identity categories in her adopted land. In this sense, we might say that the *commedia's* role in *Divorzio* is analogous to the role of the she-wolf in *Scontro*: just as Lakhous' reading of the she-wolf emphasizes the multiplicity of Ahmed/Amedeo's theatricalized roles, so does his feminist re-reading of the *commedia* in *Divorzio all'italiana* permit Safia/Sofia to imagine and interpret a variety of roles beyond the web of identity-based roles in which she finds herself trapped. As I will show, the re-signification of the *commedia*, and the novel's attendant representation of reality as highly "cinematized," are essential to understanding Safia/Sofia's quest for personal and social freedom.

### **1.7 The "Cinematized" Everyday of *Divorzio all'islamica***

To understand how Lakhous' "feminization" of the *commedia* theatricalizes the identity categories that ensnare Sofia/Safia, we must first address the novel's dense thicket of cinematic references—which, I must note, are not at all limited to the genre of the Italian *commedia*. Movies are omnipresent in *Divorzio all'islamica*. In addition to the novel's title and basic plot structure, which are significantly inspired by the *commedia all'italiana*, the medium of cinema (along with its constitutive elements, such as acting, movie stars, directors, and genre conventions) is integrally interwoven into the fabric of the narrative. This is evident from the novel's very beginning, when we are first introduced to Christian disguised as Issa. Unadjusted to his new name, date of birth, nationality, identity card, and moustache, Issa/Christian states that he needs "un po' di tempo per entrare nel personaggio" ("a bit of time to get into the character") (11). Furthermore, he states that his physical appearance prevents him from imagining himself as James Bond or Donnie Brasco, the famous fictional protagonists of suspense and crime films—which, ironically, suggests he already *is* imagining himself to be like them (12). Similarly, upon meeting Akram, the owner of "Little Cairo," he notes that "Con le basette, e con cappello, occhiali, scarpe e pantaloni neri, assomiglierebbe al mitico John Belushi" ("With sideburns, and with a hat, glasses, shoes and black pants, he would resemble the mythical John Belushi"), referring to the famous comic actor of *Animal House* and *Saturday Night Live* (13). Such filmic references abound throughout the

novel: characters are constantly comparing each other and the situations they encounter to cinematic images they have seen previously.

On a first reading, Christian's description of his new role as "Issa" seems to repeat *Scontro di civiltà's* "theatricalization" of identity by calling attention to the signs that constitute ethnic and national identity. Both his own disguise and his "reading" of Akram demonstrate a clear accentuation of "signs" of identity such as name, clothes, hair, and accessories. But in *Divorzio all'islamica*, these signs are not merely "theatricalized": they are *cinematized*. I argue that, although the signs of identity that Christian/Issa mentions theatricalize ethnic/national identity by revealing its constitution through performance, these signs are also endowed with the *added* function of signifying images from the universe of cinema: namely, iconic films, genres and movie stars.

At first glance, the conceptual distinction that I am proposing between "theatricalized" identities in *Scontro di civiltà* and "cinematized" identities in *Divorzio all'islamica* may seem unwarranted. After all, *Scontro di civiltà* also uses cinema as a central metaphor, and also contains many references to films other than Neorealism and the *commedia all'italiana*. Yet, I argue that the impact of cinema on the perception and construction of reality—and, consequently, on the performance of identity—in *Divorzio all'italiana* is more extensive and far-reaching than in its predecessor. In addition to the characters' constant use of films as a lens to read themselves and each other, as in the

previously discussed examples, the novel is also replete with “hidden” film references that are embedded in the narration, but are not explicitly demarcated. For example, Safia/Sofia explains that her fiancée’s insistence that she wear a veil was not enough to make her end the betrothal because: “Non l’avrei mai passata liscia. La famiglia dell’ex fidanzato, sedotto e abbandonato, avrebbe usato un’arma potentissima per screditarmi e vendicarsi: spargere la voce che l’ex fidanzata...non era vergine” (“I would have never gotten off easy. The ex-fiancee’s family, seduced and abandoned, would have used a very powerful weapon to discredit me and have revenge: to spread the rumor that the betrothed woman...was not a virgin”) (40). What is striking here is Safia’s casual, un-self-conscious use of the phrase “seduced and abandoned,” which clearly refers to the classic Italian comic film of the same name.

A similar “hidden” reference can be found when Safia refers to racists as “i soliti ignoranti” (“the usual ignorant people”), which is a subtle tip-of-the-hat to another classic of the *commedia*, *I soliti ignoti* (*Big Deal on Madonna Street*, 1958) (106). Yet another such reference is found in Issa’s defiant response when Giuda suggests that Issa keep a low profile to avoid conflict. Issa’s statement, “Io non ho paura” (“I am not afraid”), may be interpreted as referencing a 2003 Italian crime film of the same name. On one hand, these extremely subtle references, which can be found throughout the novel, suggest that the characters’ sense of reality is so saturated with cinema that they are always thinking about films, even when they don’t realize it. On the other hand, these

references also have the effect of temporarily removing the reader from the diegetic world: the reader's perception of the fictional reality is repeatedly interrupted by hidden references to other fictional (filmic) realities. These "interruptions" of the reader's immersion in the diegesis serve as foreshadowing of the novel's ending, in which we learn that the whole terrorist plot that Christian/Issa was supposed to uncover never existed in the first place. In this novel, even the most basic reality is a fiction: and not just a single layer of it, but a dense weaving of interconnected cinematic fictions.

The indelible impact of cinema on the fictional world is also visible in the structure of the sub-plots that unfold throughout the novel. As we said earlier, *Divorzio all'islamica* and *Scontro di civiltà* both feature a protagonist who can "pass" for another ethnicity, who lives a double life, and who has a double name. However, I would argue that the idea of characters living a "double identity" is taken much further in *Divorzio all'islamica*. In addition to the fact that nearly all the characters have double names, in this novel, the "spy" plot that forms the novel's axis, in which Christian/Issa must "spy" on the Arab immigrants, gives rise to a proliferation of the motif of espionage, whether real or imagined. In Christian/Issa's overcrowded apartment, the other Muslim immigrants begin to think someone amongst them is "spying" on behalf of Teresa, their oppressive landlady. Similarly, in the Call Center "Little Cairo," both Issa/Christian and Safia/Sofia censor their speech because they know that the owner, Akram, and other patrons are constantly listening—even "spying"—on everything they say. And, as the

novel's end reveals, Giuda has been carefully "spying" on both Issa/Christian and Safia/Sofia during the entire "mission." Thus, while in *Scontro di civiltà*, the central "secret" that must be unlocked is Ahmed/Amedeo's mysterious identity, in *Divorzio all'islamica*, practically *everyone* is both hiding a secret and seeking out the secrets of others. The proliferation of secrets, double identities, and spies gives the novel the distinctive feel of a spy film, or rather, of numerous spy films rolled into one.

The characters' repeated references to film, whether conspicuous or subtle, in conjunction with the novel's structural resemblance to particular film genres, present the novel's fictional reality as a "cinematic pastiche." In other words, to the reader, this fictional world looks like a collage of cinematic images that someone else previously saw, remembered, and "edited" into a hybrid "montage" of film and narrative. But why might Lakhous write his novel in such an overtly, hyperbolically "cinematized" way? Let us return to Maurizio Grande's argument that the *commedia all'italiana* "condemns the excessive closeness between daily life and cinematic spectacle" (45). I contend that Lakhous' representation of reality as "excessively close" to cinema partially shares the "condemnation," or critique, of non-fictional "reality" that Grande mentions. In his interview with Brogi, Lakhous stated that *Divorzio all'italiana's* setting in the year 2005 is significant because it recalls the "alarmist climate" that dominated Europe "after the bombings in Madrid and London" in 2004 and 2005, respectively (11). The social and cultural "alarmism" of that time period is clearly perceptible in the novel's "spy" theme,

which not only reproduces the prevalent Western paranoia about terrorist plots, but also shows the characters to be constantly worried that they are being spied on, even as they spy on others. The novel's suggestion that this culture of alarmism and its consequent exacerbation of anti-Muslim prejudice are reminiscent of patently fictional Hollywood movies clearly articulates a critical stance toward such attitudes.

Yet, I would argue that the "cinematization" of reality also serves another purpose. Specifically, returning to our premise that Lakhous "feminizes" the *commedia*, I maintain that the film-like construction of the novel's fictional reality serves to offer Safia/Sofia, the main "female lead," a strategy to escape the coerciveness of her identities ("woman," "Muslim," "Arab") by enabling her to imagine other roles to interpret. In other words, the novel both resembles cinema and constantly calls our attention to cinema in order to represent cinema as a source of inspiration for creating and imagining a new, liberating reality. If Grande argues that the *commedia* "condemns" reality's likeness to movies, Lakhous *celebrates* that likeness because, in his view, film can offer new ways of re-interpreting, re-building and re-signifying identities and the oppressive baggage they carry with them—especially in the case of Safia/Sofia, his Muslim, Arab, woman protagonist. Yet, as does Ahmed/Amedeo in *Scontro di civiltà*, Safia/Sofia does not *completely* shed her identities, but rather, *negotiates* them in a more personally liberating way.

## 1.8 *The Re-Signifying Power of Cinematic Images: The Case of Sofia/Safia*

Like Issa/Christian, the character of Sofia/Safia is “cinematized” almost as soon as we meet her. We are told that most Italians have difficulty pronouncing the name “Safia,” and thus substitute it with “Sofia,” a name more familiar to them. But their tendency to call her “Sofia” also stems from the fact that, supposedly, she physically resembles the iconic film actress Sophia Loren (26). Safia/Sofia is pleased by this comparison because, as she remarks, “Sofia Loren è una grande sognatrice, e anch’io sono come lei. Che senso ha una vita senza sogni?” (“Sophia Loren is a great dreamer, and I too am like her. What meaning does a life with no dreams have?”) (27). This comment suggests that Sofia/Safia draws on film images and icons, such as Sophia Loren, as a source of inspiration for her “dreams.” These cinematically imagined “dreams” become the blueprint from which she attempts to achieve her liberation from the “chains” of identity.

In this novel, Safia/Sofia’s cinematically inspired dreams are born of “stargazing”—that is, her fixation with movie stars and their images. Richard Dyer’s analysis of stars as a cultural phenomenon will help to illustrate her seemingly inexhaustible fascination with them. For Dyer, “the star phenomenon” includes not only an actor’s film roles, but also advertising, accounts of their private lives, cultural depictions of them—in short, “everything that is publicly available about stars” (2). Consequently, he

writes, “Star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual”: they cannot be pinned down to a single medium or body of texts” (3). And, of course, stars are artificial: their images are, in large part, produced by film or media industries such as Hollywood, as well as, in some cases, by the stars themselves (4-5). However, Dyer also highlights the importance of spectators’ collective interpretations and reactions to a star in the elaboration and diffusion of that star’s image. “Audiences,” he maintains, “cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, the inflections and contradictions, that work for them” (4). Thus, our analysis of Sofia/Safia’s relationships to stars—specifically, Marilyn Monroe, Sophia Loren, and Marcello Mastroianni—will not only consider the “image(s)” of these stars projected in their films, but also, how our protagonist strategically interprets the “complexity of the image” in a manner that “works for her.”

Let us first turn to Sofia/Safia’s relationship with one of cinema’s most timeless and globalized icons, Marilyn Monroe. Monroe’s first appearance in the novel occurs when Safia, still living in Egypt, recalls her cousin showing her a photograph of Monroe as a young woman. Because the woman in the photograph has brown hair and looks “carina, ma non bellissima” (“cute, but not gorgeous”), Safia/Sofia is initially shocked to learn that the woman is actually Monroe (26). This image represents a turning point for Safia/Sofia. Although she has harbored an obsession with hair (blonde hair, in

particular) since childhood, the image teaches her an important lesson: “bionde si diventa e non si nasce” (“a girl isn’t born blond, she becomes blond”) (26). Sofia/Safia is profoundly struck by Monroe’s transformation from brunette to blonde because this metamorphosis reveals the artificiality and malleability that underlie the seemingly universal myth of Monroe’s cinematic image. Perhaps surprisingly, Safia is not disappointed by her discovery of Monroe’s “fakeness.” On the contrary, Monroe’s image becomes empowering for Safia because it allows her to imagine her own life, constrained by identities she did not choose, as similarly open to re-shaping and transformation.

Safia/Sofia’s discovery of the artificiality of Marilyn’s “capelli d’oro” (“golden hair”) encourages her to pursue her dream of becoming a hairdresser, in spite of her society’s resistance to the idea. This resistance is strongly based on a traditional notion of a woman’s gender role as seen by culture and religion: as Safia/Sofia tells us, Egyptian society, being heavily rooted in Islamic cultural traditions, expects a woman to perform a domestic, maternal social function, and, thus, to rely on male protection for her whole life, be it from a father, husband, or brother. A woman, she writes, must resign herself to “vivere come una pecora...normale, conformista” (live like a...normal, conformist sheep”) (29). While in Egypt, she hides her ambition from her parents, but continues to nourish her dream secretly by reading fashion magazines. Similarly, when she moves to Rome to follow her husband, Said/Felice, who has already emigrated there, she must work “clandestinely” as a hairdresser because she knows he would never allow it (57).

Safia/Sofia's "double life," first as an aspiring hairdresser who must hide her dream from her family, and later as a "clandestine" hairdresser in Rome, parallels her reading of Marilyn Monroe's image. Sofia's fixation with hair pre-exists her viewing of the young Marilyn's photograph; however, this photograph intensifies Safia's idealization of hair as a symbol of glamour *by making that glamour seem accessible*. Although Monroe was "naturally" brunette, Sofia interprets her "acquired" blondness as the key that allowed her to metamorphosize into a globally recognizable icon of beauty and sexuality. The importance of Marilyn's image to Safia/Sofia is perceptible in her reflections on the Islamic idea of "destiny," or *maktub*. Immediately after narrating the story of Marilyn's photograph and recounting her frustration at the seeming intransigence of gender roles in her society, she suddenly recalls an episode in which she read a Tunisian poet in high school. The poet, Abu al-Quasim al-Shabbi, wrote a verse that said: "Quando il popolo decide di vivere, il destino non può che piegarsi" ("When the people decides to live, destiny cannot help but bend") (30). She recalls that her classmates in high school argued that the poet was a "miscredente" ("unbeliever") because the poet suggested that the people's will could trump destiny, which was decided by God. The teacher, however, defended the poet by arguing that "Dio è onnipotente e di conseguenza può cambiare anche il destino" ("God is omnipotent and consequently can even change destiny").

The teacher's explanation of *maktub* as something that is not rigid, fixed, and immutable, but rather, as something that can be changed by people (with God's approval) deeply resonates with Sofia/Safia. I argue that her adherence to his interpretation is intimately related both to Marilyn's image and to her consequent re-imagining of gender roles. As we have seen, the malleability of Marilyn's image fuels Safia's vision of hair as a symbol of beauty by making its beauty seem accessible to her. Thus, Marilyn's image allows Safia to believe in the possibility of transforming the social role assigned to her. This, in turn, leads her to begin to understand the dominant social practices of Islam to be *but one interpretation* of its fundamental precepts—an interpretation that, as she comes to learn, is subject to *re-interpretation*. Hence, her belief in the flexibility of *maktub* (destiny) demonstrates a negotiation with her native faith and culture to render them consonant with the role that Marilyn's image has inspired her to imagine.

Safia's use of movie star images to re-imagine her role in society is also perceptible in her imaginary relationship with her adopted namesake, Sophia Loren. The fact that Safia is presented as physically resembling Sophia Loren immediately calls to mind what Marcia Landy calls Loren's "association with Mediterranean life" (125). Loren's image as typically "Mediterranean" emphasizes the theme of ethnic ambiguity we have already seen in Issa/Christian's character, as well as in Ahmed/Amedeo from *Scontro di civiltà*. In Safia and Loren's case, the ethnic ambiguity of the "Mediterranean"

look is important because it allows Safia to perceive commonalities between European and Arab womanhood. As Landy demonstrates, in addition to connoting the “Mediterranean,” Loren’s image is also strongly associated with her “curvaceous, bosomy and reproductive body” and with her role as “a woman of the people, unruly, raucous, robust, and colloquial” (127). But, as we will see, Safia’s engagement with this star is quite different from her admiration of Marilyn’s uninhibited sexuality, so potently symbolized by her hair.

Although Loren first appears in the novel when Sofia/Safia mentions their mutual resemblance, Loren does not appear again until significantly later. Addressing the prejudices associated with the word “marocchino” (“Moroccan”), Mohamed, one of Issa/Christian’s Muslim housemates, surmises that perhaps Italians’ anti-Moroccan prejudice stems from the memory of Moroccan soldiers raping Italian women during World War II (74). This leads Christian to consider Vittorio De Sica’s film, *La ciociara* (*Two Women*, 1960), in which Sophia Loren plays the lead role, as a manifestation of an “immaginario collettivo italiano” (“collective Italian imaginary”) that preserves the memory of Moroccan violence in Italy but obscures the memory of Italian violence in its colonies.

Later on, we learn that this film is one of Sofia/Safia’s favorites. She tells us:

Qualche settimana fa ho rivisto per la terza volta il film *La ciociara* con Sofia Loren...La Loren interpreta il ruolo di una giovane mamma che scappa con la figlia ragazzina da Roma a causa dei bombardamenti...Nel finale del film vengono stuprate all’interno di una chiesa abbandonata e distrutta dalle bombe

da una banda di soldati con dei turbanti. Giulia mi ha detto che erano marocchini. Questa scena mi fa sempre piangere perché ogni volta mi identifico sia con la mamma che con la figlia. (128)

(A few weeks ago, I saw the film *Two Women* with Sophia Loren for the third time. Loren plays the role of a young mother who escapes Rome with her young daughter because of the bombings...At the end of the film they are raped by a band of soldiers with turbans in an abandoned church, destroyed by the bombs. Giulia told me they were Moroccan. This scene always makes me cry because I identify every time with both the mother and the daughter.)

As this passage illustrates, Sofia/Safia's reading of this film is quite different from Issa/Christian's. Although Issa is drawn to the film as an example of "the long-standing failure of Italian public memory to come to terms with its colonial past," Safia views it as a kind of transcultural "bridge" that allows her to re-imagine how ethnicity and womanhood intersect (Triulzi 431). Loren's star image is essential for this "bridging": as Millicent Marcus argues, the choice to cast her in this role was intended to "indulge the public's need for visual spectacle, for glamor, and for the primacy of passion in human affairs" (*Filmmaking* 84). Safia's reading of Loren as an image of ethnically ambiguous, "Mediterranean" glamour disengages Loren's character from any suggested distinction the film might pose between a "good" ethnic group (Italians) and "bad" ethnic group (Moroccans).

Yet, Sofia/Safia's identification with Loren is not *only* based on the "Mediterranean" quality of Loren's image. This identification also happens because the violence that Loren and her fictional daughter suffer on screen vividly echoes the violence that Sofia/Safia, too, has suffered, along with other women she is close to. In

fact, her recounting of her third viewing of *La ciociara* immediately follows a long discussion of female circumcision, a widespread custom in her native Egypt. Although she was spared thanks to her aunt's clever scheming, her two older sisters were both subjected to this practice. The second sister, Zeineb, suffered great physical and psychological trauma as a result of it; as Safia reminds, us, "le ferite della memoria non guariscono con il tempo" ("the wounds of memory do not heal with time") (123). One of Safia's "dreams" is thus to set aside the money she earns from her secret work as a hairdresser to allow her sister to undergo clitoral reconstruction surgery.

Safia/Sofia also is a victim of violence herself. Prior to her discussion of *La ciociara*, she is attacked by an Italian racist at an outdoor market; later on in the novel, her husband strikes her in rage and fury as he repudiates her a third time. Hence, I argue that Safia's "identification" with Loren's character in *La ciociara* stems from the intersection of Loren's "Mediterranean" image with Safia's own experience of physical abuse and her intimate familiarity with female circumcision. The "openness" of Loren's "Mediterranean" womanhood blurs the cultural, political, and economic boundaries that are normally invoked to distinguish European women from North African women, Italian women from Egyptian women, or Christian women from Muslim women. Reading Loren's "Mediterranean-ness" as a sign of transcultural femininity,

Safia is able to re-interpret *La ciociara's* narrative of Muslim men causing harm to Italian women. Specifically, she re-signifies this narrative as a symbol of her own lived

experiences of the violent patriarchy that characterizes *both* European *and* Arab societies. For this reason, I argue that Safia/Sofia's reading challenges Marcus' point that "the story's dramatic intensity reaches such levels that it usurps Loren's star claims on our attention" (*Filmmaking* 85). For Safia, the specifically "Mediterranean" quality of Loren's image is an essential component of Safia's ability to dismantle the "us"/"them" conflict that the film's rape scene might otherwise be interpreted as promoting.

In Monroe and Loren's "star" images, Safia/Sofia discovers models of womanhood that allow her to reshape the restrictive social roles ascribed to her ethnic and gender identity. On one hand, she reads Monroe as a symbol of the *artificiality* or *constructedness* of womanhood, which therefore allows both gender and Islamic cultural traditions to be subjected to re-interpretation. On the other, she reads Loren's Mediterranean "ambiguity" as a strategy to critique patriarchal violence from a transcultural feminist perspective. The third star that allows her to re-shape her lived performance of femininity is Marcello Mastroianni. Mastroianni's debut in the novel occurs in a dream Sofia/Safia has while sleeping. The dream recreates the iconic scene from Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) in which Anita Ekberg dances in Rome's Trevi fountain. In the dream, Sofia/Safia is initially watching Ekberg and Mastroianni from afar, but, envious of Ekberg, she, too, decides to enter the fountain. As Mastroianni approaches Safia, she realizes that he has the face of Issa/Christian, whom she has only seen in passing at "Little Cairo," and whose name she does not yet know. From this point on in

the narrative, even after she and Issa are properly introduced, she will predominantly refer to him as “il Marcello arabo” (“the Arab Marcello”).

Just as he does in the dream, Safia’s “Arab Marcello” continually irrupts unexpectedly into her life. When Safia is attacked by an Italian racist known as “il Bestione,” Issa/Christian—still referred to by Safia as “the Arab Marcello”—intervenes almost out of nowhere to defend her. They spontaneously run into each other again at the local library, where Safia/Sofia often goes to borrow movies. Later on, when her husband Said/Felice brings a guest home for lunch, she is stunned to see, once again, the “Arab Marcello,” this time in her own house eating food she has prepared. Strangely, it is only at this point, on their fourth encounter, that she learns his name and “realizes” that he is Tunisian (she has no idea, of course, that he is really an Italian in disguise). Following her third, and definitive repudiation, Felice, desperate to win her back, proposes that she marry Issa (unaware of her feelings for him) and then divorce him so that she can re-marry Felice again. Safia is all too happy to accept this premise, hoping to marry Issa permanently and remain divorced from Felice. But she is perplexed by Issa’s strange behavior when she proposes this plot: although she senses that he reciprocates her strong feelings for him, his reluctance to commit to her leaves her suspicious that he, too, has a secret to hide.

Jacqueline Reich’s analysis of Mastroianni’s star image will elucidate Safia’s overlapping interpretations of this figure in her relationship with Issa/Christian.

According to Reich, Marcello Mastroianni constitutes “one of Italian masculinity’s quintessential icons” (xii). *La dolce vita*, as one of his most celebrated films, led Mastroianni to be viewed as “the dark, mysterious and sexy Italian male, the latest incarnation of the Latin lover icon, with which the actor would be forever associated” (25). However, as Reich demonstrates, this prevalent interpretation of Mastroianni went far afield of how he is actually portrayed in *La dolce vita*, as well as in many other films. Given *La dolce vita*’s narration of his character’s “futile quest for salvation in the spiritual wasteland of late-1950s Rome,” she contends that “Marcello’s character epitomizes post-war masculine subjectivity in crisis” (24). She argues that his stereotyping as a “Latin lover” in the wake of *La dolce vita*’s success had much more to do with the commercial marketing and international exportation of Italian goods, including cinema, in the context of Italy’s economic miracle. Hence, in spite of his dominant “Latin lover” image, a careful consideration of his films reveals him to be more frequently represented as an “anti-hero, the Italian *inetto* (the inept man), a man at odds with and out of place in a rapidly changing political, social, and sexual environment” (xii, *original parenthesis*).

Safia’s initial dream, in which she imagines herself overshadowing Anita Ekberg in the eyes of her desired “Arab Marcello,” clearly ascribes to the mythology of Mastroianni as “Latin lover.” By imagining herself in the fountain with Issa dressed in Mastroianni’s garb (and, of course, with Ekberg relegated to the sidelines), she capitalizes on Mastroianni’s mythology as a sex icon in order to eroticize and exoticize

Issa as the object of her sexual desire. Her continued references to Issa as “the Arab Marcello” suggest that, even in a waking state, she continues to see him in a dream-like light. Her “star-gazing” in this case bears a striking difference to her imaginings of Monroe and Loren. If Monroe’s image accentuates the plasticity of femininity and women’s social roles, and Loren’s image blurs ethnic and cultural barriers to create transnational solidarity between women, Mastroianni’s image, it seems, serves no other purpose than to stoke the flames of Safia’s sexual desire, which, as the novel makes clear, has hardly been satisfied by her problematic marriage to Said/Felice.

Yet, by fanning the flames of desire, Mastroianni’s image helps Safia re-envision what is, perhaps, the most central institution of gender discipline portrayed in the novel: marriage. Her association of Issa with Mastroianni is not only the *result* of her intense desire for Issa; rather, it also *intensifies* her desire. When Safia tells her friend Samira about the dream, Samira responds that Safia appears to be falling in love. Safia is initially unconvinced, telling us: “sono una donna sposata con una bambina. Non voglio fare l’adolescente” (“I am a married woman with a daughter. I don’t want to act like a teenager”) (109). Even so, her attraction for him is obvious during every encounter, such as when she blushes upon seeing him in the library (129). Interestingly, her insistence on calling him “the Arab Marcello” in her narration continues after she knows his name: even when she finally learns it, she tells us, “non riesco a chiamarlo Issa” (“I can’t manage to call him Issa”) (150). As this remark illustrates, her perception of him is so

inextricably intertwined with Mastroianni's image that, perhaps, referring to him as merely "Issa" might ruin the fantasy. But, continuing to think of him as an "Arab Marcello," her desire continues to intensify: when Felice suggests that she marry Issa as part of his plan to get her back, she tells us, "Devo accettare subito, senza chiedere consiglio alle mie amiche. Forse è un segno del *maktub*" ("I must accept immediately, without asking my friends for advice. Perhaps it is a sign of *maktub*") (173). As we can see, by stirring her feelings of desire, Mastroianni's image helps Safia imagine the possibility of a happy life outside of her current marriage. The fact that we do not know how Safia and Issa's love story ends is crucial for the novel's message: the open ending avoids the potential problem of Safia's quixotic illusion being ruptured by another failed marriage. What really matters is that Mastroianni's image awakens her *sexual fantasy*. In addition to enabling her to recognize her own sexual desire, this fantasy also empowers her to envision a romantic relationship that is not predicated on a woman's "need" for a husband, but on her *desire* for a man.

And yet, Issa's ambivalent response to Safia's proposal, in which he claims he cannot marry her, but she claims she can nonetheless sense his reciprocal desire, complicates her reading of Mastroianni's image. Intuiting that he is keeping a secret from her, she tells us, "Forse si tratta di qualcosa di inconfessabile. Mi ricorda Marcello Mastroianni nel *Bell'Antonio*, quando nasconde in tutti i modi la propria impotenza alla moglie. O in *Una giornata particolare*, quando alla fine rinuncia al gioco della seduzione

con Sofia Loren a causa della propria omosessualità" ("Maybe it's something shameful. He reminds me of Marcello Mastroianni in *Bell'Antonio*, when he hides his impotence from his wife at all costs. Or in *A Special day*, when in the end he gives up the game of seduction with Sophia Loren because of his homosexuality") (174). Though she still believes he loves her, her association of him with these roles of Mastroianni indicates that her perception of his status as "quintessentially masculine" has changed. Clearly, her references to Mastroianni's impotence in *Bell'Antonio* and to his homosexuality in *A Special Day* do not indicate that she necessarily believes him to be impotent or gay. Yet, they do indicate that she is beginning to recognize that his masculinity—just like her own femininity—is a performance that accentuates some things and obscures others. Mastroianni's nuanced performances of masculinity thus have the same effect on masculinity that Monroe's image does on femininity: it accentuates the plasticity and malleability of that performance, and hence, its capacity to be re-imagined and re-shaped.

## 1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that one of Amara Lakhous' central goals is to escape the coerciveness of identity categories by theatricalizing them, and, as such, illustrating the degree to which they can be changed. His literary adaptations of the

*commedia all'italiana* accentuate the “theatrical” and “cinematic” qualities of his characters’ identities and of the worlds they live in. His deep resistance to essentialized concepts of ethnic and national identity, which include “performing” the authenticity of his “migrant” experience, is especially visible in *Scontro di civiltà*, where the debate over Neorealism and the *commedia all'italiana* serves as a dramatization of this resistance. But it is also clearly visible in *Divorzio all'islamica*. His “feminization” of the *commedia*, which he accomplishes by prioritizing a woman protagonist’s negotiations with gender, ethnicity and religion in his *commedia*-inspired novel, may also be read as a form of resistance to narrating his own “migrant-ness”: for all that Safia’s narrations may remind us of women’s writing, we know, of course, that they are not. In both novels, freedom from identity does not imply its utter and absolute erasure; rather, as Butler says of gender, the best we can do is continue to negotiate our identities through theatrical forms of resistance.

## 2. **Rewriting Rodoreda and Unravelling the Nation: the others of Catalan Nationalism in the works of Najat El Hachmi**

With an autobiography, two novels, and a major literary prize under her belt, Najat El Hachmi, a Catalan writer of Moroccan birth, is Spain's most famous and successful migrant writer. Having first entered the literary world in 2004 with the publication of the autobiographical memoir *Jo també sóc catalana* (*I, too, am Catalan*), she acquired great renown for her historic win of the Ramón Llull Prize, Catalonia's highest literary honor, for her novel *L'últim patriarca* (*The Last Patriarch*, 2008). Her most recent novel, *La caçadora de cossos* (*The Body Hunter*) was published in 2011. But although the Llull is perhaps the most important prize she has garnered yet, it is not the first. Rather, as Oriol Osan indicates in a 2009 interview with her, El Hachmi's picture landed on the front page of the June 21, 1997 edition of the local Catalan newspaper, *El 9 Nou*, when she was just eighteen years old (31). The picture was accompanied by the caption: "Una estudiant magribina de Vic guanya el concurs literari Antoni Pous" ("A Maghrebi student from Vic wins the Antoni Pous Literary Contest") (qtd in Osan 31). The paper announced the favorable reception of her short story, "La pluja damunt l'argila, entre brots de menta" ("The rain over the clay, between mint sprouts"), which

examined gender roles in the Maghreb (31).<sup>1</sup>

In hindsight, it is difficult to resist the urge to read this early, public accolade of El Hachmi's talent as a foreshadowing of her later win of the Lull. It is also impossible to miss the significance of El Hachmi's 2008 victory, given that this was the first time a migrant writer in Spain had ever won such a high literary honor. But one can also not avoid noticing how the 1997 caption frames her triumph: what makes the story newsworthy is not just her literary talent, but the fact that she is "A Maghrebi student from Vic." The caption's emphasis on her cultural origins demonstrates how a migrant writer's text, while superficially privileged for its perceived diversity, can be reified as a "road-map" of *other-ness*. In *Jo també sóc catalana*, El Hachmi reflects on the experience of winning this first prize, noting that if not for the novelty of her "Moroccan-ness," "jo hauria passat desapercebuda de la mateixa manera que havien passat desapercebuts tots els guanyadors anteriors i posteriors" ("I would have gone unnoticed in the same way that all the winners before and after had") (43-44).

The response to El Hachmi's win of the Pous in 1997 cannot be understood outside a larger context of racism in Catalonia. In *Jo també*, El Hachmi reports that while she was being inundated in local media attention, a woman whom she had known her whole life told her, "S'hi devien presentar molt pocs a aquell concurs, no?" ("Very few

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Catalan or Spanish are my own, unless otherwise noted. In the interest of space, primary sources (such as interviews and literary texts) will be cited first in the original language, and then in English. Secondary sources (such as academic studies and news articles) originally written in Catalan or Spanish will be cited only in English translation.

people must have competed in that contest, right?") (44). Furthermore, in 1997, the government of Vic, where she grew up, was forced to consolidate four public primary schools into two because the schools had become strongly segregated on ethnic lines. This situation was produced over time by the reluctance of native Catalans to send their children to school alongside the increasing numbers of immigrant and minority children, especially those of Moroccan origin (Carbonell et al, 49). As her autobiography attests, El Hachmi herself was attending one of the schools with a large minority student body at the time this merger occurred (*Jo també* 78). How is it possible that even as she won a prize for being a "Maghrebi" writer, the rejection of her ethnic community by native Catalans was so strong that government intervention was necessary to combat it? Although these two facts may seem paradoxical, I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that they are more intimately related to each other than they seem.

Fast-forward to 2012: El Hachmi, having won the Lull in 2008, has become a visible and highly regarded writer. Her first novel, *L'últim patriarca*, has been translated into several languages, and her second one, *La caçadora de cossos*, was just released the previous year. In spite of her success, a literary blogger under the nickname "Lujo" referred to El Hachmi as "un timo como escritora" ("a rip-off as a writer"), arguing that "Sin una buena promoción...esta señora no vendería libros" ("Without good promotion...this lady would not sell books") ("Najat El Hachmi es un timo"). Criticizing the heavy marketing of El Hachmi by her current publisher, Planeta, as well as El

Hachmi's numerous media appearances, "Lujo" views El Hachmi as a well-marketed poster-child for "immigrants" or "Moroccans." However, she does not believe El Hachmi should not be considered a *real* writer — Lull, or no Lull.

Scholar Cristián Ricci, although approaching El Hachmi's work from a vastly different perspective than "Lujo," echoes this blogger's distaste for Planeta's marketing of El Hachmi. In his view, this publishing house's interest in "postcolonial women's writing" is rooted in a desire to "[fulfill] the European's desire for exoticism," rather than an attempt to "[give] voice to those traditionally kept in the shadows" ("African Voices" 216). According to some, El Hachmi's win of the Lull has further intensified the celebratory discourse around her *other*-ness: as Pablo Meléndez Haddad observes, her "consecration" has transformed her into a "multicultural icon, an example of perfect integration, a prodigal daughter" ("La hija prodiga"). El Hachmi herself, while never explicitly criticizing Planeta, has demonstrated a keen awareness of the larger problem of the reification of *other*-ness within the sphere of cultural production. Although reactions to El Hachmi's work have heavily emphasized her Moroccan origins, the content of her work is strongly critical of this tendency: in her interviews, articles, novels and autobiography, she has insistently refused to be branded and bracketed as a novelty to be objectified, sold and consumed for her *difference*.

El Hachmi voiced a particularly searing critique of the tendency to objectify migrants as *others* in a 2007 interview with Nuria Navarro. El Hachmi stated:

Hay muchos tipos de discriminación. El racista golpea de frente, pero luego están los paternalistas, que dicen cosas como que, aceptándonos, Catalunya ‘se enriquecerá’, que ‘será más multicultural’...No hay que quedarse en la fiesta multicultural, que obliga a demostrar la tolerancia. Yo a eso lo he bautizado con un término...¡Pornografía étnica! Hay quien la ejerce, incluso con buena voluntad, pero hace mucho daño...El inmigrante no quiere pertenecer a una asociación de inmigrantes, sino a una de vecinos.

(There are many types of discrimination. The racist hits head-on, but then there are the paternalistic ones, that say things like, by accepting us, Catalonia ‘will be enriched,’ that it ‘will be more multicultural’...We cannot be stuck in the multicultural *fiesta*, which obliges us to demonstrate tolerance. I have baptized that with a term...Ethnic pornography! There are some who implement it, even with good intentions, but it causes a lot of damage...The immigrant does not want to belong to an association of immigrants, but to an association of neighbors.) (Entrevista con Nuria Navarro, 2007)

In this interview, El Hachmi singles out multicultural discourse, with its central tenet of celebrating and recognizing ethnic diversity, as a key culprit for the cultural *other*-ing imposed on migrants. By establishing a parallelism between “racists,” who are openly xenophobic, and multicultural “paternalists,” who claim to be more “tolerant,” El Hachmi acknowledges the ability of racism and multiculturalism to coexist—and, perhaps, to benefit mutually from each other. Because multicultural discourse classifies migrants as a source of *other*-ness, it simultaneously renders them into objects of consumption, like pornography. Recalling Sara Ahmed’s notion of “stranger fetishism” (see introduction), we may see how this “ethnic pornography” compels migrants to “submit” to the role of “difference” that dominant culture has already outlined for them—thereby marking them as *not really belonging*.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, El Hachmi's autobiography and novel jointly illuminate the ways in which "stranger fetishism" is profoundly operative in contemporary Catalonia, calling attention to the persistence of xenophobia and exclusion *in spite* of the multiculturalist tendency to "welcome" those perceived as *others*. Her texts also challenge the structural barriers that preclude migrants and ethnic minorities from achieving full belonging in the national community. I begin the chapter by exploring the "stranger fetishism" manifest in the tense and contradictory relationship between the "integrationist rhetoric" of Catalan nationalism and numerous forms of anti-immigrant xenophobia and exclusion contemporary Catalonia. With this context in mind, I move on to argue that El Hachmi's autobiography, *Jo també sóc catalana*, challenges the "integrationist" model of Catalan nationalism by laying bare the fundamental *other*-ings that such a model disguises and perpetuates. Finally, I consider El Hachmi's dismantling of the Catalan *othering* of Moroccans in her first novel, *L'últim patriarca*. As I will show, although the hypermasculine protagonist of *L'últim patriarca* appears to invoke stereotypes of the Moroccan/Muslim migrant as excessively *machista* and therefore inassimilable, El Hachmi's careful use of intertextuality, especially through its dialogue with Mercè Rodoreda's 1963 novel, *La plaça del diamant*, confounds the Western reader's ability to engage in this *other*-ing. El Hachmi's novel thus builds on her autobiography: if her autobiography reveals how Catalans *other* Moroccans (even though they say they don't), her novel dismantles that *other*-ing by deflating the oft-

invoked essentialisms that assert Europe's supposed *difference* from—and therefore, superiority over—Morocco, North Africa and the Muslim world more generally.

## **2.1 *Multiculturalism, Integrationist Nationalism, and Xenophobia in Catalonia***

Although El Hachmi and Sara Ahmed share a common critique of “multicultural” discourse, we must clarify what exactly that term means in El Hachmi’s Catalan context. The “multiculturalism” that Ahmed writes about as a person of English and Pakistani descent living in Australia and Britain would almost certainly differ from the “multiculturalism” that El Hachmi encounters as a person of Moroccan birth in Catalonia. After all, the United Kingdom, with its long and complex history of migration from its numerous former colonies (and elsewhere), has had much more time to re-negotiate its identity as a “multicultural” state than Spain (or Catalonia), which only began receiving large waves of immigration from the Global South in the 1980s and 90s.

And yet, while Spain has only in recent decades begun to deal with the “multiculturalism” of foreign migration, it has long had to negotiate its internal linguistic and cultural plurality. For example, Xavier Bonal and Xavier Rambla (using Will Kymlicka’s terminology) argue that Spain is both a “multi-nation state” because it contains numerous, distinct national identities (with Catalan, Basque and Galician being

the most prominent), as well as a “poly-ethnic state” due to immigration from other countries (Kymlicka qtd in Bonal and Rambla 78). Based on their analysis of Spanish education policy, Bonal and Rambla conclude that multicultural policy in Spain is “splintered”: while education policy in the post-Franco era accommodates the “equality and recognition of differences” of Spain’s internal, national minorities (Catalans, Basques, etc.), the strategy toward managing differences produced by immigration is, quite simply, one of “rough assimilation,” meaning that the task of integration must be achieved through individual student effort, rather than through institutional efforts at accommodation (79). The authors note that, while each of Spain’s autonomous communities is given ample leeway to solve the vexed question of what language(s) should be taught in its schools,<sup>2</sup> there has been no serious attempt at either the regional or state level to encourage instruction in the native languages of non-Spanish speaking migrants.

Although I agree with Bonal and Rambla’s argument that Spanish educational policy favors “national” diversity while leaving “ethnic” diversity inadequately addressed, I would also suggest that their argument requires further nuancing when considering the specificities of multiculturalism in Catalonia. After all, Catalonia is home to Barcelona, one of Spain’s largest and most cosmopolitan cities. It is also one of Spain’s

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<sup>2</sup> While some regions (Aragón, Asturias, Baleares) establish a “minimum requirement” rule, where the regional language is an optional course, other regions (País Vasco, Navarra, Valencia) use a “multi-option scheme,” in which parents can choose a regional language or Castilian as the main language of instruction. Meanwhile, Catalonia and Galicia require full immersion in the regional languages.

most prosperous regions, and historically was among the first to industrialize. As Beatriz Celaya Carrillo points out, Catalonia's strong sense of national identity attempts to distinguish itself firmly from the national identity of the Spanish state, symbolized by Castile and the central government in Madrid (349). The perceived oppositionality between Catalan and Spanish national identities was severely exacerbated by the Franco dictatorship's absolute suppression of the public usage of regional languages, including Catalan. In the post-Franco era, however, the recognition of regional languages as official by the 1978 constitution, in conjunction with a more general devolution of power from the central government to the regions, has allowed the Catalan language to become the central emblem of Catalonia's national identity. Usage of the language has also flourished in the democratic period thanks to a diverse ensemble of protectionist policies, such as the mandatory use of Catalan as the primary language of instruction in virtually all schools (Rendon 679).

As Kathryn Woolard notes, one of the Catalanian government's strategies for expanding the public use of the Catalan language has been to make Catalan "a civic language more than an ethnic one" ("We Don't Speak Catalan" 86). The goal of this, she writes, is so that more people other than the limited pool of native speakers will use Catalan: if one can learn and speak Catalan without being *ethnically* Catalan, then the language becomes "more publicly available to people of varying degrees of identification with the Catalan nationalist project" (86). Jordi Pujol, President of the

Generalitat of Catalonia from 1980 to 2003, famously put it this way: “Es catalán quien vive y trabaja en Cataluña y quiere serlo” (“A Catalan is whoever lives and works in Catalonia and wants to be one.”)

Scholars have observed that Catalan society’s supposed ability to “integrate” or “assimilate” foreigners has become a cornerstone of Catalanist discourse. Teresa Vilarós, for example, argues that “ideologies of assimilation have been strongly sponsored by practically all versions of Catalan nationalism from the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Renaixença* forward” (235). Montserrat Clua i Fainé concurs, explaining that:

both nationalist discourse and contemporary Catalan historiography have defended this image of Catalonia as...a ‘land of passing’ and acceptance of different peoples throughout its history...And they have argued that from this mixture of peoples the nature and essence of Catalan-ness has emerged...In this way, the Catalan nation... appears to have a historically open nature to accept people who come from other places. (65)

Clua i Fainé argues that the image of Catalonia as a nation open to integration of *others* coincided perfectly with “the defense of multiculturalism that began to surface in the late nineties” as a result of the increasing visibility of foreign immigration (68). Over the last two decades, Catalan nationalism has thus espoused the notion of celebrating the numerous cultures and origins that comprise Catalonia’s population. In theory, Catalonia’s nationalist discourse of being able to “integrate” other peoples through its “civic” rather than “ethnic” sense of identity should mean that immigrants are more accepted in Catalonia than elsewhere in Spain.

However, this does not appear to be the case. Clua i Fainé, revealing what she calls a “not fully recognized dark side” of Catalan nationalism, debunks the mythology of exceptional Catalan tolerance by analyzing the history of the pejorative term *xarnego*. In the 1960s and 70s, the term *xarnego* was coined to refer to a range of groups associated with large waves of migration from southern Spain. These not only included Andalusian migrants themselves, but also their children and children of “mixed” couples (those who had a Catalan parent). The term emerged in part because Catalans feared that the Catalan language, already under assault by the Franco regime, would be overwhelmed by the increasing presence of Castilian-speaking migrants and their children. The term thus revealed a cultural perception that some Catalans were more “purely” Catalan than others: even though *xarnegos* were often born and raised on Catalonian soil, they were seen as *less* Catalan than those who were of “pure” origin. As Vilarós observes, the “integrationist” or “assimilationist” rhetoric of Catalan nationalism ultimately resulted in the definitive “silencing of *xarnego* immigrant culture,” which included a hybrid dialect of both Castilian and Catalan influences (237). Furthermore, as Clua i Fainé argues, the occasional use of the term “*xarnego*” in the contemporary period demonstrates that notions of “pure” Catalan-ness are still firmly present in Catalonia today.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Clua i Fainé notes a 2006 incident in which the Valencian politician Jordi Sevilla was recorded saying that another politician, José Montilla, could never be president of Catalonia’s Generalitat because he was a *xarnego* (68). She argues that the fact that this term was both used and widely understood in contemporary

Given the dominance of “integrationist” rhetoric in Catalan nationalist discourse, it is important to consider this “darker side” of Catalan nationalism—that is, the idea that Catalan identity may in reality be more ethnically exclusive than it claims to be—in the context of contemporary immigration. One tool to measure the supposed tolerance of *others* is the sociolinguistic practices surrounding the Catalan language itself: when and where is Catalan spoken, and between whom? Although knowledge of Catalan is necessary for success in Catalonia’s formal institutions (namely, school and the workplace<sup>4</sup>), Daniel Gade notes that the use of Catalan in informal contexts “remains an in-group phenomenon” (436). El Hachmi corroborates this analysis, relating her frequent experience of being addressed in Castilian, rather than Catalan, as a result of her Moroccan appearance. She describes the recurring reality of language discrimination as a “llaga que mai es cura, perquè un o altre cada dia t’hi furga” (“wound that never heals because someone opens it every day”) (*Jo també* 50).

Catalonia’s *Generalitat*, or regional government, has responded to the problem of “in-group” Catalan usage (and waning usage among youth, who tend not to identify with militant Catalanism) by attempting to encourage younger and non-native speakers to use the language informally. However, these attempts have met with limited success.

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Catalonia illustrates that notions of Catalan “purity” persist in spite of the prevalent rhetoric about “integration” and “civic” nationalism.

<sup>4</sup> See Silvio Rendon’s study about Catalan in the workplace.

Kathryn Woolard describes a “poorly received” 2005 campaign known as “Dóna corda al català” (“Wind up Catalan”), which included the widespread distribution of a wind-up toy—a “pair of chattering teeth”—that sang about speaking Catalan in “childish and notably non-native Catalan” (“Language and Identity”). Similarly, a 2009 *El País* article announced another campaign orchestrated by the *Generalitat* called “Encomana el català” (“Entrust Catalan”) (Cazorla). The purpose of this campaign, which included televised commercials broadcast over a four week period, was “para animar a los catalanohablantes a que no cambien de idioma si conversan con una persona inmigrada” (“to encourage Catalan speakers not to change language when conversing with an immigrant.”)

By trying to make Catalan appealing or accessible to non-native speakers and immigrants, these campaigns are consistent with what Clua i Fainé terms the “nationalist rhetoric of integration.” However, the fact that the government considered it necessary to launch such campaigns reveals that there are significant discrepancies between government discourse about the Catalan language’s “inclusiveness” and “accessibility” on one hand, and the sociolinguistic realities of actual Catalan usage, on the other. In other words, although the government *wants* Catalan language and identity to be seen as inclusive and accessible, in real-life situations—such as El Hachmi’s lived experience of linguistic exclusion and discrimination—this is often quite far from the truth.

Some of the most striking evidence of ethnic tension between “native” Catalans and Spaniards on one hand, and immigrants and their children on the other, comes from Catalonia’s education system. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the intensity of ethnic segregation between four primary schools in Vic, which was produced by anti-immigrant prejudice of native Catalans and Spaniards, ultimately led the local government to spearhead the consolidation of these schools into two larger schools. In their study of the Vic school merger, Carbonell, Simó and Tort observe that the consolidation was initially met with significant resistance by the local community, but that over time it became more accepted. A 2003 *El País* article triumphantly praised the then-mayor of Vic, Jacint Codina, for his efforts to integrate the schools, and declared that Vic was “un modelo a seguir” (“a model to follow”) for other municipalities in Catalonia (Padilla). And yet, while certainly a worthwhile achievement, the “modelo Vic” did not put an end to all forms of segregation. Much to the contrary, as Margaret Gibson and Silvia Carrasco demonstrate in a 2009 study, significant achievement gaps between ethnic majority and minority children are still strongly perceptible in Catalonia’s schools.<sup>5</sup> Jordi Pamies echoes this finding in his 2011 study, arguing that

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<sup>5</sup> In their overview of how immigrants and their children fare in Catalonian schools, Gibson and Carrasco observe two markers of educational inequality. The first is significantly lower high school graduation rates for “immigrant children from poor and working class backgrounds,” including both foreign-born children and children of immigrants, with success for Moroccans being especially low. Second, they note that nonnative students’ test scores in key subjects such as reading and math “are among the lowest in the 27 OECD countries surveyed” (252). The authors highlight several problems as potential causes of this situation, such as segregation of nonnative

internal ethnic segregation within schools at both the academic and social levels continues to be a serious problem in Catalonia. Pamies argues that children of Moroccan birth or descent are especially vulnerable to prejudice and unequal treatment at the hands of school administrators and teachers. For Pamies, the particularity of the Moroccan experience stems from the fact that this group constitutes a highly visible and conspicuous group of *others*, which he refers to as “marroquinidad.” The perception of “marroquinidad” as “the most significant other” amongst all the *others* present in Catalonia leads native teachers and students alike to view Moroccans in light of their supposed “cultural and linguistic remoteness” (145). This, in turn, perpetuates the vicious cycle of “preconceptions and academic failure” (163).

Pamies’ idea that Moroccans represent the “most significant other” in Catalonia bears a marked resemblance to Daniela Flesler’s argument about Morocco’s place in Spanish national identity more generally. In her landmark study, *The Return of the Moor*, Flesler contends that because Spanish nationalism was built upon the historical expulsion of the “Moor,” contemporary Spanish responses to Moroccan immigration are marked by an urgent need to “trace clear frontiers between the ‘Moors’ and themselves” (9). Flesler also argues that Spain’s internal, stateless nations (Catalonia, Basque

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students in different classes while they learn Catalan, as well as inadequate teacher training in both general pedagogy and in issues relating to cultural diversity (252-3).

Country, etc.) use both the hegemonic Spanish state *and* immigrants as “others” against which to define themselves (38). Yet, in light of Vilarós and Clua i Fainé’s analysis of Catalonia’s “nationalist rhetoric of integration,” an important paradox stands out. On one hand, Catalan nationalism tries to distinguish Catalonia from the rest of Spain by painting Catalonia as historically open and tolerant of outsiders. On the other, Catalans’ attempts to “differentiate and separate” themselves from immigrants, especially from those of Moroccan origin, are clearly visible in numerous forms of social stratification.

Catalonia’s simultaneous embrace and rejection of migrants is strongly reminiscent of Ahmed’s notion of “stranger fetishism,” which argues that multicultural discourse, by marking off *others* as different, cannot break down the socially established barriers that marginalize those whom it attempts to include. Pujol’s “integrationist” vision of Catalonia becomes much harder to defend when we consider the “darker side” of Catalan nationalism—not only historically, as in the case of *xarnegos* (Vilarós, Clua i Fainé), but also in the contemporary period, in the context of Moroccan immigration (Pamies, Flesler). These cases of ethnic-based social stratification and exclusion illustrate that Catalonia’s integrationist rhetoric does not eliminate its underlying “darker side,” but only disguises it. In doing so, this rhetoric perpetuates the fundamental exclusion of groups deemed to be outside the national community.

As I will show in this chapter, El Hachmi’s work is keenly aware of the contradictions embedded in Catalan and European discourses about migrants. While

some readers understand her literary work to be “Catalanist” because it is written in Catalan and, at times, appears to adopt Catalanist rhetoric, I argue that El Hachmi’s analysis of “stranger fetishism” in Catalonia ironically serves to critique Catalan nationalism by unravelling the *other*-ings upon which this nationalism is based. By exposing and critiquing the Catalan *other*-ing of Moroccans, El Hachmi dismantles Catalonia’s nationalist rhetoric of integration. And, in doing so, she reveals that Catalan identity is far less different from its disavowed Spanish *other* than Catalanist discourse would have us believe.

## 2.2 *Between “catalanisme” and “fronterisme”*: El Hachmi’s Brand of “Border Thinking”

El Hachmi’s autobiography, *Jo també sóc catalana*, offers an excellent starting point for both exploring and critiquing the “stranger fetishism” that characterizes Catalonia’s tense relationship with migrants. In the prologue, El Hachmi writes: “escric per sentir-me més lliure, per desferme del meu propi enclaustrament, un enclaustrament fet de denominacions d’origen” (“I write to feel more free, to liberate myself from my cloister, a cloister constructed of designations of origin”) (14). The task of liberating oneself from identity labels, she writes, is ultimately a form of “pensament de frontera” (“border thinking”): such thinking “ja no és el dels nostres pares, però...no és del tot el de les persones que ens envolten, el autóctons” (“is no longer that of our parents, but...it is not

completely that of those who surround us, the natives”) (14). El Hachmi’s proposal of “border thinking,” which resists the commonplace binary of “citizens” and “outsiders,” leads Susan Martin Márquez to read her as a “border thinker” in Walter Mignolo’s sense of the term; that is, as someone who speaks from “the fractured locus of enunciation from a subaltern perspective” (*Disorientations* 346, Mignolo ix). For El Hachmi, we might interpret the “fractured locus of enunciation” as emerging from her resistance to being pigeonholed into the category of “foreigner.”

However, Beatriz Celaya-Carrillo reads El Hachmi’s text in a different light. Although she praises “the intelligent analysis that [El Hachmi] makes as a woman from the border,” she declares that El Hachmi’s Catalan nationalism is “equally essentialist” as its (Castilian) Spanish corollary, and “must be re-written if one really wants a plural Catalonia and Spain” (362). Significantly, Celaya-Carrillo is not alone in her reading of this text as “nationalistic.” As El Hachmi herself stated in her interview with Ricci, the text’s publisher, Columna, has so far refused to translate *Jo també* into Spanish for being “too Catalanist” (qtd in Ricci “African Voices” 216). This interpretation is rooted in certain moments in El Hachmi’s text which unambiguously express Catalan nationalist sentiment. For example, in one episode, El Hachmi describes a childhood friend named Jordi, whom she characterizes as “catalanista fins a la medulla” (“Catalanist to the marrow”) (*Jo també* 75). This friend, she writes, was the only one “amb qui podia compartir l’ideal d’una nació lliure sota la senyera estelada” (“with whom I could share

the ideal of a free nation under the starred flag”<sup>6</sup> (75). El Hachmi’s reference to her desire of a “free nation” under the “starred flag,” a distinctive symbol of Catalan separatism, clearly constitutes an invocation of nationalist discourse. Celaya-Carrillo is extremely critical of the fact that El Hachmi’s text is laced with such nationalist inflections.

How can we reconcile Martin-Márquez’s and Celaya-Carrillo’s readings? In other words, how is it possible for El Hachmi to speak simultaneously “from the border” as a protestor of *other-ing*, as well as from the vantage point of Catalan nationalism, a discourse which is fundamentally grounded on particular forms of exclusion? Although Celaya-Carrillo is right to point out that certain textual moments reveal the author’s deployment of Catalan nationalist discourse, I contend that it is reductive to regard this tactic as antithetical to the goal of “a plural Catalonia and Spain.” In my view, this text’s occasional hints of nationalist idealism should be read as a strategic maneuver that accentuates the strange coexistence of nationalist, integrationist rhetoric and the lived reality of xenophobic exclusion. El Hachmi narrates this contradictory reality in her text, noting that even in some cases where native Catalans recognized her as “Catalan,” such acceptance amounted to little more than “un triste miratge” (“a sad mirage”) (89). She

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<sup>6</sup> The term “senyera estelada” refers to an alternative version of the official Catalan flag, which is associated with Catalonia’s independence movement. Although the official flag consists only of alternating red and yellow horizontal stripes, the “estelada” includes a blue triangle on the left with a white, five point star inside of it. The “lone star,” of course, is supposed to represent freedom and independence—namely, from the Spanish state.

explains that those who claimed to embrace migrants as Catalans “no ens acceptava a nosaltres, tal como érem, només...se tranquil·litzaven a ells mateixos pensant que tots els que veníem de fora ho deixaríam tot enrere per convertir-nos a la causa catalane, perquè en el fons sempre ressonava la dita: de fora vingueren” (“did not accept us, as we were, they...merely calmed themselves by thinking that all of us who came from abroad would leave everything behind to convert to the Catalan cause, because deep down the saying still resounded: they’re not from here”) (89-90). As this passage shows, for both open xenophobes and integrationists alike, the underlying categorization of migrants as *others* outweighs any other claims of belonging to Catalan society that migrants might make. For Catalan integrationists, the desire to disguise this *othering* with feigned acceptance is often motivated by a nationalist impulse: although migrants are expected to contribute to the cause of Catalan nationalism, in the end, their foreignness prohibits them from reaping the benefits of inclusion and belonging that are supposed to accompany such participation.

El Hachmi’s occasional employment of nationalist discourse in her autobiography must thus be interpreted with care. Rather than uncritically staking itself in such rhetoric, her text highlights the conspicuous discrepancy between Catalan claims of welcoming *others*, on one hand, and her abundant experiences of exclusion, on the other. As El Hachmi shows repeatedly, large segments of Catalan society too often read her as *not Catalan enough*, and nothing, short of changing her heritage and her past,

could convince them otherwise. El Hachmi's text argues that the variant of multicultural discourse embraced by Catalan nationalism is therefore unable to solve the deeper problem of the *other*-ing imposed on migrants and their children, especially those of Moroccan roots. Rather, it is necessary to profoundly reconfigure the historically inflected, deeply rooted exclusion of Muslim and Arab *others* upon which *both* Spanish and Catalan national identities are predicated.

Thus, we may understand El Hachmi's "border thinking" as a critique of the oppositional dichotomy that underlies Catalans' perception of themselves in relation to Moroccans (which, as Flesler argues, is no different from dominant Spanish perceptions). In doing so, El Hachmi reveals the workings of "stranger fetishism" in contemporary Catalonia. By viewing Moroccans (and migrants in general) as the "origin of difference," Catalonia's integrationist rhetoric does not challenge the traditional *other*-ing imposed on Muslims and Arabs as a re-incarnation of the historical "Moor". On the contrary, such rhetoric sweeps this *other*-ing under the rug, thereby allowing it to fester. In her autobiography, El Hachmi figuratively "pulls the rug back," returning those *other*-ings to the light. We may thus understand her novels as seeking to undo the *other*-ings that the latent racism of Catalan nationalism perpetuates. The next section of the chapter will explore how El Hachmi accomplishes this in her first novel, *L'últim patriarca*.

### 2.3 *Destabilizing the Patriarchal Other: L'últim patriarca and La plaça del Diamant*

In this section, I will illustrate how El Hachmi uses her vision of “border thinking” to break down the oppositional dichotomy between “Catalans” and “Moroccans” in her first novel, *L'últim patriarca*. I argue that this novel, while initially seeming to reinforce notions of essential difference between Catalan and Moroccan cultures, actually undermines that *other*-ing in a profound way. The central tool El Hachmi uses to accomplish this is her reconfiguration of Mercè Rodoreda’s classic novel, *La plaça del diamant*. El Hachmi’s novelistic tribute to Rodoreda confounds the reader’s desire to view Catalan and Moroccan societies as dramatically different, instead showing these two cultures to look like mirror images of each other. Gender, in particular, becomes the axis around which El Hachmi’s transnational critique revolves: although Muslims in Europe are too often imagined as inassimilable because of perceptions of their cultures as excessively patriarchal, El Hachmi’s novel forces her Catalan (and Spanish, and European) readers to acknowledge the *other* of patriarchy within their own societies, and within themselves.

*L'últim patriarca*, published in 2008, narrates the story of the Driouch family’s migration from northern Morocco to a small city in Catalonia. The plot revolves around two main characters: Mimoun, the extremely oppressive, overbearing family patriarch, and his unnamed daughter, the novel’s first person narrator, who gradually liberates

herself from his tyrannical grasp. Beginning at Mimoun's birth, the novel portrays Mimoun as unrelentingly obsessed with masculine power. Although harshly treated by his father as a youth, he is spoiled by his mother and sisters. As a toddler, he kills his baby brother, and considers his other younger brother to be his "rival número u" ("rival number one") throughout his whole life (19/11).<sup>7</sup> His female relatives attribute his outrageous behavior to childhood experiences: some say a particularly hard slap from his father marked him forever; others suspect it was the trauma of being sexually abused by his maternal uncle as a boy that made him such a volatile, aggressive adult. As an adolescent, Mimoun becomes promiscuous with women, despite strict traditional norms about gender segregation in public spaces. Once he marries, he is determined to control the behavior of his wife and daughter at all costs. He even becomes irrationally convinced that his wife was unfaithful to him and that his daughter might have been conceived by another man, despite no evidence of this whatsoever. The hypocrisy of his accusations is stunning, given that he has multiple extramarital affairs and makes no attempt to hide them.

The novel's second half, which begins when Mimoun's wife and children (including the narrator) join him in Catalonia, narrates the exacerbation of his physical and psychological abusiveness, as well as his family's growing resistance to it. Upon

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<sup>7</sup> Page numbers that accompany all citations of *L'últim patriarca* refer first to the original Catalan edition, and second to Peter Bush's 2010 English translation.

moving to Catalonia, the child narrator immerses herself in the task of learning the Catalan language and in reading, in large part to escape the difficult reality of a father who constantly beats and torments her mother (and, eventually, the narrator herself as well). As a young adult, the narrator propels herself into an unhealthy relationship with a young man, also of Moroccan origin. This relationship evolves into a marriage, despite her parents' objections. However, her ultimate act of resistance against both her husband and father is not only to leave her husband, but also to have an incestuous sexual encounter with her father's brother—that is, his “rival number one.” This extreme act of defiance constitutes a final, devastating blow to Mimoun's attempts to control her. Her rebellion is further intensified by her discovery of literary writing toward the novel's end and her consequent decision to write a novel—which, we may imagine, is the very novel we have just finished reading.

On a first reading, the centrality of the female narrator's resistance to Mimoun's glaring misogyny might lead readers to conclude that this novel's primary goal is to critique the patriarchal social order which, presumably, is deeply embedded into traditional Berber and Moroccan societies, and to contrast this apparently archaic, primitive culture with the “modern” world of Catalonia (and Europe). Such a reading would suggest that the novel glorifies Catalonia for its ability to “integrate” migrants while “liberating” oppressed migrant women. In fact, even the term “misogyny” does not seem to fully capture the extent of Mimoun's violent treatment of women, given the

extreme degree of physical, psychological and sexual abuse he inflicts on numerous female characters (which not only includes beatings, jealousy, and infidelity, but also rape) over the course of the novel. As Dieter Ingenschay points out, even though Mimoun suffers terrible abuse as a child and is therefore “a victim of his society” along with the women he abuses, El Hachmi does not present his behavior as morally justifiable (67). On the contrary, the clear resistance the female narrator demonstrates to her father’s tyranny, which is especially manifest in her “symbolic killing” of the patriarch at the novel’s end, articulates a definitive rejection of his patriarchal obsessions (67).

Although Mimoun is perhaps somewhat humanized by his personal suffering, especially during his youth, it is difficult—perhaps impossible—to divorce his egregious misogyny from larger discourses and cultural perceptions of Moroccan and Muslim masculinity in contemporary Europe. Specifically, Mimoun’s hypermasculinity invites us to reflect about how “gender equality” is often used as a justification for differentiating Europe from the Islamic world. Recalling Flesler’s argument that Spaniards (and Catalans) have responded to Moroccan immigration by “trac[ing] clear frontiers between the ‘Moors’ and themselves” (9), we must also consider Deniz Kandiyoti’s observation that “Gender appears as the ultimate frontier, the impermeable boundary” that is used to distinguish the Muslim world from the European (32). Specifically, as Rikke Andreassen and Doutje Lettinga note,

European cultural and media discourses have represented Muslim immigration as dangerous by stirring fears of “a fundamentalist and patriarchal Islam encroaching upon a Europe marked by values of gender equality” (21). Such discourse, they write, uses perceptions of gender liberation in Europe in order to “counterpos[e] a backward and dangerous Islam vis-à-vis an enlightened, egalitarian and modern Europe” (22). In her autobiography, El Hachmi demonstrates herself to be fully aware of how accusations of “patriarchy” are used to *other* Moroccans: at one point, she criticizes the “paternalism” of some European feminists, who, she writes, feel motivated to “alliberar tota dona musulmana que li passa per davant” (“liberate every Muslim woman who passes by them”) because of the common perception that all Muslim women are horribly oppressed by Muslim men (162).

Yet, if it is true that Europeans *other* Muslims by painting them as incorrigibly sexist, what sense do we make of El Hachmi’s incorrigibly sexist protagonist? After all, his pathologically violent behavior seems to reinforce, rather than deconstruct, dominant Spanish and European stereotypes about Muslim male migrants as fundamentally inassimilable in European societies because of their perceived sexism. If this is the case, her novel would seem to be strongly out of sync with her larger goal of dismantling the *other*-ing imposed on migrants in general, and Moroccans in particular. Her assertion in her autobiography that “she, too, is Catalan” might potentially make this representation even more problematic: if El Hachmi is read as wanting to be

“Catalan” while portraying Moroccan men as irreparably patriarchal *others*, does her novel do little more than reify the notion of European societies being generally “better” for women than Arab or Muslim ones, even though in her autobiography she purports to be critical of this “paternalistic” attitude?

I argue that the answers to these questions lie in an aspect of this novel that, however essential, has thus far been insufficiently addressed in criticism. Before we dismiss Mimoun as the a re-enactment of the stereotype of the inassimilable Muslim *other*, we must pay attention to the fact that Mimoun’s character—like the “Moors” of contemporary Spain, who, as Flesler argues, must be constantly represented as *different* because, in reality, they are “not different enough” —is not quite as *other* as he might initially appear (9). A closer look at the novel reveals Mimoun to bear a striking resemblance to Quimet, a similarly rough-handed, short-tempered, highly possessive male character from *La plaça del diamant*, a classic novel by Mercè Rodoreda, a pre-eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century Catalan novelist. As I will show, the parallelisms between these two characters are numerous and are clearly not coincidental. The uncanny similarities between a supposedly inassimilable Muslim *other* and a Catalan character from a Catalan novel disrupt the ability of Catalan, Spanish and Western readers more generally to *other* Mimoun. Instead, through her careful re-writing of *La plaça del diamant*, El Hachmi invites her readers to abandon their “stranger fetishism,” that is, their desire to construct their identity around an inassimilable *other*—even when this *other* is

ostensibly “welcomed” in public discourse, as is the case with Catalan integrationist rhetoric. Instead, El Hachmi’s novel articulates a critique of patriarchy that resists being leveraged as a justification of ethnic and religious prejudice.

However, any discussion of El Hachmi’s rewriting of *La plaça del diamant* must also acknowledge the abundance of other intertextual references with which *L’últim patriarca* is laced. These other references occur primarily in the novel’s second half, once the narrator and her family have joined Mimoun in Catalonia. Throughout this part of the novel, the narrator repeatedly refers to writers, works, characters, films and other media from a variety of cultural origins. The sheer frequency of these references—which feature a preponderance of women characters and authors—demonstrates the narrator’s voracious consumption of fiction, whether literary, filmic, or televised, upon settling in Catalonia. Significantly, some of the most prominent allusions include works by Catalan women writers (including Rodoreda’s *Mirall trencat* and Víctor Català’s *Solitud*), works by minority women writers from other countries (such as Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, or the film version of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*), as well as popular visual media (such as the character Superman and the horror film *Poltergeist*). Even “Colometa,” the protagonist of *La plaça del diamant*, is mentioned by name three times in the novel’s second half. I argue that these numerous intertextual references, some of which have been discussed by Ricci and Ingenschay, demonstrate how the narrator uses fiction as a visceral, incipient form of resistance to

both ethnic prejudice and gender oppression. In particular, I argue that her passion for fiction is the seed that gives rise to her later forms of rebellion, namely, literary writing and her dramatic incestuous encounter with her uncle.

Yet, while the web of intertextual references in the novel's second half allows us to trace the narrator's path toward adulthood and independence, I contend that *La plaça del diamant* nonetheless plays a lead role throughout the whole novel. Specifically, El Hachmi places Rodoreda's novel at the head of her intertextual table, so to speak, by thoroughly interweaving the leitmotif of pigeon-keeping—a distinctive feature of *Diamant*—throughout her novel, from beginning to end. While it is clear that the narrator reads this novel in her youth along with many of the other texts and films already mentioned, the impact of *Diamant*, in particular, on the recounting of the Driouch's narrative is significantly more pronounced than these other works. From a young age, Mimoun demonstrates an obsession with pigeons that will last throughout his lifetime. This obsession leads him to raise pigeons in his house, just as Quimet does in *Diamant*. Furthermore, both Quimet and Mimoun force their wives to bear the brunt of the responsibility of caring and cleaning for the birds. As I will show, pigeons in Rodoreda's novel symbolize the female protagonist's struggle against her socially prescribed gender role. I argue that El Hachmi re-adapts this image to articulate a transnational critique of patriarchy while simultaneously forbidding readers from remaining complacent with the all-too-common discursive opposition between a

“gender-equal” Europe and a “strongly patriarchal” Muslim world. Instead, by writing a novel that “converses” with Rodoreda’s, El Hachmi calls attention to women’s (and men’s) *shared* suffering under patriarchal cultural systems on both sides of the Mediterranean. In doing so, she challenges the “stranger fetishism” normally imposed on migrants, thus inviting her readers to discover and confront their desire to exempt their own societies from the accusation of patriarchy, while vigorously invoking it against *others*.

The remaining sections of this chapter will thus: (1) examine the special intertextual relationship between *L’últim patriarca* and *La plaça del diamant*, and then (2) discuss this novel’s other intertextual references, specifically in terms of the narrator’s use of fiction as a tool for empowerment and resistance.

#### **2.4 *Birds and Names in La plaça del Diamant***

In order to demonstrate El Hachmi’s re-working of Rodoreda’s novel, it will first be necessary to offer an overview of *La plaça del Diamant*. This novel is widely regarded not only as Rodoreda’s “most celebrated novel” (Ugarte, “Working” 297), but even, as Gabriel García Márquez asserts, “the most beautiful [novel] to have been published in Spain following the Spanish Civil War” (13). Yet, according to Dominic Keown, the novel is not only highly esteemed by international critics, but is also “especially dear to

the heart of the native population” of Catalonia (659). For Keown, the novel’s enduring significance to Catalans and, by consequence, its privileged place in the history of Catalan letters, are largely due to the fact that “its depiction of the travails of the downtrodden protagonist and her tortured attempts at survival elicit a sympathetic identification experienced collectively by a nation whose existence was similarly compromised so savagely by the exclusive uniformity of Franco’s Spain” (659). In other words, in addition to being aesthetically accomplished, the novel’s story of one protagonist’s resilience and survival in the face of the Civil War and early Francoism strongly resonates with Catalonia’s dominant narrative of national and linguistic resistance against Francoist oppression.

First published in 1962, *La plaça del Diamant* recounts the life of a fictional protagonist, Natàlia, who is also the first-person narrator. The novel is set against the historical backdrop of the Spanish Civil War, including the periods immediately preceding and following it. At the novel’s beginning, Natàlia is dating a local boy named Pere, but leaves him after meeting a rough-mannered young man named Quimet. Quimet gives her a nickname, “Colometa,” which, in English, can be translated as “little dove” or “little pigeon.”<sup>8</sup> Significantly, once they are married, Quimet decides to raise

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<sup>8</sup> In English, there is debate about which of these translations is correct: Keown, for example, argues for “pigeon” because the connotations of “dove,” such as “peace, purity, comfort, and deliverance...[are] entirely absent in the original text, where the referent is clearly a pigeon” (662). I argue, however, that both the positive connotations of “dove” as well as the negative connotations of “pigeon” are important to understand this bird’s symbolism in the novel.

pigeons in their house in hopes of selling them for profit, but leaves “Colometa” in charge of caring for them and of cleaning after them. When the Civil War strikes Spain in full force, Quimet goes off to fight for the Republican side, but is killed on the Aragonese front. Nearly reduced to indigence, Natàlia must find a way to survive. She ultimately marries a local grocer, Antoni (a much gentler man than Quimet), even though he has been left sexually impotent by a previous accident. Yet, toward the novel’s end, well after she has married Antoni, she returns to the house she once shared with Quimet and, using a knife, carves the name “Colometa” onto the door.

The symbols of “pigeons” and “pigeon-keeping,” which are essential to El Hachmi’s rewriting of this novel, first enter *La plaça del diamant* when Quimet re-baptizes Natàlia as “Colometa.” Recounting how they danced together in Barcelona’s “Plaça del diamant,” Natàlia tells us:

Quan el vals es va acabar la gent va començar a sortir...[Quimet] va dir, quan estarem ben sols...vostè i jo ballarem un vals de punta a la plaça del Diamant...Colometa. Me'l vaig mirar molt amoïnada i li vaig dir que em deia Natàlia i quan li vaig dir que em deia Natàlia encara riu i va dir que jo només em podia dir un nom: Colometa. Va ser quan vaig arrencar a córrer i ell coria al meu darrera, no se m'espanti...¿que no veu que me la robarien, Colometa?

(When the waltz ended people started to leave...[Quimet] said...that when we were alone...we'd dance a waltz on tiptoe in the Plaça del Diamant...He called me Colometa, his little dove. I looked at him very annoyed and said my name was Natalia and when I said my name was Natalia he kept laughing and said I could have only one name: Colometa. That was when I started running with him

behind me: "Don't get scared...Don't you see you'll get robbed, Colometa?")  
(70/18)<sup>9</sup>

This scene potently illustrates the multilayered symbolism of pigeons in this novel. On one hand, Quimet's act of renaming Natàlia "Colometa" appears to be an expression of his affection for her: through the positive connotations associated with "doves" (peace, tranquility, spirituality, femininity, etc.), the name evokes women's idealized social role as wife and mother. A dove, after all, is imagined as meek, gentle, and pure: such a name suggests that Natàlia/Colometa is supposed to play the part of "àngel del hogar" ("angel of the home"), to borrow a common nineteenth century phrase. In particular, the diminutive suffix attached to the name ("-eta") might be read as suggesting warmth and closeness in their relationship.

However, the renaming also has a much darker significance. In his analysis of this scene, Jaume Martí-Olivella argues that "the endearing diminutive" of the name "Colometa" reveals "the male gesture of appropriation and reification, Quimet's reaching out to Natàlia as that other that is going to reinforce his own self" (321). Thus, for Martí-Olivella, the renaming is simultaneously a form of *coersion* and *other-ing*: not only is Natàlia's autonomy over her identity taken away, but she is also reduced to a position of inferiority (hence, the grammatical diminutive of "Colometa"). Natàlia's resistance to being "renamed" accentuates this fact. The coercive and belittling nature of

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<sup>9</sup> Page numbers that accompany all citations of *La plaça del diamant* refer first to the original Catalan, and second to David Rosenthal's 1986 English translation.

this gesture is echoed by the fact that the pigeons Quimet will eventually raise are held in captivity: “Colometa,” it seems, is tied to her reproductive and domestic roles just as the pigeons are kept in their coop. Furthermore, her loss of control over her identity will be symbolically repeated later on in the novel, when Quimet decides to use the attic, the only space in the house that belongs solely to “Colometa,” as a space for the pigeon coop.

The episode of Natàlia’s renaming thus allows us to understand the pigeons as symbolizing both a romanticized view of women’s traditional marital role, as well as the coercive, stifling, fundamentally oppressive nature of such a role. This double symbolism is echoed again when Quimet and “Colometa” acquire their first pigeon. Initially, the bird is wounded and bleeding; after “Colometa” nurses it to health, Quimet’s initial idea is to build it a cage and keep it as a pet. But when Quimet’s friend, El Mateu, comments that “més valia que el matéssim, que més li valia morir que viure lligat i prisoner” (“the best thing was to kill it, that it was better for it to die than to live tied up like a prisoner”), Quimet decides to build a coop for the bird, as well as to find it a mate so that it can reproduce (122/65). At first, Quimet’s decision to bring the bird into his house, have “Colometa” care for it, and, ultimately, build a coop for it seems motivated by a compassionate, paternal impulse. However, the blatant irony of this supposed compassion is that even in a coop, the bird remains in captivity. In spite of the

seemingly better quality of life Quimet intends to offer the bird, El Mateu's remark that it is better for it to die than to live without freedom continues to ring eerily true.

Like the episode in which Quimet renames "Colometa," Quimet's treatment of the first pigeon reveals a great deal about his character. Just as Quimet's renaming of "Colometa" illustrates how a seemingly affectionate nickname masks an underlying assertion of patriarchal power, Quimet's adoption of the pigeon illustrates how an ostensibly compassionate impulse toward a suffering animal is inextricably bound with his desire to own it, control it, and, ultimately, to exploit it for profit. As the name "Colometa" suggests, Quimet's possessive treatment of the animal shares a striking parallelism with his treatment of his wife: Quimet repeatedly asserts his "ownership" of "Colometa" through physical aggression as if she, too, were a powerless creature dependent on him for survival and subject to his authority.

The novel is replete with examples of Quimet's possessive, patriarchal behavior toward "Colometa." Early in their marriage, Quimet demands that she cease working in a neighborhood pastry shop because, supposedly, the shopkeeper she works for looks at her lustfully. "Colometa" tells us that, after she protests Quimet's absurd claim, Quimet "em va agafar pel coll amb una mà i em va sacsejar el cap" ("grabbed my neck and shook my head from side to side") (77/25). On another occasion, he unfairly accuses her of spending time with Pere, her previous boyfriend:

Em va dir que li havia de prometre que no sortiria mai més amb en Pere i per acabar d'una vegada i no sentir-li més la veu, que quan estava enrabiada no

semblava la seva, li vaig dir que ja el creuria i que no sortiria més amb en Pere...es va posar com un dimoni, em va dir que ja estava tip de mentides, que m'havia posat un parany i jo hi havia caigut com un ratolí...I em va fer demanar perdó agenollada per dintre per haver sortit a passejar amb en Pere que, pobra de mi, no havia vist d'ençà que havíem renyit.

([He] told me I had to promise not to go out with Pere and to put an end to it and not hear his voice anymore, which didn't sound like his own when he was mad, I told him I'd do as he said and not go out with Pere anymore...he got madder than a devil. He told me he was fed up with my lies, that he'd set a trap for me and I'd been caught in it like a mouse...and he made me apologize, kneeling down inwardly, for having gone for a walk with Pere who, poor me, I hadn't seen since we'd broken up.) (84/32)

Quimet's rage at the very idea, however unfounded, of "sharing" his wife's attention in any way with another man leads him to remind her of the hierarchical nature of their relationship, in which she must occupy the inferior position. Significantly, a mere apology is not enough to appease his anger: "Colometa" must also humble herself by "kneeling down inwardly," thereby accepting Quimet's demand for complete power over her life and body. The injustice of his behavior is even further accentuated by his constant references to his own previous relationship with a woman named Maria: to Natàlia's confusion and dismay, Quimet frequently and almost randomly repeats the refrain, "Pobra Maria" ("Poor Maria"), even as he jealously (and unjustly) punishes her for associating with Pere.

Just as Quimet's paternalistic and patriarchal vision of Natàlia is emblemized by the pigeons, so, too, do these birds become a reflection of Colometa's increasing frustration with Quimet's insufferably sexist attitudes. At one point, she compellingly

observes the dehumanizing way in which she is treated: “En Quimet no veia que necessitava una mica d’ajuda en comptes de passar-me la vida ajudant, i ningú no s’adonava de mi i tothom em demanava més *com si jo no fos una persona*” (“Quimet didn’t see that I needed a little help myself instead of spending all my time helping others and no one cared how I felt and everyone kept asking me to do more *as if I were not a person*”)<sup>10</sup> (171/107, *emphasis mine*). As this comment illustrates, the experience of being married to such a domineering, aggressive person (and of caring for his pigeons) does not correspond to any positive symbolism the birds might evoke. On the contrary, Colometa’s experience with the birds is marked by the unsavory task of constantly cleaning their excrement, and by the foul smell that pervades her house: as she puts it, “em matava netejant els coloms. Tota jo feia pudor de colom” (“I was killing myself cleaning up after the doves. My whole body stank of doves”) (*Diamant* 163/100). At one point, her frustration with them is so pronounced that she vigorously shakes their eggs to prevent them from hatching. Hence, Josep-Anton Fernández, emphasizing the pigeons’ “association with parasitism and pests,” argues that these birds symbolize the protagonist’s “silent yet ruthless war against reproduction” — that is, her long-term struggle with the idealized, yet stifling marital and maternal role she has been coerced into performing (106).

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<sup>10</sup> Although Rosenthal translates the italicized text as “like I was superhuman,” I believe a more literal translation is necessary to understand Colometa’s deep-seated frustration.

Although this novel's symbolic use of pigeons articulates a penetrating critique of traditional gender roles in Catalan society, the novel's ending suggests the possibility of transcending or reshaping these roles. Following Quimet's death and Natàlia's marriage to Antoni, Natàlia figuratively re-establishes her identity as an individual by carving the name "Colometa" on the door of the house that once belonged to Quimet and her. Emilie Bergmann argues that this gesture is fundamentally liberating, interpreting it "as both an affirmation of life and the inscription on the tomb of a past from which she is now able to detach herself" (154).

Martí-Olivella reads it in a similar light, arguing that "when Colometa manages to inscribe her name on the door, she is reasserting an identity of what is finally her own territory" (319). As these critics attest, Natàlia's gesture functions as a symbolic demonstration of her renewed ability to reclaim the sense of space and self that was taken away from her by the social role she had been obliged to perform.

An awareness of the double symbolism of pigeons in *La plaça del diamant* is crucial to understanding the significance of the pigeon leitmotif in *L'últim patriarca*. Although El Hachmi's novel is peppered with numerous intertextual references to literature, film and television, pigeons can be found all throughout El Hachmi's novel. Furthermore, they are particularly important to Mimoun, the tyrannical patriarch for whom the novel is named. I argue that Mimoun's obsession with pigeons, which leads him to raise pigeons in his house (and make his wife take care of him), invites us to view

Mimoun as a reincarnation of Quimet. As I will show, the mirror-like resemblance between Quimet and Mimoun forces Catalan readers to abandon their impulse to read Mimoun as an inassimilable *other* (read: “Moroccan,” “Muslim,” “misogynist”) upon which to construct their identity. By showing readers that the patriarchal *otherhood* that they reject is embedded in “their own” culture, El Hachmi crushes the discursive opposition between “us” and “them” upon which Catalan (and Spanish, and European) identities are based. In doing so, she thus invites a radical reconsideration of how those identities might be rebuilt.

## 2.5 *Pigeons in L’últim patriarca*

*L’últim patriarca* begins by announcing its own conclusion: the female narrator declares Mimoun, her father, to be “l’últim dels grans patriarques que formen la llarga cadena dels avantpassats de Driouch” (“the last of the great patriarchs who make up the long line of Driouch’s forbears”) (7/vii). This fact tells us that not only is Mimoun a “patriarch,” but that he is the *last* patriarch: the novel’s goal, then, is to narrate the story of how the line of patriarchal succession will be permanently terminated. Commencing the narration just before Mimoun’s birth, the narrator also reveals that Mimoun is the family’s first male child, having followed three girls. This makes him “l’afortunat...per haver nascut després de tanta dona” (“Mimoun the Fortunate because he was born after

so many females”) (11/3). This comment by the narrator highlights the asymmetry of power and status afforded to men and women in the dominant social order: as the firstborn son, Mimoun is “fortunate” because he fulfills the family’s strong desire to produce a male heir.

But Mimoun’s birth also brings fortune to his mother: prior to Mimoun’s birth, we are told that she has “fracassat com a esposa” (“failed as a wife”) for not having had a son yet (12/4). Her anxiety over this “failure” is apparent: while pregnant, she performs every traditional ritual she can think of to guarantee the birth of a boy. In one such ritual, she must “fumejar l’entreuix amb la barreja que cremava al foc, feta de sofre, gallarets esmicolats i extrements de colom secs” (“[stand] with her groin over the steam from a sulphurous, shredded poppy and dry pigeon shit concoction that was boiling on the fire”) (12/4). Mimoun’s birth thus represents a reversal of her “failure”: she has finally satisfied one of the most basic requirements of her reproductive role, which is not merely to produce children, but to produce a *male* child.

Incidentally, the spell that Mimoun’s mother uses to ensure the birth of a boy is also the first appearance of the novel’s recurring “pigeon” motif: after all, “pigeon shit” is one of this spell’s essential ingredients. Although this first manifestation of pigeons in the novel may seem relatively inconsequential, I argue that it is important for two reasons. First, the “pigeon shit” functions as part of a “remedy” to an otherwise deviant performance of gender: the narrator’s grandmother has, after all, “failed” in her role as

wife of the patriarch. The connection between pigeons and women's social roles mirrors *La plaça del Diamant*, where pigeons represent Natàlia/Colometa's "war against reproduction." Furthermore, it is also significant that pigeons are first referenced in *L'últim patriarca* by their "shit": although the Catalan word "colom" might possibly evoke the positive symbolism of "doves," the novel unequivocally portrays its first deployment of this symbol as repulsive, rather than attractive.

Although the connection between pigeon excrement and the coerciveness of gender roles will surface again later in the novel, the second appearance of the "pigeon" motif points us in a seemingly different symbolic direction. As a young boy in rural, northern Morocco, Mimoun is a lackluster student, and skips school frequently. When he does show up, his utter boredom leads him to daydream about making "casetes per a coloms i conills que es reproduïen sense morir'se per una pesta sobtada" ("hutches for pigeons and rabbits that reproduce and never die from sudden plagues") (27/18). One day, during a test for which he is terribly unprepared, his daydreaming inspires him to doodle on the exam paper. In his drawing, he depicts "el mur de casa on havia anat deixant obertures ben al capdamunt perquè hi niessen els coloms, [i] coloms petits amb les boques ben obertes esperant el menjar mastegat que hi dipositava la mare" ("the house wall at the top of which he'd left lots of openings for birds to nest, and...baby pigeons, beaks wide open, waiting for the masticated food their mothers were about to pop inside") (29/20).

On one level, Mimoun's drawing is simply indicative of his lack of interest in school. His poor performance on the test, as well as his father's discovery of his habit of playing hooky, ultimately result in severe punishment: his father beats him and throws him into a cactus. Even at this early moment in the novel, however, terrible physical abuse at the hands of male relatives is nothing new to Mimoun. In fact, once he reaches adulthood, his female relatives repeatedly hypothesize that Mimoun's excessive aggressiveness stems from particularly traumatic instances of abuse during childhood, such as an especially hard slap from his father at only six months of age, or, even more significantly, having been raped by his uncle as a young boy.

Thus, given the context of physical and sexual abuse in which Mimoun is brought up as a child, his drawing of pigeons feeding their young is extremely revealing. The image suggests that he projects his identity onto the baby pigeons, given that the nurturing he receives from his female relatives is the only respite in his life from his violent, "patriarchal" upbringing. Yet, we might also read Mimoun as imagining himself as the "mother pigeon": After all, even though it is the *mother* who feeds the baby pigeons in the drawing, the idea of "feeding" clearly calls to mind the traditionally masculine, paternal role of "breadwinner." Hence, the "mother pigeon," as portrayed in Mimoun's drawing, seems to indicate his desire to *escape* patriarchal violence through benevolent paternity (even if that desire never corresponds with his actual behavior.) Furthermore, his feelings of compassion and nurturing toward imaginary pigeons bear a

noticeable resemblance to Quimet's ostensible empathy toward the wounded pigeon in *La plaça del diamant*.

Mimoun's drawing of the pigeon feeding its young complicates the narrator's initial statement that Mimoun is "fortunate" for being born the family's first male child. Rather, the notion that Mimoun would like to escape the patriarchal violence to which he is subjected as a young boy calls attention to the fact that there is also something decidedly *unfortunate* about his insertion into his family's patriarchal lineage. Although his drawing indicates a desire to resist the violence that inevitably accompanies his experience of "masculine" upbringing, his social function as "patriarch" has already been decided for him, even before his birth. As his mother's spell demonstrates, the family is strongly invested in Mimoun's correct performance of the patriarchal role: Mimoun *must* become the patriarch, whether he likes it or not, and *must* perform the social functions of this role in the particular ways that his culture mandates. Although the position of "patriarch" brings with it great power and prestige (especially in contrast to the domestic/reproductive role of women), Mimoun's role is also clearly coercive in nature, because there is no conceivable option for him to choose *not* to carry it out.

As the novel progresses, we learn that Mimoun's imagining of his paternal authority as analagous to the nurturing role of a "mother pigeon" is not exclusive to his childhood. On the contrary, his idealized portrait of parental love seems to shape his idea of paternity well into his adulthood. For example, when he marries the narrator's

mother, the village women are eager to tell her “allò dels coloms” (“about the pigeons”), although her mother-in-law forbids them from doing so (109/94). Mimoun’s wife, however, is curious, wondering to herself: “Sí que era veritat que en aquella casa hi havia molts forats fets al capdamunt de les parets del pati, on niava un nombre exagerat de coloms, però això què hi tenia a veure, amb el seu marit?” (“It was true that there were lots of holes at the top of the walls around the yard where an excessive number of pigeons nested, but what did that have to do with her husband?”) (109/94). Her question, of course, ironically indicates that Mimoun had everything to do with it: although years have passed since Mimoun drew his childish doodle, as an adult, he has actually created the nesting areas in the garden walls that he once daydreamed about as a young boy. Similarly, even after the family’s relocation to Catalonia, Mimoun (like Quimet from *Diamant*) raises pigeons in a coop in the family home, but leaves his wife in charge of feeding them and cleaning their living space. At one point, the narrator even describes how her father would like to play “pigeons” with her: in this game, Mimoun, playing the “mother,” tells his daughter to “obriu bé la boca” (“open your mouth wide”) so he can pretend to “feed” her from his “beak” (212/192).

Mimoun thus projects an important symbolism onto the image of pigeons feeding their young. On one hand, he appears to yearn for the kind of nurturing that he imagines baby pigeons to receive, given that he himself was treated so harshly as a child. On the other, the game of playing “pigeons” with his daughter seems to suggest that he

hopes to offer the nurturing and support to his children that he did not receive. In this sense, Mimoun's use of imaginary pigeons to idealize his masculine role as "patriarch" bears strong parallelisms with Quimet's association of "pigeon" or "dove" imagery with idealized femininity. Recalling the fact that Quimet names Natàlia "Colometa" ("little dove" or "pigeon") as a reflection of the socially prescribed gender role he expects her to interpret, we can also see how Mimoun projects his own identity onto his fictional pigeons because their behavior mirrors the socially determined, gender-specific expectations that he, as "patriarch," believes he should fulfill.

However, in spite of Mimoun's idealized imagining of paternity and parenting through the image of the "mother pigeon," his actual behavior hardly corresponds with that vision at all. His treatment of those around him, *especially* the women in his life, is extremely abusive. Over the course of the novel, Mimoun beats his sister in public, rapes his boss' wife, and inflicts such intense psychological and physical torment on his wife that she ends up hospitalized. Similarly, although he is very close with his daughter as a young girl, once she reaches puberty, he also becomes zealously overprotective (and thus abusive) of her, beating her regularly for even the most trivial, perceived infractions of his authority. Obviously, the contrast between his imagined role of himself as "mother pigeon" and the aggressiveness with which he treats his female family members could not be more severe.

Although Mimoun's violent misogyny might initially appear to reinforce European stereotypes of excessive patriarchy in Moroccan, Arab or Muslim cultures, the distinct parallelism between Quimet's and Mimoun's obsession with pigeons casts light on numerous other striking similarities between these two characters. As we have seen, both Quimet and Mimoun are very quick to lose their temper, and are both given to physical aggression. Furthermore, they are both hypocritically possessive: just as Quimet forces Natàlia to "kneel down inwardly" for supposedly going out with a previous boyfriend (even as he constantly refers to his ex-girlfriend "Maria"), Mimoun repeatedly (and falsely) accuses his wife of infidelity, even though he makes no attempt to hide his own extramarital relationships. At one point, Mimoun even denounces his wife to her family for her alleged unfaithfulness; although her family members appease him by claiming to accept this accusation, none of them is really convinced of her guilt.

Yet, by first referencing pigeons through their "shit," El Hachmi's novel has already warned readers to be skeptical of the "nurturing" symbolism that Mimoun attributes to pigeons. Recalling the disciplinary role of pigeon excrement in Mimoun's mother's fertility spell, we must remember that this bird has another side to it beyond its "nurturing" or "maternal" aspect: after all, no matter how idealized, this creature still "shits." The symbol of pigeon excrement returns in full force during the novel's second half. At a certain point, the narrator, now settled with her family in Catalonia, must search the neighborhood for her father, who did not return the night before. Although

she imagines herself to be “Supermana,” a female Superman who will rescue her family from the evil that has befallen it, her thoughts are not entirely heroic: part of her secretly wishes she would find Mimoun dead. She imagines finding his body in the river “amb els ulls esberlats i els llavis morats” (“with glassy eyes and purple lips”), or perhaps “devorat per uns gossos famolencs que li haurien obert el ventre” (“devoured by hungry dogs that had ripped his belly open”), or perhaps “atropellat per un cotxe...amb els braços i les cames malgirbats” (“the victim of a hit-and-run...with his arms and legs all dislocated”) (192-3/172). Meanwhile, she notices that “els coloms...amenaçaven de cagar-se a sobre teu i jo que devia pensar prou merda ens ha tocat a nosaltres” (“the pigeons threatened to shit on you and I probably thought we’ve had enough shit thrown at us already”) (191/171)<sup>11</sup>.

In his reading of this scene, Cristián Ricci argues the narrator’s choice to imitate a male character (Superman) illustrates a larger pattern of how the narrator becomes “a mirror of the patriarchal structure she attacks” (“Forjamiento” 78-9). Yet, he writes, her dissatisfaction with that image of herself will ultimately lead her to “twist or break that mirror, before straightening it out” (79). Ricci’s reading is reinforced by the narrator’s projection of violent deaths onto Mimoun: her desire to inflict gruesome physical harm on him mirrors his extremely aggressive treatment of her mother and other women. Furthermore, the narrator draws an explicit comparison between the prospect of being

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<sup>11</sup> The “you” the narrator refers to is impersonal; she is not speaking to anyone in particular.

covered in pigeon feces and the burden of enduring her father's violent abuse and irresponsible neglect. By accentuating the violence and suffering caused by patriarchal culture, the narrator's mention of bird feces is once again reminiscent of *Diamant*, where "Colometa's" constant proximity to this revolting animal waste symbolizes her struggle against a world that sees her as little more than a possession of Quimet's.

Later on, the narrator compares her family's situation to that of "Colometa" in a very direct manner. Explaining how her mother has grown fed up of cleaning the mess left by Mimoun's pigeons, she states: "La mare a vegades semblava la Colometa...de tant com havia netejat els excrements sec de damunt els taulons de fusta sota les teuls d'urilita" ("Sometimes mother was...like Colometa...she'd cleaned up so much dry excrement from the wooden planks that were under the pre-fabricated Uralite roofs") (199/179). This remark, which is one of only a handful of times in which *La plaça del Diamant* is explicitly mentioned, immediately calls to mind Colometa's repeated complaints that "em matava netejant els coloms" ("I was killing myself cleaning up after the doves") (*Diamant* 163/100). As such, the young narrator makes a clear comparison between the the struggles with coercive gender roles that Mimoun's wife and Colometa both experience. As we have seen, although this is the first time this comparison is made explicitly, it is hardly isolated: rather, the parallelisms between Rodoreda's characters and El Hachmi's are heavily reinforced throughout the whole novel by the recurring leitmotif of pigeons and their excretion.

El Hachmi uses the symbol of “bird shit” to puncture the idealized symbolism of selfless parenting and caretaking that Mimoun attributes to pigeons. By calling attention to the fact of defecation as a bodily byproduct of all animals, the novel emphatically fractures our ability to uncritically accept Mimoun’s romanticized illusions about the possibility of a “paternal” or benevolent patriarchy. On the contrary, the symbol of “feces,” by calling to mind the idea of inevitable, corporeal “waste,” signifies the bodily violence against both women *and* men that *always* accompanies patriarchal culture, no matter how “benevolent” this culture may portray itself to be.

The symbol of animal waste is also important because of the crucial linkages it establishes both within and beyond the novel. On one hand, by appearing in both halves of the novel (in the ritual Mimoun’s mother performs before his birth, and in Mimoun’s house in Catalonia), this “pigeon shit” migrates across both space and time, traversing generational distance (from Mimoun’s mother to his wife) and geographical distance (from northern Morocco to Catalonia). At the same time, the symbol of pigeon feces reinforces the already unmistakable intertextual connection with Rodoreda’s novel, inviting us to perceive patriarchal oppression as something that is not exclusively characteristic of either Berber/Moroccan society or of Catalan/Spanish society, but rather, as a deeply entrenched quality of both societies. Following the example of *La plaça del diamant*, *L’últim patriarca* portrays pigeon excrement—whether it is used in a spell to guarantee a male child, or whether it is a repugnant mess that Mimoun’s wife, like

Colometa, is doomed to clean again and again—as strongly associated with the coercive nature of gender performance.

Thus, the “pigeon” motif—especially through the symbol of feces—enables a transnational critique of patriarchy. While in Rodoreda’s novel, the dove/pigeon is a sign of the suffering and discontent created by the socially constructed ideal of married womanhood, El Hachmi’s novel extends this symbol’s meaning to include the two-sided role of the “patriarch”—which, although socially esteemed and revered, is a role imposed on Mimoun before his birth that he must perform all throughout his life. Yet, by making Mimoun resemble Quimet, El Hachmi thwarts the underlying European desire to leverage “gender equality” as an excuse for the imagining of Muslim or Moroccan men (and women) as inassimilable. El Hachmi’s rewriting of Rodoreda’s work thus endows this Colometa’s struggle against patriarchy with a transethnic, transcultural, and transgenerational quality. At the same time, this rewriting exposes and deconstructs the latent *other*-ings upon which contemporary Catalan identity is based, forcing Catalan readers to recognize a piece of themselves in the monstrous mirror of patriarchy.

## 2.6 *Fiction as Bodily Resistance*

Now that we have analyzed how El Hachmi's rewriting of *La plaça del diamant* articulates a transnational critique of patriarchy from the perspective of the male characters, we must also consider how the female narrator articulates her own form of resistance to both ethnic and gender oppression. In his analysis of this novel, Ricci convincingly argues that the narrator manages to "destabil[ize] the hegemonic order through the use of the symbiosis between her writing...and her body" ("Forjando" 78). Ricci is referring here to two simultaneous paths of resistance that the narrator employs in the second half of the novel: first, her interest in mastering the Catalan language, which paves the way toward her pursuit of writing; and second, her portrayal of sexuality.

The narrator's journey toward writing begins early in the novel's second half, when she develops the habit of studying the Catalan dictionary with intense dedication. Her effort to master the dictionary continues throughout the novel: she ends each of the next twenty-odd chapters by mentioning a letter of the alphabet, followed by a list of several new Catalan words she has learned that begin with that letter. Significantly, her completion of the dictionary corresponds with her development of an interest in writing: in the novel's final chapters, she declares that she intends to write a novel. Her desire to learn Catalan is clearly related to her discovery of writing, since the Catalan language is the material from which her written work will be constructed. El Hachmi's novel becomes self-reflexive at this point by implying that the narrator's future novel is the

novel we are currently reading. Furthermore, the narrator's strong desire to learn Catalan and her eventual discovery of literary writing bear a striking autobiographical resonance with El Hachmi's own life.

But, as Ricci suggests, writing is not the narrator's only path to resistance: rather, her writing is intimately intertwined with her body, especially with regard to her depiction of sexuality. Ricci observes that "sex in the narration, except in limited, symbolic occasions, is sex with pain;" thus, these "sexual practices...mark the narrator-protagonist's painful, anguished, and psychologically disturbed passage before masculine, structural violence" (76). Here, Ricci refers to the narrator's recounting of such episodes as her father's sexual trauma as a child or her parents' wedding night, in which the young couple was required by custom to show the blood-stained sheet to onlookers as a demonstration of male virility and female virginity. But in the novel's second half, the narrator explores her own sexuality in a way that departs from the associations of reproductivity, traditional gender norms, and physical "pain": she also begins to discover and seek out erotic pleasure, both by herself and with partners. Her multiple forms of sexual experimentation include masturbation, kissing, and sexual simulation; towards the end of the novel, her infatuation with a local boy turns into a clandestine marriage, from which she eventually breaks free. It is especially important to note that her desire is not exclusively heterosexual: at one point, she masturbates after watching a woman in male drag perform during the annual neighborhood festival, and,

later on, plays a game that simulates sexual intercourse with other female friends. Her increased openness to sexual pleasure, including nonheteronormative experiences, is intimately bound up with her journey toward writing. Furthermore, her discovery of sexual pleasure is also especially important to bear in mind when interpreting the novel's end, in which she permanently dismantles her father's authority over him by having sex with his brother, that is, his "number two rival."

However, I argue that the path to liberation that the narrator embarks upon through writing and sexual exploration cannot be understood without considering a third, perhaps more primordial strategy of resistance: namely, her seemingly unquenchable thirst for fiction. Although the narrator mentions her practically constant immersion in novels and movies on several occasions, her passion for these fictions is most clearly demonstrated by the high frequency with which she draws parallels between her world and those of novels and films. As we will see, fictional worlds are so prevalent in the narrator's mind that even banal details and unexceptional situations remind her of a book she read or a film she watched previously.

I argue that the narrator's insistent predilection for fiction is her earliest and most visceral strategy of resistance: it is the source from which her sexual rebellion and her turn toward writing emerge. On one hand, the fact that her passion for reading and watching films significantly precedes her interest in writing suggests that her impulse to write is at least partially born of her extensive consumption of fiction. Furthermore, as I

will show, the narrator's passion for fiction is inseparable from her discovery of sexual pleasure, for fiction is the first tool at her disposal that enables her to communicate with and understand her own body.

The narrator's relationship with fiction begins in Chapter 3 of the novel's second half. At this point, Mimoun's wife and two children have recently moved to Catalonia with him after several years of living apart. However, Mimoun's obsession with accusing his wife of adultery has grown so extreme that, on one occasion, he threatens to kill her, pressing a knife to her throat in front of the young narrator. The narrator, traumatized, begins to refer to her family life as a "poltergeist," in reference to the 1982 horror film of the same name. Her decision to imagine her life as a horror film is clearly, to some extent, a coping strategy: "Ara ja no ploro" ("I don't cry anymore"), she writes; "amb un record tan poc versemblant no vaig tenir altre remei que fer-ne ficció, de tot allò" ("As my memories seemed so unreal I had no choice but to turn it all into fiction") (176/156). Her choice of *Poltergeist* is particularly compelling: in this film, the protagonist, Carol-Anne, is a young toddler who lives in the suburbs with her family. Once her house begins to demonstrate strange paranormal activity, she is sucked into an otherworldly dimension by the undead spirits who have invaded it. Although Carol-Anne is rescued at the end of the film, El Hachmi's narrator concludes that Carol-Anne must have been traumatized by the experience of being trapped in another world: she speculates that Carol-Anne "no podria oblidar mai del tot el lloc on havia estat mentre

els pares miraven de rescatar-la, desesperats" ("could never completely forget the place where she'd been while her desperate parents tried to rescue her") (176/156).

As we can see, the narrator is drawn to the story of *Poltergeist* because she imagines herself to be trapped in a frightening parallel universe like Carol-Anne.

However, given that no one is going to miraculously save her from her "poltergeist," she reflects on what strategies might allow her to escape its grasp:

Per escapar del *poltergeist*, si no tens una senyora cridanera i baixeta com Tangina Barrons, has de riure molt, fins a sentir que tens les costelles a punt de petar, o has de plorar molt, fins a sentir que t'has buida, o has de tenir un orgasme que, fet i fet, també és buidar-se. Jo encara no en sabia, de tenir orgasmes, al pare no li agradava que ningú plorés i a la mare no li agradava que ningú rigués. De manera que vaig començar a llegir, paraula per paraula, aquell diccionari de la llengua catalana. Tothom deia quina nena més intel·ligent, quina nena més estudiosa, però només era per buscar una de les tres coses.

(If you want to escape from the poltergeist and don't have a loudmouthed little mistress like Tangina Barrons, you should laugh a lot till you feel your ribs are about to explode, or cry a lot till you feel drained, or you should have an orgasm, that, at the end of the day, is also a way to get drained. I still didn't know how to get an orgasm, father didn't like anyone crying and mother didn't like anyone laughing. So I started to read that dictionary of the Catalan language word by word. Everybody said what an intelligent girl, what a studious girl, but it was only so I could find one of those three things.) (180/161)

In this passage, the narrator names laughing, crying and orgasm as three "ways out" of her difficult home life, which is marked by her father's neglect, as well as his extreme physical and psychological abuse. Interestingly, all of the possibilities the narrator names imply a corporeal reaction: for this character, the body, in particular, holds the key to overcoming the stress of living under the thumb of an egomaniacal tyrant.

However, the narrator notes that because none of these three “corporeal” solutions are available to her, she immerses herself in the Catalan dictionary as a way of “searching” for the bodily release she has not yet personally experienced.

To further clarify the narrator’s investment in fiction as a pathway to embodied liberation, let us turn to the theoretical ideas of French feminist Helene Cixous and Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa. Although these theorists (especially Cixous) are well known for their work on the relationship of women’s bodies with women’s *writing*, both also emphasize the embodied nature of *reading*. For both Cixous and Anzaldúa, reading during childhood was much more than a source of “escapism”, and even more than a strategy to “cope” with hardship: on the contrary, for both women, reading constituted an incipient form of resistance and critique to colonialism, racism and sexism. Cixous, after all, grew up in Oran during the French colonial occupation of Algeria, while Anzaldúa’s childhood was marked by the racism and poverty of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Cixous describes her childhood habit of reading in the following passage:

I don’t go and read just to read, to forget—No! Not to shut myself up in some imaginary paradise. I am searching: somewhere there must be people who are like me in their rebellion and in their hope....For a long time I read, I lived, in a territory made of spaces taken from all the countries to which I had access through fiction, an antiland...where distinctions of races, classes, and origins would not be put to use without someone’s rebelling. (72)

As this passage illustrates, for Cixous, self-immersion in reading transcended both escapism and “coping” with hardship. Rather, for her, reading was a search for empathy

and solidarity: she strove to find “people like her” in order to draw strength in her own struggles. In particular, her desire to imagine an “antiland” where oppressive hierarchies such as race and class would be met with “rebellion” demonstrates that reading, while *seemingly* an escapist pastime, was actually a way to transform her world through her imagination. For Cixous, the fictional world exerted a tremendous influence on the “real” world; as such, reading was the seed from which her personal revolution sprang.

Similarly, in “La prieta,” Anzaldúa explains that: “

The whole time growing up I felt that I was not of this earth. An alien from another planet...One day when I was about seven or eight, my father dropped on my lap a 25¢ pocket western, the only type of book he could pick up at a drugstore. The act of reading forever changed me...in the pages of these books, the Mexican and Indian were vermin. The racism I would later recognize in my school teachers and never be able to ignore again I found in the first western I read. (40)

Like Cixous, Anzaldúa also mentions childhood reading as an empowering source of critique. However, for Anzaldúa, reading fictions that constructed Mexicans and Indians as “vermin” enabled her to perceive how her own world had been built on similarly artificial dichotomies. Although western novels are supposedly an escapist genre, the fact that their patently fictional, simplistic division of the world into racist binaries struck a deep chord with Anzaldúa, who perceived her own world to be marked by similar binaries. This realization enabled her to understand that fictional representations both shape, and are shaped by, the supposedly “nonfictional” world—sometimes with

extremely harmful consequences. Hence, the symbiotic relationship she perceived between fiction and reality would “forever change” her: it contributed significantly to her antiracist, antihomophobic and feminist activism later in life.

Cixous and Anzaldúa’s comments illustrate that the narrator’s investment in fiction has a tremendous revolutionary potential. Yet, we must remember the connection that El Hachmi’s narrator establishes between reading and the *body*: after all, she pores over the Catalan dictionary and consumes fictions of numerous genres and media with the intention of discovering a *bodily* response to her personal “poltergeist,” such as laughter, crying or orgasm. Again, Cixous and Anzaldúa can illuminate fiction’s relationship to the body: for both of these theorists, reading is imagined to be not a purely cerebral activity, but a *bodily* one. In “Sorties,” Cixous names numerous characters from Greek mythology that she identified with as a child, such as Achilles and Dido. She explains that her search to inhabit these characters’ lives emerged from the following question: “I pushed ahead into all the mythical and historical times. And what would I have been? Who?—A question that didn’t come to me until later. The day when suddenly I felt bad in every skin I had ever worn” (73). For Cixous, it is a sense of bodily discomfort—*feeling bad in her skin*—that motivates her to search for empathetic links with fictional characters. In other words, the compulsion to read emerges *from* the body itself: her intellectual and political pursuits can trace their origin to a sensation of physical unease.

Anzaldúa also connects the experience of reading to the body:

Often when reading a poem or a story, before it even hits your mind, it's already *plucking at your flesh, tugging at your heart*. When it does that to you before it hits your mind, it has activated your imagination. You'll feel and experience things, not just visually or kinesthetically, but with your *whole body and mind*. ("Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness" 107, *emphasis mine*)

If for Cixous, the compulsion to read *emerges* from the body, for Anzaldúa, reading *affects* the body by "plucking at your flesh" or "tugging at your heart." Although the fictional world is imaginary, it is real enough to produce something like a physical sensation, a pull or pressure upon the body that urges it to *feel* and *react*—perhaps even before the mind is ready to "think." For these theorists, reading does not *divorce* us or help us *escape* from our bodies, but rather, it puts us in intimate communication with them: our bodily experiences both push us toward fiction, and are changed by the experience of fictional worlds.

Cixous' and Anzaldúa's insights about how the desire to identify with fictional worlds both arises from and affects the body are strongly perceptible in in *L'últim patriarca*. On one hand, it is clear that the "poltergeist" from which the narrator seeks reprieve is defined by physical violence and aggression. As we have noted, Mimoun's behavior toward his wife is especially marked by constant psychological and bodily abuse; this abuse is also extended to the narrator as she grows older. Given the bodily nature of the narrator and her mother's suffering, the narrator demonstrates a noticeable affinity for female protagonists who have experienced a similar degree of emotional

dissatisfaction, physical abuse and sexual aggression in their relationships with men. Her connection with these protagonists is thus extremely visceral, emerging from her own lived experience of corporeal oppression, as well as from witnessing her mother's subjection to similar torment. Yet, as we will see, the narrator's passion for fiction also transforms her relationship with her body in important ways, empowering her to radically distance herself from the patriarchal culture she has always known.

The earliest literary comparison that the narrator makes (and which she will repeat several times) is between her mother and Mila, the protagonist of *Solitud*, a novel by Víctor Català.<sup>12</sup> In this novel, Mila is an unhappily married woman who, after growing increasingly frustrated with her loveless relationship with her husband and being raped by another character named Ànima, decides to leave her husband and live alone. As El Hachmi's narrator recounts dramatic episodes of her father's abuse toward her mother, she repeatedly refers to her mother as "Mila" in passing, sometimes offering no particular context or explanation for the comparison. For example, when Mimoun's wife and children first join him in Catalonia, the narrator refers to her mother, who dutifully dedicates herself to housework, as "una Mila amb mocador i cinturó de cordill" ("a Mila with headscarf and string belt") (170/150); later on, during a short-lived "truce" in which her father and mother tacitly agree not to fight, the narrator notes that

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<sup>12</sup> *Solitud* was published in 1905; Víctor Català is the pen name of Catalan woman writer Caterina Albert (1869-1966).

“la Mila no tenia ningú per primera vegada a la vida en un lloc tan lluny de tot” (“for the first time in her life Mila had nobody in a place that was so far from everywhere”) (177/157). Yet, the more this comparison is repeated, the more its relevance becomes clear: the reader begins to realize that the fictional Mila’s ultimate resistance against patriarchal culture, which forces her into an unhappy marriage and even subjects her to rape, mirrors the narrator’s mother’s growing defiance toward her husband; her mother’s resistance, in turn, foreshadows her daughters future rebellion. On one occasion, Mimoun’s wife refuses to give Mimoun money to spend on his mistress, in spite of his credible threats of violence. When his wife utters the words, “o la deixes, o et deixo” (“you leave her, or I leave you”), the narrator writes: “Jo no em vaig creure el que sentia, però era la meva mare que parlava, era la Mila que s’havia afartat de netejar capelles i relíquies, la Colometa que fugia de tot per trobar-se” (“I couldn’t believe what I was hearing, but it was mother speaking, it was Mila who had tired of cleaning chapels and relics, Colometa who was running away from everything in order to find herself”) (222/202-3). Clearly, the narrator is extremely surprised by her mother’s defiance. Furthermore, as the double comparison to both Mila from *Solitud* and Colometa from *Diamant* illustrates, she has only ever witnessed such feminist rebellion in fiction, but never in “real life.” The narrator does not hesitate to side with her mother in this battle: when, in that same chapter, her mother works up the courage to denounce Mimoun’s relationship with his mistress by slapping the mistress in the face, the narrator writes

that “jo vaig admirar la mare per ser més que una Mila, més que una Colometa, per ser de debò” (“I admired mother, because she was more than Mila, or Colometa, and was for real”) (223/203).

The narrator’s comparisons of her mother to Mila and Colometa are based on a deeply visceral identification with them. Clearly, female characters who resist the myriad forms of abuse, suffering and unhappiness that patriarchal culture has foisted on them offer the narrator her very first glimpse of a feminist imagination: although her entire childhood has been marked by Mimoun’s abuse and neglect, these fictional characters have enabled her to begin to imagine what life might be like under different circumstances. In doing so, they have stretched her mind to such an extent that she can only make sense of her mother’s rebellion in light of these fictions. As Ricci observes compellingly, these references also mark “the transubstantiation of daughter to mother”; in other words, the fictions of Víctor Català and Mercè Rodoreda enable the narrator to *feel* her mother’s suffering *as if it were in her own body*. Her solidarity with her mother is thus not based exclusively on her own bodily experience, but also on her mother’s. Recalling Cixous’ and Anzaldúa’s insights about how the desire for fictional identification both emerges from and changes the body, we can see how the connection and empathy the narrator feels with another “living” woman is mediated by the imaginary worlds of fiction (79). Fiction, in short, serves as a bridge from the narrator’s body to her mother’s.

As the novel progresses, the narrator draws several other comparisons between her own experiences and those of other female protagonists.<sup>13</sup> In one instance, when she and her family move from an apartment to a house, the narrator refers to their new dwelling as “la nostra casa a Mango Street però sense Lucy ni *chicanos*” (“our house on Mango Street, but no Lucy and no *chicanos*”). This comment, of course, is a transparent homage to Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros’ well-known novel, *The House on Mango Street* (230/210). Similarly, on another occasion, the narrator fears that her father will beat her after she realizes that he has seen her give her female teacher and a male friend two kisses on the cheek (a customary salutation in many parts of Europe). Although she notes that her father doesn’t actually hit her, she recalls that, “Només va dir no la tornaràs a veure i jo vaig sentir-me la Whoopy Goldberg a *El Color Púrpura*” (He just said that’s the last time you see her, and I felt like Whoopi Goldberg in *The Color Purple*) (270/249). This comment, of course, refers to the film version of African-American writer Alice Walker’s classic novel. In both of these references, El Hachmi’s narrator invokes young, female protagonists (Lucy from *Mango Street* and Celie, played by Whoopi Goldberg, from *The Color Purple*) who suffer extensively because of patriarchal violence, including various forms of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Similarly, both Lucy, who is Chicana, and Celie, who is African American also share our narrator’s

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<sup>13</sup> In the interest of space, I have chosen those references that I feel are most relevant, rather than attempting to examine them all exhaustively.

minority ethnic identity in a “first-world” country. Furthermore, over the course of their respective novels, both also strive to free themselves from the myriad forms of oppression that have shaped their lives. As with Mila and Colometa, the narrator’s identification with these characters is clearly deeply related to her own lived experiences of patriarchal violence at the hands of her tyrannical father and the patriarchal cultures of her country of origin and her adopted homeland.

However, the narrator’s imaginary relationships with Lucy and Celie are of particular interest because, unlike Mila and Colometa, they introduce the perspective of a woman who belongs to an ethnic minority. Ingenschay calls attention to this fact in his discussion of the narrator’s reference to Cisneros, noting that *Mango Street* belongs to both a “minority literature” and a “multicultural canon” (65). I suggest, however, that the narrator’s ability to identify with both Catalan and non-Catalan literary women echoes her critique of Catalan nationalism reinforces the transnational quality of her feminist critique. Just as El Hachmi writes in her autobiography that “*escriu per sentir-me més lliure, per desferme del meu propi enclaustrament, un enclaustrament fet de denominacions d’origen*” (“I write to feel more free, to liberate myself from my cloister, a cloister constructed of designations of origin”), her alternating identifications with female characters of different cultural origins suggests, once again, a desire to transcend dichotomies of “native” and “other” that have so deeply marked her experience as a migrant in Catalonia (14). Similarly, just as El Hachmi’s reworking of the pigeon

leitmotif demonstrates her critique of patriarchy on *both* sides of the Mediterranean, her feelings of empathy and solidarity with women of various national and ethnic backgrounds reiterates her resistance to the usual forms of *other-ing* imposed on migrant women and women of color.

The most dramatic example of fiction's corporeal impact occurs at the novel's end, when the narrator's uncle—her father's brother, who is referred to as his "rival number two"—spends a night at her house in Barcelona on his way to a conference in Paris. By this time, the narrator has divorced her husband and is living alone. Upon seeing her uncle for the first time in years, the narrator notes that there is a spark of desire between them. Although their encounter is ostensibly friendly, his lustful gaze causes her to feel an "excitació sobtada...que feia estremir de dalt a baix" ("sudden rush of excitement...that made me tremble from head to toe") (330-1/309-10). As a result, she begins to plan her father's demise: knowing his habit of spying on her, she intentionally leaves the blinds open so that he will be able to witness her scandalous sexual encounter with his rival. She then proceeds to have anal sex with her uncle, emphasizing, however, that this is an extremely pleasurable experience: "jo només de tenir-lo a sobre ja havia tingut un orgasme. Vaig tornar-hi quan em va fer mal i el dolor no se sabia on s'acabava o on era que continuava am el plaer" ("by the time he was on top of me I'd already had an orgasm. And I felt one again when he hurt me, and I couldn't decide where pain ended and pleasure began") (331-2/310). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mimoun falls right

into her trap: when she notices her father's face in the video intercom, she realizes that she is witnessing "un pare que ja no tornaria a ser patriarca, no pas amb mi, que el que havia vist no ho podria explicar" ("Father, who'd never again play the patriarch, not with me, because he could never tell anyone what he had seen") (332/311).

At first, the shock value of this novel's final episode might outshine any apparent relationship to the narrator's habit of reading fiction. Yet, while narrating the incident, the narrator compares herself to none other than Mercè Rodoreda two times. Pondering the possibility of sex with her uncle, she writes, "Jo no era Mercè Rodoreda, però havia d'acabar amb l'ordre que ja feia temps que em perseguia" ("I was no Mercè Rodoreda, but I had to put an end to the order of things that had been persecuting me for so long") (331/310). Shortly thereafter, the thought occurs to her again: "No sóc la Rodoreda, em deia, però la meva missió va més enllà de tot això, per què no? Per què no?" ("I'm not Rodoreda, I told myself, but my mission in life goes way beyond all this, so why not? Why not?") (331/310). While it may seem initially mysterious that the narrator would mention Rodoreda just before committing an incestuous act with her uncle, Ingenschay offers an observation that helps to clarify these references: when Rodoreda was twenty years old, she married her uncle, Joan Gurguí, who was fourteen years her senior, after obtaining a papal dispensation to do so (66). According to the *Associació d'escriptors en llengua catalana* (Association of Catalan Language Writers), Rodoreda "never accepted"

this marriage fully, considering it to be a “traumatic experience” and hence a source of suffering for a great part of her life (“Biografia – Mercè Rodoreda”).

Thus, the narrator’s appropriation of this detail from Rodoreda’s life is extremely striking. On one hand, she imitates Rodoreda by having sex with her uncle; on the other, she resignifies this gesture such that it no longer represents submission to patriarchal practices, but rather constitutes a definitive defiance of them. As a result, this episode is especially illustrative of the corporeal impact of fiction on the narrator. Although Rodoreda’s influence has already been made abundantly clear by the pigeon leitmotif and by references to *Mirall trençat*, the fact that the narrator chooses to enact her ultimate form of rebellion by reappropriating and resignifying this detail from Rodoreda’s life illustrates how Rodoreda’s fictions have inspired and empowered her to redefine her body and her sexuality on her own terms. The intensity of the orgasms she experiences during her encounter further emphasize this point, demonstrating that the narrator has finally achieved the corporeal “way out” of her “poltergeist” through orgasm, as she mentioned much earlier in the novel. Echoing Cixous and Anzaldúa’s insights on the intimate relationship of fiction to the body, the narrator’s personal revolution compellingly presents fiction as much more than a tool for escapism or “coping,” showing it instead to be a source of radical, transformative liberation.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that El Hachmi's work is fundamentally about undermining social, political and cultural barriers fabricated out of perceived notions of *difference*. For El Hachmi, the dismantling of difference is a form of "border thinking" that counteracts the prevalent problem of "stranger fetishism" in contemporary Catalan society. Although Catalan nationalist discourse takes pride in the supposedly "integrationist" nature of Catalan society, El Hachmi reveals Catalonia's sense of identity to be structured nonetheless on exclusions of both migrants (especially Moroccan) and of the rest of Spain. El Hachmi's autobiography, *Jo també sóc catalana*, demonstrates this point by illustrating her lived experience of discrimination. In doing so, she confirms Flesler's argument that both Spain and Catalonia regard contemporary Moroccan immigrants as reincarnations of a historical "Moor" against which their identities must be staked. Yet, by highlighting Spain and Catalonia's shared "othering" of migrants, she deflates the notions of *difference* often used to distinguish Catalonia from the rest of Spain. Her novel, *L'últim patriarca*, uses its intertextual relationship with *La plaça del diamant* to further attack the notion of *difference* upon which Catalan nationalism is predicated. Specifically, by holding up the mirror of a "patriarchal *other*" to Catalan society, this novel forces Catalan readers to confront their own reflection in that mirror, rather than displacing it on to cultures they desire to exclude. At the same

time, her novel articulates a compelling ode to the power of fiction by demonstrating how fictional identifications empower her narrator to discover new paths to freedom and autonomy from the clutches of patriarchal oppression. El Hachmi's work thus forces Catalonia to confront its hidden demons: if Catalonia is but a mirror image of both Morocco and the rest of Spain, there are no more reasons why she, too, cannot be Catalan.

### 3. Resurrecting Race through Cervantes: Francisco Zamora Lobo's Decolonial Reading of *Don Quijote*

On November 13, 1992, a Dominican migrant named Lucrecia Pérez was murdered by a neo-Nazi group in Aravaca, a prosperous suburb of Madrid. Spanish society was shocked: for many, it was the first time they had heard of a racist hate crime being committed on Spanish soil (Torregrosa and El Gheryb 8). Reactions were strong and immediate: nearly every sector of society, from the media, to major political parties, to the Catholic hierarchy, to ordinary citizens, to immigrants (both legal and not) weighed in on the matter through numerous venues and demonstrations (Calvo Buezas).

The impact of this crime reverberated for years. Reflecting on the murder in 2000, the activist organization *Derechos para tod@s* named the tragedy a "symbolic date" for the anti-racist movement in Spain more broadly because of the massive mobilization it inspired ("Ley de extranjería"). Furthermore, as Silvia Bermúdez demonstrates, over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, the murder of Lucrecia Pérez garnered numerous cultural responses in Spain, especially in the form of popular music. One of the most compelling of these responses was a collection of essays written by Francisco Zamora Lobo, an Equatorial Guinean exiled in Madrid, entitled *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca* (*How to be black and not die in Aravaca*, 1994). In these essays, Zamora takes the story of Lucrecia's death as a starting point for reflecting on the roots of contemporary racism in

Spanish society. As I will show, his analysis links contemporary forms of racism, such as anti-immigrant xenophobia, with historical ones, such as the Atlantic slave trade or the expulsion of the Jews. It examines racism not only at the level of Spain as a state and former imperial metropolis, but also at the level of Spain's regions (or "stateless nations," as they are sometimes called) and of Europe more generally.

But Zamora's text should not be mistaken for a unilateral condemnation of Spanish culture: on the contrary, his essays also seek out elements of Spanish culture that may constitute the basis of an anti-racist critique. For example, in the essay entitled "Negritud e Hispanidad" ("Negritude and the Hispanic World"), Zamora filters through numerous authors and literary works of the Spanish canon, arguing that some represent emblems of prejudice and intolerance (especially Quevedo), while declaring that others (such as García Lorca and the picaresque genre) constitute symbols of anti-racist solidarity. He concludes the essay by stating that, of the latter group of works, "El Quijote...pasa a ser libro de cabecera" (The *Quijote*...is the most important book") (112).

At first glance, the reader may be tempted to overlook this remark because it is not explained or developed almost at all. However, I argue in this chapter that Zamora's designation of Miguel de Cervantes' seventeenth-century masterpiece, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, as the supreme standard of anti-racism in Spain's literary canon merits careful consideration. Although this is the only mention of Cervantes' novel in *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca*, *Don Quijote* makes important appearances in two of Zamora's later

works: namely, his poem “Estefanía” (1998) and his novel *Conspiración en el green* (*Conspiracy on the Green*, 2009). These works both reference the *Quijote* explicitly and draw significantly on several of its key thematic concerns, especially the inseparable melding of fiction and reality. Thus, I read Zamora’s poem and novel as elaborations of the anti-racist reading of *Don Quijote* that our author first proposes in *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca*. I argue that Zamora exploits the *Quijote*’s blurring of fiction and reality in order to portray what he sees as the root causes of racism—namely, the transnational racial divide between blacks and whites, as well as national and supranational identity constructions such as “Spain,” “Europe” and “Africa”—as fictions that can be remolded and reconstructed.

However, in order to fully grasp Zamora’s reading (and re-writing) of the *Quijote*, and the critiques of racism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism that he derives from it, it is essential to consider his position as an Equatorial Guinean exile, and his relationship with the “canon” of other Equatorial Guinean writers. As I will show, Zamora’s ambivalent relationship with the construction of an Equatorial Guinean literary canon demands that his work be read *not only* as representative of Equatorial Guinean identity, as current criticism tends to frame him. Rather, I suggest that his shared concerns with other migrant writers, such as the Europe/Africa divide, the performance of identities, and the building, dismantling and recycling of literary canons,

allow his work to be read in dialogue with a much wider range of writers, including those I focus on in this dissertation.

My analysis is divided into four parts. In the first section, I begin by offering readers necessary contextual information about Equatorial Guinea and its literature. I then discuss Zamora's ambivalent relationship with the "canon" of Equatoguinean literature, given the emphasis in his writings on the artificiality of national identity. In the second part, I use Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality to examine Zamora's collection of essays, *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca*, especially his claim about the anti-racist significance of *Don Quijote*. In the final two sections, I explore how Zamora's poem "Estefanía" and his novel *Conspiración en el green* develop more fully his anti-racist reading of *Don Quijote*. I argue that these texts reveal how Zamora's interpretation of the *Quijote* epitomizes what Walter Mignolo calls "de-linking from the colonial matrix of power" ("De-linking" 455).

### **3.1 *Francisco Zamora and the Artificiality of "Guineidad"***

Before examining Zamora's works in depth, I will briefly overview the history of his homeland, Equatorial Guinea, and its complex relationship with Spain, its former European colonizer. I will also provide a brief overview of Equatorial Guinean literature, since Zamora's work is most often presented as representative of this recently

constructed national “canon.” However, in addition to providing context, this section of the chapter will also demonstrate Zamora’s resistance to being read exclusively through a nationalist lens, highlighting the critical possibilities that emerge from reading his work alongside migrant writers from other cultural contexts.

Equatorial Guinea, Zamora’s land of origin, is a tiny country in sub-Saharan Africa with less than a million residents. It is fundamentally multiethnic: although the Fang constitute the majority, there are significant minorities of Bubi, Ndowe and Annobonese. First colonized by the Portuguese in 1472, the territory was ceded to Spain in 1778 according to the terms of the Treaty of El Pardo. Yet, although Spain exploited the island economically, it did not begin to impose its language, culture and religion systematically on the island until the twentieth century. As Michael Ugarte notes, Spain’s increased interest in its small African colony was the result of intensified nationalist sentiment following the Spanish-American war of 1898, in which Spain lost its last Latin American colonies (*Africans in Europe* 22). Given the importance of colonialism to bolster nationalism at home in the wake of this loss, both Spanish dictators Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-30) and Francisco Franco (1939-75) heavily promoted Catholic education in the colony, emphasizing the teaching of Spanish and loyalty to Spain.

In response to international anticolonialist pressures, Spain granted Equatorial Guinea independence on October 12, 1968, and Francisco Macías Nguema was elected

president. However, in 1970, Macías transformed the country into a single-party state, inaugurating a dictatorship so intensely brutal and repressive that Ugarte terms it “a twentieth-century African holocaust” (*Africans in Europe* 25). Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, arguably Equatorial Guinea’s best known and most studied author, has termed the years of Macías’ reign “los años del silencio” (“the years of silence”) because of the dictator’s extreme suppression of all intellectual and artistic creativity. There was also “silence” in Spain on the atrocities of the Macías regime: embarrassed by the tragic state of its newly independent colony, the Francoist regime declared all matters relating to Equatorial Guinea to be “materia reservada” (“classified material”), thereby prohibiting the press from reporting on them. During this time, Equatorial Guinea’s economic and social infrastructures collapsed almost entirely, and a massive number of Equatorial Guineans, including writers and intellectuals such as Francisco Zamora, were forced into exile.

In 1979, Macías’ nephew, Teodoro Obiang, successfully executed a coup d’état against his uncle. Although Obiang’s claims of initiating democracy brought some exiles home, the reality of another repressive dictatorship forced many to leave once again. In the 1980s, it was discovered that Equatorial Guinea harbored vast subterranean oil reserves; this, of course, attracted the attention of major international energy corporations such as ExxonMobil, as well as the governments of Spain and France, who, as Ugarte notes, “tend to turn the other way in the face of human-rights abuses” (*Africans in Europe* 28). Although living conditions in Equatorial Guinea today are

extremely low (it is ranked among the very poorest of African countries), Igor Cusack nonetheless maintains that “the common citizen who maintains a low profile perhaps does not live in the same state of terror as in the Macías era” (“Literatura e identidad nacional” 176).

Equatorial Guinea’s passage from colonization, to independence, to dictatorship, to diaspora has profoundly marked Francisco Zamora’s life and works. Born in 1948 on the Equatorial Guinean island of Annobon, he is the son of Maplal Lobocho, a prominent Guinean poet and intellectual. He came to Spain to study at university, where he graduated with a degree in journalism in Madrid. However, due to the atrocities of the Macías regime, which came to power while he was studying, he never returned to Equatorial Guinea. He has since established himself as a journalist in Madrid, working as a sports editor at the newspaper *As* for many years. In addition to the essays of *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca*, his literary writings include two volumes of poetry: *Memoria de laberintos* (*Memory of Labyrinths*, 1999) and *Desde el Viyil y otras crónicas* (*From the Viyil and Other Chronicles*, 2008), as well as two novels, *Conspiración en el green* (2009) and *El Caimán de Kaduna* (2012).

Although many of Zamora’s literary works demonstrate a distinctively transnational perspective, literary anthologies and academic criticism often present his work through a nationalist lens—that is, as a staple figure of the Equatorial Guinean literary canon. The first major attempt to delineate the borders of this “canon” was

Donato Ndong-Bidyogo's 1984 *Antología de la literatura guineana*, in which Zamora's work was included. Ndong's introductory essay, "El marco de la literatura guineana" ("The Framework of Guinean Literature"), is usually regarded as the foundational essay on the "borders" of Equatorial Guinean literature. In it, Ndong states that Guinean literature—and therefore, the "Guineidad" that it reflects—is characterized by the essentially defining characteristics of "africanidad" (African-ness) and "hispanismo" (Hispanic-ness) (11). The objective of the anthology, Ndong asserts, is to reveal the shared characteristics of Equatorial Guinean literary works, which he calls "embriones de una cultura nacional" ("embryos of national culture") (15). Furthermore, he suggests that the writers showcased in the anthology are all committed to producing socially engaged works, since, in his opinion, being an African writer requires "un compromiso continuo que ejerza una acción sobre la sociedad" ("a continuous commitment that exerts action upon society" (27).

Having articulated his vision of uniting literature with nation-building, Ndong carefully defines what does and does not constitute Equatorial Guinean literature. For example, he says, the Equatorial Guinean canon must exclude Guineans who wrote before Equatorial Guinea was a Spanish colony (such as Juan Latino, the "probably" Guinean sixteenth century professor at the University of Granada) (16). It must also exclude twentieth-century Spanish authors who lived in, and wrote about, Equatorial Guinea, regardless—as Ndong himself admits—of the "decisive" impact these

Spaniards had on later generations of Guinean writers<sup>1</sup> (16). Yet, says Ndongo, the canon *should* include Equatorial Guineans who wrote during the colonial period, in spite of their essentially pro-colonial stance (a fact observed both by Ndongo and by many critics<sup>2</sup>). Also included on the list are writers whose potential “Guinean-ness” might be disputed by some, such as Raquel Ilonbé, who, although born in Equatorial Guinea, has a Spanish father and has lived in Spain since she was two years old.

Although Ndongo’s premises call attention to the underlying ambiguities of defining a national identity, they have been, by and large, accepted by later critics.<sup>3</sup> As Sabrina Brancato points out, Ndongo’s efforts to construct an Equatorial Guinean canon have been complemented by those of numerous other scholars who “feel the pressing need to define its boundaries, point out its particularities, and distinguish it from other national literatures in Africa” (“Voices lost” 6). Chief amongst these distinguishing characteristics is the notion that Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking nation in Africa, and that this Hispanic heritage, together with its indigenous African cultures, endows the country and its literature with a unique identity. But it is not only the literary community who clings to this notion of national identity: as Igor Cusack

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<sup>1</sup> Ndongo mentions novelists such as Abelardo de Unzueta, José María Vilá, Iñigo de Aranzadi, Marcelo Romero and Teodoro Crespo.

<sup>2</sup> See Ndongo (“Marco,” p. 22), Cusack (p. 216), Ngom (“Introducción”, p. 18-19).

<sup>3</sup> The only significant revision to Ndongo’s essay was offered by Mbaré Ngom in his 2000 anthology (which he co-edited with Ndongo). In the Introduction, Ngom proposes to replace Ndongo’s use of the term “hispanoafriano” (Hispano-African) to describe Equatorial Guinean literature with the term “hispano-negroafriano” (Hispanic-Black-African), presumably to emphasize the importance of blackness for this literature’s uniqueness.

observes, the current dictatorship “has unashamedly used Spain’s desire to perpetuate its own culture in Africa as a ploy in appealing for development aid” (“Hispanic and Bantu Inheritance” 214). For Benita Sampedro, the idea of Equatorial Guinea’s exceptionally African and Hispanic national identity has been so frequently reiterated in both political and literary spheres that it has become a “cliché” whose “centrality can be interrogated” (“Rethinking the Archive” 341).

Ndongo’s vision of literature as a nation-building project has been echoed by critics and scholars alike. For example, Ndongo’s initial 1984 anthology was updated and expanded in 2000 and 2011<sup>4</sup>. However, the most recent anthology, Ngom and Nistal’s *Nueva Antología de la Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial*, does not present Equatorial Guinean works as “embryos” of a canon, as Ndongo did; rather, as Basilio Rodríguez Cañada states in the “Presentación,” this volume declares the canon to be “por fin consolidad[o]” (“finally consolidated”) (15). The assumption that a national canon has been “consolidated” also seems to underlie Igor Cusack’s argument that Equatorial Guinea’s emerging literature generally complements other processes of national identity construction. For Cusack, these other factors include the government’s insistence on a common “Hispanic” and “Bantu” identity, as well as the fact that many Equatorial Guineans have shared important, life-altering experiences such as exile, particularly in

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<sup>4</sup> These include: *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial (Antología)*, edited by Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo and Mbaré Ngom (2000); *Literatura emergente en español*. Onomo-Abena, Sosthé’ne. (2004); and *Nueva antología de la literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial*, edited by M’bare N’gom y Gloria Nistal (2011).

Spain, and the memory of state-inflicted terror (“Hispanic and Bantu inheritance” 216). While I accept Cusack’s analysis of how state-sponsored and sociological influences have helped to forge Equatorial Guinea’s national identity, I question his assumption that literature, too, should unilaterally be regarded as yet another element of “nation-building.” For, as Sabrina Brancato cogently observes, the most primordial feature of the the so-called Equatorial Guinean canon is that “it is a literature mostly produced in the diaspora, and that this diaspora is mostly located in Spain” (“Voices lost” 8). Furthermore, as I will show, not all Equatorial Guinean writers are as certain as Ndongo about what “Guineidad” means.

The presumption that Equatorial Guinea’s literature both emerges from and reinforces a coherent sense of national identity also underlies a great number of academic articles, special issues and monographs that are being produced on Equatorial Guinean writers. In much of this scholarship, there is a noticeable tendency to approach Equatorial Guinean writers in clusters.<sup>5</sup> Although this comparative approach is valuable, it often uncritically assumes that writers who share nationality jointly articulate a coherent, national voice. Even scholars such as Benita Sampedro and Michael Ugarte, whose excellent work has emphasized the fractures and complexities of Equatorial

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the anthologies, notable examples of the “clustering” phenomenon include critical studies by include Marvin Lewis, Dosinda García Alvite, and Clelia Olimpia Rodríguez.

Guinean identity<sup>6</sup>, have also contributed to this tendency by approaching multiple Equatorial Guinean writers at once, thereby privileging their shared nationality as a criterion for comparison. Of course, not every Guinean writer is always studied this way: Donato Ndongo, in particular, has been studied as an individual literary voice far more than any other of his compatriots. As I write this chapter, he is the only Equatorial Guinean writer whose work has been examined on its own in a monograph-length study.<sup>7</sup> His work has also received significant attention by leading Hispanists in the U.S. and abroad.<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is also worth noting that, while interpretations of his work often highlight his nuanced treatment of questions of national identity, Ndongo remains one of the strongest defenders of Equatorial Guinean literary nationalism, and continues to defend the importance of maintaining a national canon in numerous interviews.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>In "Rethinking the Colonial Archive," Sampedro argues for moving beyond the task of delineating Equatorial Guinean literary exceptionalism and putting its writers in dialogue with other postcolonial and African studies; however, some of her earlier work, such as "African Poetry in Spanish Exile," reproduces the tendency of isolating Equatorial Guinean writers with each other. Similarly, while Michael Ugarte's book, *Africans in Europe*, theorizes the complexities of Equatorial Guinean writing through the concept of "emixile" (a notion that combines emigration and exile), his study nonetheless focuses exclusively on Equatorial Guinean writers.

<sup>7</sup>In fact, Ndongo's work has been the subject of two monographs: Joseph Désiré Otabela and Sosthène Onomo Abena's book, *Entre estética y compromiso: La obra de Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo*, as well as Joseph Désiré Otabela's book, *Literatura rebelde desde el exilio: Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo*.

<sup>8</sup>Ndongo's novels *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *Los poderes de la tempestad* have been studied either individually or jointly by: Brad Epps, Michael Ugarte (in both "Spain's Heart of Darkness" and *Africans in Europe*), Joseph Désiré Otabela, René Peña Govea, and Alice Driver. His latest novel, *El metro*, has been studied in articles by Chad Montuori and Beatriz Celaya, and is the subject of a chapter of Ugarte's book, *Africans in Europe* ("El metro: Saga of the African Emigrant.")

<sup>9</sup>See Ndongo's interviews with: Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego and Laurence Prescott (346-7); Michael Ugarte (226-30); Dorothy Odartey-Wellington (162-3); and Eliza Rizo (261-2).

Yet, despite the tendency of some writers and critics to insist on the notion of an “Equatorial Guinean literature,” Equatorial Guinean writers themselves have expressed surprisingly heterogeneous opinions about the canon they belong to. One of the most interesting examples of this diversity of opinions is to be found in Mbaré Ngom’s collection of interviews with Equatorial Guinean writers, *Diálogos con Guinea*. In this text, a surprising number of writers expressed disagreement with Ndongo’s premises about what constitutes Guinean literature. For example, Leoncio Evita, the writer repeatedly credited by Ndongo and Ngom as having produced the first Equatorial Guinean novel<sup>10</sup>, stated that Spanish writers who lived in and wrote about Equatorial Guinea *should*, in fact, to be considered part of Equatorial Guinea’s literature (this, of course, directly contradicts the opinion Ndongo expressed in “Marco”) (35). Other writers, in turn, voiced doubt about Evita’s established place as the author of Equatorial Guinea’s first novel: although several categorized this novel as part of “Guinean” literature, others considered it to belong to the realm of “colonial” literature.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the writers expressed differing relationships with the Spanish language: although all of them use it as the language of their works, some claimed it enthusiastically as a mother tongue,

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<sup>10</sup> Evita’s novel, *Cuando los combes luchaban*, was written in 1953. Ndongo discusses the significance of its publication in “Marco” (12) and names it the foundational novel of Equatorial Guinean literature in his interview with Ngom (80). Ngom also names this novel as Equatorial Guinea’s first novel on numerous occasions: in the Introduction to *Diálogos con Guinea* (20), in the Introduction to *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial* (19), and again in *Nueva antología de la literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial* (28).

<sup>11</sup> Those who categorized this novel as “colonial” include: Raquel Ilonbé: (63). Ciríaco Bokesa Napo (105), Antimo Esono Ndongo (131), and Jerónimo Rope Bomabá (146). María Nsué Angüe claimed it as Guinean (117). Leoncio Evita, the author of the novel, said it was both colonial and Guinean (35).

while others said they used it only because of its practical value; some even said that they would prefer to write in their indigenous African languages if it were not so impractical to do so.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, there was also dissent about Ndongo's idea that African literature necessarily had to express social commitment: Raquel Ilonbé found this idea to detract from the universal qualities of her work (64), while María Nsúé Angüe observed that literary social engagement was not distinctly African at all (117).

Two interviews, in particular, expressed outright resistance to the notion of an Equatorial Guinean canon: namely, those of Francisco Zamora and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, the latter of whom is known as "Equatorial Guinea's leading nonexile writer" (Lewis 55). When asked about the present state of Equatorial Guinean writing, Zamora stated, "No existe" ("It doesn't exist") (110); when asked about its future, he stated that "Guinea no tiene futuro alguno, y menos literario" ("Guinea has no future at all, much less a literary one") (112). Similarly, when asked about whether African writers had a duty to produce socially engaged literature, he evaded the question altogether, responding ironically that writers should become businessmen to make money for Africa; he also stated that Leoncio Evita's novel (supposedly Equatorial Guinea's first) was not a novel at all, but "periodismo mal hecho" ("badly done journalism") (111).

Acknowledging his friendship with Ndongo, Zamora also quipped: "Como sé que es

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<sup>12</sup>Those who refer to Spanish as a mother tongue include: Raquel Ilonbé (66), Ciríaco Bokesa Napo (106), María Nsúé Angüe (117), and Jerónimo Rope Bomabá (147). Those who refer to it as a "foreign" language whose value lies in its practical utility include: Marcelo Ensema Nsang (43), Julián Bibang Oyee (51), Antimo Esono Ndongo (134), Maximiliano Nkogo Esono (139).

amigo mío, me permito la licencia de pensar que está completamente loco” (“Since I know he is my friend, I take the liberty of thinking he is completely crazy”) (111).

In a similar vein, Ávila Laurel refused to answer almost any questions regarding the formation of an Equatorial Guinean canon, repeatedly claiming to have insufficient knowledge to address the topics he was asked about.<sup>13</sup> Although Marvin Lewis attributes his refusal to answer these questions to youthful inexperience (55), I argue that both Ávila Laurel and Zamora responded to the questions in a tongue-in-cheek way: their answers are indicative of a reluctance to be woven in to a fundamentally reductive narrative of their country’s “national literature.” Ávila Laurel has reiterated this opinion on later occasions: in Elisa Rizo’s joint interview with him and Ndongó from 2005, he strongly challenged Ndongó’s insistence that the Spanish language is a defining feature of Equatorial Guinean literature, arguing that language in itself cannot be used to “[definir] una literatura de otra” (“define one literature from another”) (261). Likewise, in a 2005 article, he argues that the questions of “who” constitute Guinean writers, and “what” is the subject of their writing, are not clear-cut at all (“Notas”). Contrasting himself with Ndongó, whose 1997 novel, *Los poderes de la tempestad*, strongly denounces the atrocities of the Macías regime, he concedes that he, too, “se siente conminado a

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<sup>13</sup> In this interview, Ávila Laurel stated that he was not knowledgeable enough to divide Equatorial Guinean literature into periods (153), or to make a judgment about Evita’s novel (154), or to decide whether Spanish writers who lived in Guinea should be considered part of Guinean literature (154). He also stated that he had no future projects regarding literature (clearly a false statement, given his numerous writings after that date) (156), and that the only African writer he had ever heard of was the Nigerian Wole Soyinka, a Nobel Prize winner, and that he had never read him (156).

tocar ciertos temas, pues es creencia general que los escritores deben erigirse en denunciadore de las violaciones de los que gobiernan" ("feels pressured to touch on certain topics, since it is a general belief that writers must denounce the violations of those who govern") (173). However, in this respect, Ávila Laurel ironically claims to be guilty of a fatal error. Referring to himself in third person, he acknowledges that in his 2001 novel, *El desmayo de Judas*, he "no sólo no se erige en defensor de los derechos de la gente de su tierra, sino que ni siquiera habla de ella" ("not only does not stand up to defend the rights of people from his land, but he doesn't even talk about his land") (173). For Ávila Laurel, the use of literature to construct "Guineidad" should not be the writer's primary task: defending the notion of literary "universality," he concludes that "Primero somos del mundo, después guineanos" ("We are from the world first, Guineans second")(173).

The internal disagreement amongst these writers about what constitutes "Guineidad" or "Guinean" literature gives new urgency to Benita Sampedro's already compelling argument that "The time has come to move beyond obstructive representational markers and anxieties [of national identity]...and to allow Equatorial Guinea a space in contemporary debates relating to colonialism in Africa, Western imperial practices, and the diverse decolonization strategies" (341). In this chapter, I argue that Francisco Zamora's work offers a key step toward "moving beyond" the question of defining "Guineidad" and embracing alternative decolonial projects. For this

reason, I follow the lead of Susan Martin-Márquez, whose discussion of Zamora alongside other postcolonial and migrant writers in Spain suggests that these writers jointly contribute to the “disorientation” of Spain and Europe’s identities (*Disorientations*). Yet, I suggest that his writings accentuate the fundamental artificiality of Equatorial Guinean identity, as well: for Zamora, it is not only Spain’s nationalism that is “fictitious,” but nationalism in general. As I hope to demonstrate, Zamora’s acute awareness of the “fictitiousness” of nationalisms, including that of the land where he was born *and* the one where he lives in exile, is a crucial element of his reinterpretation of the *Quijote*, a work for which the overlapping and melding of fiction and reality is a central thematic concern. Furthermore, the parallelism he establishes between the “fictitiousness” of national identities and the “fictitiousness” of the *Quijote* portrays deeply entrenched structures of oppression, such as race or the Europe/Africa divide, as “fictions” that, like the *Quijote*, can be reinterpreted, reimagined, or even completely rewritten.

### **3.2 *Zamora’s Essays: Recipes Against Racism***

In this section, I turn to the text where Zamora first names the *Quijote* as an inspiration for an anti-racist worldview: the collection of essays, *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca*. Written in 1994 as a response to Lucrecia Pérez’s tragic death, this text

presents racism as both transcultural and transhistorical: hardly a “new” phenomenon, Zamora shows it to be deeply embedded into the construction of Spanish national identity. To further illustrate this point, I will rely on Aníbal Quijano’s concept of “coloniality,” and Walter Mignolo’s related concept of “decolonial thinking.” Quijano defines “coloniality” in the following passage:

What is termed globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power. One of the fundamental axes of this model of power is...the idea of race, a mental construction that...pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism. The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality. (533)

In this excerpt, Quijano establishes an important linkage between the foundation of European colonial power in the sixteenth century, the spread of capitalism, the formation of the concept of race, and globalization today. This linkage is crucial for several reasons. For Quijano, “coloniality” and “globalization” —in spite of the several centuries that have passed since the beginnings of European colonialism— are not seen as distant, or opposite moments; on the contrary, the contemporary, globalized world *presupposes* coloniality. This world order, he suggests, is based precisely upon a “racial axis” that divides Europe (and its contemporary extension, North America) from the rest of the world.

Walter Mignolo builds on Quijano's analysis, noting that "coloniality at large goes beyond decolonization and nation-building: coloniality is the machine that reproduces subalternity in the form of global coloniality in the network society" ("Coloniality of Power" 426). In other words, decolonization and the formation of nation-states in the Global South do not constitute challenges to coloniality, but rather, are by-products of it. As a result, the end of coloniality cannot be brought about by a mere end to colonialism; for that goal, Mignolo writes, one needs a "de-linking from the colonial matrix of power" ("Delinking" 455), that is, a "de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality" (453). The tension proposed by Quijano and Mignolo, in which modernity/coloniality gives rise to decolonial resistance, is perfectly palpable in Zamora's work. On one hand, his analysis of racism as transcultural and transhistorical parallels Quijano's notion of "coloniality," which reveals the connections between colonialism, modernity, capitalism and globalization. On the other hand, Zamora's portrayal of the fictitiousness of national identities in *both Europe and Africa* can be read as an "epistemic shift" away from the legacy of colonialism, including that of postcolonial nationalism, which insists on reifying European-produced borders as essential identity traits.

One of the most striking ways in which Zamora's essays portray the problem of coloniality is through their superimposition of contemporary forms of racial exclusion onto historical ones. This is immediately noticeable in the title of the first essay: "Prólogo

para un gachupín o chapetón que pensaba que su país no era racista" ("Prologue for a *gachupín* or *chapetón* who thought his country wasn't racist"). Of particular interest is the title's use of the pejorative slang terms "gachupín" and "chapetón" to refer to Spaniards. These epithets, once used to refer to Spanish emigrants in Latin American countries, articulate the prologue's intention of illustrating to Spaniards who were shocked by the hate crime of Aravaca that racism has existed throughout Spain's history. Yet, by invoking the terms "gachupín" and "chapetón," Zamora superimposes Spain's history of emigration onto its contemporary situation as a recipient of immigration. This tactic has two effects. First, it invites Spanish readers to empathize with contemporary migrations through the lens of their own cultural (or familial, or personal) memories of uprooting and exclusion. Second, this title deflates Spain's performance of "European-ness:" as Jo Labanyi observes, post-Franco Spain has often demonstrated an "obsess[ion] with creating the image of a brash, young cosmopolitan nation," especially around the highly symbolic year of 1992, when Lucrecia Pérez was killed ("History and Hauntology" 65).<sup>14</sup> In contrast to this performance, Zamora's use of terms such as *gachupín* and *chapetón* calls attention to Spain's not-so-distant history of impoverishment and mass displacement, especially in the wake of civil war and dictatorship (Labanyi 65).

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<sup>14</sup>In 1992, the year in which Pérez died, several important events took place that marked Spain's performance of a new, European identity: namely, the Barcelona Olympics, the Quincentenary of Columbus' first voyage to the Americas, and the World Expo in Seville.

The superimposition of history onto the present occurs again immediately, in the prologue's first paragraph:

El primer moro a quien España aplicó la Ley de Extranjería se llamaba Boabdil, aunque los castellanos viejos decíanle *El Chico*. Y, llegada aquella atroz nueva en aquella mala hora, de nada le valió exhibir, lloroso, dicen, ante aquellos dos bárbaros, Fernando e Isabel, una tarjeta de residencia, signada, hacía ocho siglos, en la ciudad de Granada....embarcáronle en una patera y através del Estrecho arrojáronle a una tierra, África, que le resultaba tan desconocida, áspera y remota como Uganda para un botiguer chueta.<sup>15</sup> (11)

(The first Moor to whom Spain applied the Immigration Law was named Boabdil, although the Old Castilians called him *El Chico*. And, when the terrible news arrived at that fateful hour, it did him no good to show, tearfully, as they say, his residence permit to those two barbarians, Ferdinand and Isabella, stamped eight centuries ago in the city of Granada....they put him on a *patera* [makeshift boat] and threw him across the Strait to a land, Africa, which was just as unknown, rough and remote to him as Uganda would be to a *botiguer chueta*.)

In this passage, Zamora appropriates dominant contemporary terminology about immigration ("Immigration law," "*patera*," "residence permit") to describe the exile of King Muhammad XII (also known as Boabdil), the last Muslim ruler of Granada before that city's surrender to the Catholic Monarchs in 1492. Specifically, he draws a cheeky, yet incisive parallelism between the "ley de extranjería" of the 1980's and early 1990s, which emphasized protecting Spanish borders from outsiders<sup>16</sup>, to the conquest of

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<sup>15</sup> "Botiguer" is a Catalan word meaning "store owner," while "chueta" refers to a *converso* (a Jew who converted to Christianity) from the island of Mallorca.

<sup>16</sup> As Désirée Kleiner-Liebau explains, the first "ley de extranjería" was adopted in 1985 and lasted throughout the 1990s. Although this law initially conceived of immigration to Spain as "temporary," by 1990, the government issued a report acknowledging that permanent immigration was also a major issue, and that efforts to promote integration and combat xenophobia were thus necessary (86). Yet, another important adjustment came in 1991, when Spain entered into the Schengen agreement. While this agreement opened borders between several European states, it forced Spain "to tighten up its regulations on Visa and

Granada and the subsequent exile of Boabdil and his family. Although the term “Moor” properly refers to historical Muslims who lived in Spain until 1492, Zamora uses it as a double-entendre, simultaneously invoking the colloquial usage of this term to refer to contemporary Moroccan migrants in Spain. The notion that a Moorish King would be sent to Africa in a *patera* is especially outlandish: *pateras*, of course, are normally used by low-income, economic migrants travelling from Morocco to Spain, not by royalty or nobility travelling the other way. And yet, the conflation of Boabdil with contemporary migrants is eerily compelling: the historical, geographical and class differences that separate him from today’s migrants are eclipsed by their shared identity as “Moors,” which, somehow, renders them interchangeable in their fundamental *other*-ness.

By highlighting the interconnectedness of both the expulsion of the Moors and historical Spanish emigration with contemporary immigration to Spain, Zamora articulates a strong critique of Spanish nationalism and the “European-ness” which it asserts. On one hand, by emphasizing the parallelism between the expulsion of Moors and the *ley de extranjería*, he calls attention to Spain’s historical and contemporary attempts to “purify” itself of *others*, whether through its past obsession with *limpieza de sangre* or its current desire to protect national and European borders from a supposed

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entry to its territory;” this, in turn, meant North Africans would now be required to obtain visas to enter Spain (86).

Muslim “invasion.” At the same time, by reminding Spaniards of their history as a nation of exiles and immigrants, he confounds contemporary Spaniards’ ability to differentiate themselves from migrants, thereby questioning the ethnic and ideological borders that frame Spain and Europe.

The prologue goes on to offer a scathing overview of racism in modern Spanish history, citing the expulsion of Jews, the colonization of the Americas, the subjugation of the indigenous, and, in particular, the African slave trade as deeply racist chapters in Spain’s history. Zamora’s overall point is to demonstrate that in spite of Spain’s long history of racial prejudice, Spanish people’s critical sensibility toward this racism has remained extremely limited. Thus, for Zamora, racism in Spain is comparable to an “hidra adormecida” (“sleeping hydra”): although Spaniards were caught by surprise when Lucrecia Pérez was killed in 1992, Zamora illustrates that the sudden reappearance of virulent racism should have shocked no one (21).

The second essay, “Trabajar como un negro” (“Work like a black man”),<sup>17</sup> builds on these observations, examining the history of slavery on Spanish territory itself. Noting that the slave trade was, of course, far more numerically and economically significant in the colonies than in continental Spain, Zamora nonetheless asserts that “no hacía falta viajar hasta la lejana América para trabajar como negro, y, de paso, probar el

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<sup>17</sup> The expression “Trabajar como un negro” is frequently used in Spanish to indicate hard work; its usage is roughly equivalent to the English expression “work like a dog.” Zamora deploys it ironically to highlight how the expression calls to mind the history of black enslavement, while reinforcing stereotypes of black servitude and inferiority.

rigor del látigo del hombre blanco" ("it was not necessary to travel to faraway America to work like a black man, and, in the process, to feel the severity of the white man's whip") (28). He then discusses several of Spain's regions, mentioning historical examples of extreme cruelty by Spanish slaveowners toward their slaves in various parts of the peninsula.<sup>18</sup> He cites testimony in Catalan of two slaves who fled after being severely mistreated and beaten by their Catalan masters (28-9)<sup>19</sup>. Then, declaring that blacks in the Valencia region could be lynched "al más puro estilo de Alabama o Aravaca" ("just like in Alabama or Aravaca") (29), Zamora recounts an incident from the year 1520 that involved the death of a slave named Mateo.<sup>20</sup> He explains that Mateo was first shot by one townsman, then pierced with a sword by another, "después de lo cual la multitud le hizo pedazos" ("after which the crowd tore him to bits") (Danvila y Collado 90, qtd in Zamora 29-30). Finally, Zamora touches briefly upon violence against slaves in other regions, including: Galicia, where a slave was purchased to fill the job of executioner, which no one else in the town wanted<sup>21</sup> (32); Andalusia, where, according to

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<sup>18</sup> In this part of the text, Zamora mentions numerous manuscripts but does not offer bibliographic information to indicate their authors, titles or locations. I have traced his sources where possible, but in several instances, the historical episodes he mentions are impossible to verify.

<sup>19</sup> It is unclear what Catalan manuscripts Zamora is citing here.

<sup>20</sup> Zamora cites the text of this book without referencing it; however, I have traced the quoted material to Danvila y Collado's 1884 work, *La Germanía de Valencia: Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de la Historia*.

<sup>21</sup> Again, Zamora does not cite his source; however, I have traced the narrative he cites to a 1929 historical article called "La golla del esclavo" by Galician writer and historian Marcelo Macías.

Zamora, slaves were commonly owned as late as the nineteenth century<sup>22</sup> (30), and “Euskadi,” or the Basque Country, where “judíos, moros, mulatos o negros” (“Jews, Moors, mulattoes and blacks”) were outright forbidden from living in the first place<sup>23</sup> (32).

Zamora’s catalogue of racial brutality in peninsular Spain complements his prologue, which discusses racism in the Spanish empire more broadly. But I believe that his careful effort to survey so many of Spain’s regions serves an additional purpose. Although he does not say so explicitly, his discussion of “regional” racism, which includes the three regions with particularly strong nationalist movements (Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia), suggests that he is exploring what Sara Ahmed calls “the violent collision of regimes of difference,” which, in this case, refers to the tension between racial diversity, on one hand, and Spain’s internal nationalisms, on the other (“Animated Borders” 45). Although Spain’s peripheral nationalisms often present their identities as in conflict with the identity of the larger Spanish state, Zamora illustrates that, throughout the course of Spain’s history, racism emerged just as strongly on the

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<sup>22</sup> Since Zamora does not cite his source, this claim is difficult to verify. Although slavery in peninsular Spain was abolished in 1837, Arturo Morgado García argues that it was eliminated *de facto* from Spanish territory in 1766, when Sidi Ahmet el Gazel, the Moroccan ambassador, purchased and freed approximately 800 slaves in Barcelona, Cádiz and Seville (94-5). Furthermore, citing the work of Vicente Graullera Sanz, Morgado García claims that the last known reference to the sale of a slave in peninsular Spain occurred in Valencia in 1790 (95).

<sup>23</sup> Susan Martín-Márquez corroborates this statement, writing that claims of racial purity have historically been very significant to Basque nationalist movements. These claims were based on the notion that the Basque region had never been conquered by Moors, and on the fact that “several Basque regions had limited immigration to those who could prove ‘blood purity’, and expelled from their territories any resident unable to do so” (*Disorientations* 44).

local level (i.e. individual slaveowners in various regions) as it did on the national level (i.e., Ferdinand and Isabella ordering expulsions).

It is especially significant that Zamora refers to the Basque Country as “Euskadi,” its name in the Basque tongue, and that he cites the testimony of runaway slaves in Catalonia in the original Catalan (offering Spanish translations in footnotes). In a text otherwise written completely in Spanish, these instances of linguistic alterity immediately call attention to the contentious politics surrounding the usage and preservation of these languages in contemporary Spain: both the Catalan and Basque languages are, in and of themselves, foundational symbols of the nationalist movements they represent. Given the fact that Zamora’s text was written in 1994, less than twenty years after Franco’s death, we can be sure that that the memory of Francoism’s erasure of these languages from the public sphere was acutely strong then, as it is today.<sup>24</sup> However, by examining the history of Spanish racism at the local and regional level, Zamora once again superimposes history onto the present. In light of the tendency of regional nationalisms to present themselves as “oppressed” peoples, especially in the post-Franco era, Zamora instead illustrates that, historically, they, too, were extremely “oppressive” to those they deemed inferior—just like their “Spanish” counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> It is well known that during the reign of the dictator Francisco Franco (1939-1975), Spain’s regional languages, including Catalan, Basque, and Galician, were forbidden from being used in the public sphere.

<sup>25</sup> Both Martin Marquez (*Disorientations*) and Flesler also argue that Spain’s regional nationalisms are simultaneously based not only on a rejection of Spanish nationalism, but also of foreigners. Zamora himself also makes a particularly strong critique of Catalan identity in his poem, “Salvad a Copito.” This poem tells

Many of Zamora's other essays extend his excoriating critique of racism in Spain, Europe and the Western world more broadly. In "Humor negro" ("Black humor"), he compiles an appallingly long list of popular sayings and jokes with racist punchlines that have circulated throughout Spain's history. Similarly, in "Por qué el blanco es tan listo y el negro tan lerdo" ("Why the White Man is So Smart and the Black Man So Slow"), he acerbically surveys European countries' repeated installation of easily manipulated puppet dictatorships in postcolonial Africa. Furthermore, in "Pene blanco, pene negro" ("White Penis, Black Penis"), he discusses the construction of racial others as sexual predators in both early modern Spain and in the contemporary West.

And yet, while his blistering criticisms of Spanish and European racism may seem unrelentingly cynical, his essay entitled "Negritud e Hispanidad" ("Negritude and Hispanity") offers a touch of optimism. In this essay, he surveys the Spanish literary canon, selecting those texts which might lend themselves to an anti-racist interpretation, while dismissing others as irrecoverable icons of racism. Needless to say, because his observations span a very wide array of genres and works over numerous centuries, it would be impossible to evaluate them all in the space of this chapter: as Ugarte notes, "his words...on the differences between Quevedo and Cervantes in terms of racial

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the story of Copito de Nieve, world's only known albino gorilla, which was born in Equatorial Guinea but was transferred to the Barcelona zoo, where he became a symbol of Barcelona's identity until his death in 2003. For a compelling study of this poem, see Benita Sampedro, "Salvando a Copito de Nieve."

discourse are worthy of an academic treatise" (104). Hence, I will briefly focus on those works he designates as "anti-racist" because of their potential for being reimagined in an African context: namely, the prose novella *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554, author unknown); and, of course, Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, which was published in two volumes in 1605 and 1615, respectively.

Widely considered as the foundational example of the picaresque genre,<sup>26</sup> the *Lazarillo de Tormes* tells the story of Lázaro González Pérez, a roguish young boy from Salamanca who must serve a series of masters in order to survive. Zamora is particularly drawn to this novel's representation of two black characters: Zaide, the stepfather of Lazarillo, who is jailed for stealing, and whose absence initiates Lazarillo's life of servitude; and Lazarillo's young, interracial stepbrother (born of his mother and stepfather). Fascinated by the scandalous scenario of a lower-class woman cohabiting with a black man and even bearing him a son in sixteenth century Spain, Zamora wonders what might happen if the unknown author of this classic were discovered to be a mulatto as well:

Pudo ser así: esclava raptada en Annobón<sup>27</sup> por negrero portugués, joven, bella, en casa de señor importante con deseos de restregar la cebolleta en sangre caliente. El pajar. Una noche fría de invierno. Resultado, un mulato. Maravedises, a cambio de silencio, estudios lejos de casa del hijo bastardo, sin apellidos, afición por la literatura...y, como venganza, el libro genial desgarrado

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<sup>26</sup> A picaresque novel is usually narrated from the perspective of a person of humble social origins, who scrapes by in a corrupt society by using his own wits and cunning. The genre is often humorous in nature, but exposes social injustice through its realism.

<sup>27</sup> Annobon is an island off the coast of Equatorial Guinea; it is also the place of Zamora's birth.

de un mestizo, y a la hora de firmar, un silencio elocuente. ¿A que resulta una teoría plausible, un excelente pajote mental? (99-100)

(It could have been like this: A female slave kidnapped in Annobon by a Portuguese slave merchant; a young, beautiful woman in the home of an important man with a strong desire to get his rocks off. The haystack. A cold winter's night. The result: a mulatto child. Gold coins in exchange for silence, studies for the bastard child far away from home, no last name, a passion for literature... and, for revenge, the marvelous, hoarse book of a mestizo, and when it's time to sign, an eloquent silence. Doesn't that sound like a plausible theory, an excellent mental wank?)

Zamora's desire to fill the void of the *Lazarillo's* unknown author with a mulatto voice is extremely interesting. On one hand, we might be tempted to read this fantasy as an attempt to counter the silencing of black voices in the history of Spanish literature and culture, which, as Zamora shows, is full of (racist) discourse *about* blacks, but rarely or never offers them a platform for self-expression. On the other hand, Zamora's theory is so outlandish that, by calling it "plausible," he accentuates its fantastical nature; similarly, he derides his own musings by calling them a "pajote mental" ("mental wank"). Hence, Zamora is not really suggesting that Spain needs an authentically black or mulatto literary voice to cure its racism. Rather, what makes the *Lazarillo* suitable to anti-racist interpretation is its malleability and flexibility: as a seemingly authorless work of fiction that has been endlessly read, taught, studied and reread over the centuries, this text can serve as an expression of histories, experiences and subjectivities far removed from its own particular context. For Zamora, these might include the plight of blacks in contemporary Spain, or the inhabitants of contemporary Equatorial Guinea.

In the same essay, Zamora starts to perform a similar reconstruction of *Don Quijote*; however, this rewriting of the *Quijote* is left unfinished. As with the *Lazarillo*, he is drawn to the *Quijote*'s representation of Africa and Africans. He refers specifically to the episode in which Dorotea, a beautiful woman who chances upon Don Quijote and his wandering entourage, participates in a ruse to trick Don Quijote into abandoning his search for chivalric adventures. To do so, she pretends to be the Princess Micomicona, from the faraway, Ethiopian land of Micomicón, begging Don Quijote to help her slay the giant who has taken over her kingdom (*DQ* I.29). Don Quijote agrees to travel with her to her Ethiopian land, although obviously, this adventure never materializes, since such a land does not exist. Yet, Zamora is delighted by the prospect of Don Quijote travelling to Africa. At the end of his essay, he declares that the *Quijote* must be located "a la cabecera" ("at the head of the table") of Spain's antiracist canon, justifying his choice with a wisecrack: "Todos los días un poquito es suficiente para acabar siendo un maestro de la prosa, aun cuando uno proceda de las mismísimas selvas de Micomicona" ("A little bit every day is enough to become a master of prose, even for someone who hails from the very jungles of Micomicona") (108). By referring to Equatorial Guinea as the fictional African kingdom in *Don Quijote*, Zamora connects the *Quijote*'s blurring of fiction and reality with a real-world struggle for anti-racist resistance. As we will see in the next section, Zamora explores this reading much more thoroughly in his poem,

“Estefanía” (from his 1999 book of poetry, *Memoria de laberintos*), which imagines what would happen if Don Quijote actually had travelled to Equatorial Guinea.

Hence, what is striking about Zamora’s essays is their proposal of fiction as a solution to deeply entrenched racism. For, while Zamora compellingly unearths numerous forms of racism both within Spain and beyond, he nonetheless seeks a cure for these ills in Spain’s own literary tradition. In the following two sections, I explore two of Zamora’s works that further insist on literature’s capacity for antiracist resistance by drawing significant inspiration from the *Quijote*: the aforementioned poem, “Estefanía,” as well as the historical novel, *Conspiración en el green*.

### **3.3 *Re-reading the Western through Don Quijote***

Zamora’s poem, “Estefanía,” can be read as a continuation of his reflections in *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca* about the potential of *Don Quijote* to function as an anti-racist critique. Written as a single stanza of fifty-six lines in free verse, this poem imagines Don Quijote’s arrival to the Equatorial Guinean island of Annobon. Noting the surprise that Don Quijote would surely experience upon discovering a Spanish-speaking land in Africa, the poem’s speaker invokes Don Quijote’s aid against the “malhechores” (“evildoers”) who have wreaked so much havoc in Equatorial Guinea throughout its history (“Estefanía” 14). In addition to speaking directly to Don Quijote, the poem both

implicitly and explicitly references numerous details from Cervantes' iconic novel. Yet, perhaps the most essential element of the *Quijote* that Zamora draws upon in order to envision this novel's potential as an anti-racist tool is the *Quijote's* relationship with "popular" or "mass" literature. We will recall that in the original novel, Don Quijote's feverish reading of chivalric novels leads him to see the real world around him—which is often strikingly banal and uninteresting—through the romanticized lens of medieval chivalry. However, in his poetic rendering of Don Quijote's African voyage, Zamora replaces chivalric imagery with forms of popular literature that he and other Equatorial Guineans have also consumed in "excessive" quantities: namely, cheap, mass-produced genre novels imported from Spain, especially those about the Wild West.

The most immediately noticeable example of lowbrow literature's presence in the poem is its title, "Estefanía." This title alludes to Marcial Lafuente Estefanía, an extremely prolific, mid-twentieth century Spanish writer of Western adventure novels that achieved massive popularity throughout the Spanish-speaking world—Will Wright goes so far as to assert that this writer "is probably the most popular novelist in Mexican history" (11). Because in this poem, the Western genre serves as a sort of modern-day substitute for Don Quijote's chivalric novels, the poem is not only full of references to the *Quijote*, but also of references to the Western genre. These include characters and episodes from famous Western films, as well as other authors of Western novels.

Before continuing our analysis of these elements, however, some context is necessary to understand Zamora's relationship to the Western novel. At first glance, it may seem curious that Zamora would give a writer like Estefanía such centrality in a poem that purports to honor Cervantes. Yet, as Zamora himself explains in his interview with Ngom: "Las novelas del oeste baratas han ejercido más influencia en mí que ningún autor consagrado. No es ninguna broma. De crío...no hacía más que leer a autores tan desconocidos como Silver Kane, Marcial Lafuente Estefanía, Keith Luger, Burton Hare o Fidel Prado"<sup>28</sup> ("Cheap Western novels exerted more influence on me than any canonical author. It's no joke. As a kid...all I did was read such unknown authors as Silver Kane, Marcial Lafuente Estefanía, Keith Luger, Burton Hare o Fidel Prado") (110). The anthropologist Gustau Nerín suggests Zamora is not alone in his passion for this genre. Noting that books are extremely scarce in Equatorial Guinea and that the reading public is minimal, Nerín explains that, nonetheless, "there is a small number of [Estefanía's books] in circulation and...they are passed along by hand at a frantic pace." Furthermore, Nerín offers the following hypothesis as to why these books are so popular in Equatorial Guinea:

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<sup>28</sup>These are all Spanish writers who wrote popular novels printed on cheap paper. "Silver Kane" is a pseudonym used by Francisco González Ledesma (1927- ), a prolific writer of detective novels. "Keith Luger" in reality was Miguel Oliveros Tovar (1924-71), who primarily wrote Western novels but also science fiction and detective novels. "Burton Hare" was the literary alias of José María Lloró Olivé, also a prolific writer of Western novels. Finally, Fidel Prado (1891-1970), better known by his pseudonym "F.P. Duke," was another writer of popular Western novels.

To anyone who knows Guinea, it is not strange at all that Guineans have clung to reading *Estefanía*...It is easy to feel identified with poor cowboys when, strolling through the Mondoasi market or through the popular Lea neighborhood, any citizen can be stopped by members of the Presidential Security, with their weapons more visible than any Western gunman and with mannerisms typical of the worst criminals of the American West. The outrages that average citizens of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea endure do not fall short of those that were suffered in the old West: properties expropriated by all-powerful lords, arbitrary imprisonment, constant coercion. All Guineans, reading *Estefanía*, dream that the avenging sheriff will arrive who will free them from so much humiliation.

Nerín's analysis thus suggests that the popularity of these novels derives from a sort of fantasy in which ordinary Guineans can imagine being liberated from the extremely oppressive conditions in which they live. For Nerín, Guineans who read these novels identify with the "poor cowboys" — that is, the solitary, individualistic wanderers who form the crux of Wild West mythology.

However, I contend that Zamora's take on the Western genre is different from Nerín's: instead, I believe that "*Estefanía*" satirizes notions of Western-style "heroism" while celebrating the genre's patent fictionality. In doing so, Zamora makes the historically rooted structures of domination and oppression in Equatorial Guinea (including Spain's own complex-ridden sense of national identity, which motivated its colonial endeavors in Africa) look like "fiction." This fictionalization of histories (whether Spanish, Equatorial Guinean, African, or European) does not serve to present them as "less real." On the contrary, as both real and yet fabricated, Equatorial Guinea's history, present and future can be re-imagined and re-written in a radically different way — just like Zamora's ironically heroic Quijote.

In the first sentence of the poem, which comprises sixteen lines, the speaker invites Don Quijote to embark on a sea voyage to the Equatorial Guinean island of Annobon:

Si vuestra merced, mi señor don Quijote  
estrella, espejo y farol de la andante caballería  
os avinieseis a haceros a la mar oceána  
y, en cubierta, a bordo del Río Francolí  
pusieseis proa a Annobón,  
en arribando a tan lejana ínsula  
y una vez hicierais fondo en la rada de Palea  
fuerais recibido, como es usanza, por sus pobladores  
diciendo por tres veces ¡Uh, uh, uh!  
accedería en pequeño mas lujoso esquife, al Viyil  
donde sería puesto al corriente  
por los más ancianos del lugar  
de los históricos desaguizados y afrentas sufridos  
a manos de ciertos tahúres y malhechores  
y que únicamente podría reparar  
un tan noble y desprendido brazo como el suyo. (1-16)

(If your grace, my lord Don Quijote,  
star, mirror and lantern of knight-errantry,  
would agree to take to the ocean sea  
and, on deck, from the Francolí river  
you would set sail to Annobon  
upon arriving to such a faraway isle  
and once you had set anchor in the roadstead of Palea  
you would be received, as is custom, by its inhabitants  
saying three times 'Uh, uh, uh!'  
you would gain access to a small, more luxurious skiff, at the Viyil  
where you would be informed  
by the place's most ancient men  
of the historical offenses and affronts suffered  
at the hands of certain cardsharps and evildoers  
which only an arm as noble and generous  
as yours could repair.)

In this passage, the speaker portrays Don Quijote's voyage to the Equatorial Guinean island of Annobon as a heroic enterprise worthy of a knight-errant's effort and attention. He exoticizes the island, portraying it as full of swashbuckling action, as if to "sell" this voyage to Don Quijote, who is always in search of honor and glory. For example, by proposing that Don Quijote take to "the ocean sea," the speaker prods Don Quijote to embark on Atlantic adventures, implying that such a journey may be newer and more exciting than Don Quijote's previous adventures, which are limited to the Iberian peninsula. Similarly, by referring to the island of Annobon as a "faraway isle" ("tan lejana ínsula"), the speaker calls to mind Sancho Panza's thirst to govern an "ínsula" and, consequently, the episode from the original *Quijote* in which the Duke and Duchess play an extended joke on Sancho, pretending to grant his wish for their own entertainment.<sup>29</sup> The description of Annobon as a "tan lejana ínsula" makes Annobon seem remote and challenging to access; yet, at the same time, the challenge of the voyage also makes it desirable. Although Annobon is a "real" island with "real" problems, the

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<sup>29</sup> In Chapter 30 of Part 2 of Cervantes' original *Don Quijote*, Don Quijote and Sancho Panza encounter a Duke and a Duchess in the forest. The Duchess, having read the first part of *Don Quijote's* adventures (which, in Part 2, has already been published and widely read), decides to entertain Don Quijote's belief that he is actually a knight errant. She and her husband use their wealth to indulge Don Quijote's fantasies, while simultaneously playing tricks on him and Sancho to amuse themselves. Since Don Quijote has promised to make Sancho the governor of an island, the Duke and Duchess appoint Sancho as "governor" of a town, which Sancho believes to be an island. However, his governorship lasts only seven days: in Chapter 53, Sancho abdicates his post after the Duke and the Duchess orchestrate a feigned attack on the island, tricking Sancho into believing that the governorship is too much for him to handle. Sancho concludes that he must stay closer to his God-given station in life.

poem' comparison of it to Sancho Panza's purely imaginary "ínsula" invites us to think of this island as a malleable, mutable fiction.

By inviting Don Quijote to embark on a postcolonial voyage to Africa, this poem simultaneously invites the reader to reflect on the history of Spanish colonialism, and of the place that the actual novel *Don Quijote de la Mancha* has occupied within that discourse. It is particularly striking that in the poem, as the word "únicamente" indicates, it is *only* Don Quijote who can avenge the "historical offenses and affronts" inflicted upon Equatorial Guineans by "cardsharps and evildoers." This leads the reader to wonder: given Spain's history as Equatorial Guinea's former European colonizer, why exactly might Equatorial Guineans *need* a Spanish hero, even if only a fictional one, to achieve peace or justice for themselves—especially in the postcolonial era? Following Diana Taylor's analysis, we might read this part of the poem as a modern-day "scenario of discovery," that is, a ritualized re-presentation or re-enactment of Columbus' discovery of the Americas. After all, Zamora invites Don Quijote first to "discover" the isle of Annobon so he can "save" or "rescue" the natives from evildoers. Thus, in addition to making him resemble a colonial-era explorer or conquistador, Zamora also reinvents Don Quijote as a "savior," since is it *only* through him that justice can be accomplished. The idea of Don Quijote "rescuing" the locals echoes not only the conventions of chivalric literature, wherein the valiant knight must save the helpless victims he chances upon, but also the rhetoric of spiritual or religious "salvation." Just as

Spain's imperial endeavors were often justified in light of the supposed spiritual salvation that would accompany the imposition of Catholicism on indigenous peoples, so, too, is Don Quijote's voyage to Annobon considered a moral imperative because his heroism, strength and bravery constitute the *only* hope that Equatorial Guineans might be "saved" from their troubled history and present.

Furthermore, the speaker's appeal to Don Quijote's "noble and generous arm," which makes Don Quijote look strong and capable in comparison to the apparently defenseless Guineans, seems to rehearse interpretations of the *Quijote* as an emblem of Spanish nationalism and heroism (16). As Anthony J. Close argues, the German Romantics were among the first to read the *Quijote* as an expression of an essentially Spanish national character. They were followed by numerous, influential Spanish critics who took nationalist interpretations of the *Quijote* to new heights. Amongst the most famous of these was Miguel de Unamuno, who viewed Don Quijote as a "mythical hero" and believed that this novel expressed a "spirituality inherent to the historical essence of the Spanish people" (Close). Later on in the twentieth century, the Franco regime also capitalized on this interpretation of the *Quijote*, using it as a tool to glorify the Francoist vision of a united, coherent national identity, and consequently, to justify the regime's suppression of any expressions of identity that deviated from the official narrative (Valls 269). The Franco regime's ideological instrumentalization of the *Quijote* was particularly palpable in the 1947 quatricentennial celebration of the birth of

Cervantes, in which the regime “attempted...to unload upon the author all the weight of [the] glorious interpretation of the imperial past” (Bernat Vistarini 34). Under Francoism, the *Quijote* was seen as not only a national symbol, but as a symbol of imperial glory, as well.

As we can see, although the *Quijote* has historically been interpreted in a dazzling variety of ways, one particularly weighty series of these interpretations has, over time, appropriated *Don Quijote* as a symbol of Spanish national identity and as an assertion of Spain’s colonial power. Bearing this in mind, we might initially conclude that the first part of Zamora’s poem rehearses and reinforces such interpretations by representing Don Quijote as a post-neo-colonial “savior” of helpless Africans. However, our interpretation cannot ignore the biting irony that underlies these first sixteen lines: there is something decidedly tongue-in-cheek about the notion that Don Quijote might really save Equatorial Guinea from the “cardsharps and evildoers” that torment it. After all, although frequently interpreted in a “heroic” light by Spanish nationalist discourse, Don Quijote also lends himself to a decidedly anti-heroic interpretation: his (mis)adventures as a knight-errant can also be read as the hilariously pathetic by-product of his own delusional madness. The ending of *Don Quijote* especially validates such an interpretation by narrating how Alonso Quijano, just before his decidedly un-

heroic death from fever, denounces his previous illusions of chivalric grandeur (II.74).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, over the course of the novel, Don Quijote's unflinching adherence to the code of chivalry sometimes causes harm instead of good (as in the episode of the boy being viciously whipped by his master) (I.4)<sup>31</sup>. Thus, the simplistic casting of Don Quijote as a "hero" fighting against a proliferation of possible "malhechores," or evildoers, produces a clear dichotomy between "good" and "evil" that is far more characteristic of Hollywood films or comic books than of Cervantes' actual novel, much less of so-called "real life." In other words, the postcolonial "scenario of discovery" that the poem presents must be read as deeply ironic, since its Hollywood-esque pitting of a "superhero" (who isn't really a superhero at all) against the "bad guys" undermines our ability to take it at face value.

The extreme "fictionalization" of Don Quijote's voyage is further intensified as the poem continues. In the next ten lines, the speaker explains to Don Quijote that his hypothetical voyage to Equatorial Guinea would introduce him to the presence of the Spanish language in Africa. The speaker highlights the fact that one of the consequences

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<sup>30</sup> At the end of the novel, Don Quijote plans to retire as a shepherd. After returning to his family home, he falls ill with a fever and remains bed-bound for six days. On the seventh day, he awakes, renounces all his former attachments to chivalry, repents for having pursued adventures as a knight-errant, and makes a will. He then dies peacefully three days later.

<sup>31</sup> In Chapter 4 of Part 1 of *Don Quijote*, Don Quijote encounters a farmer who is whipping a boy. The farmer claims that the boy has been shirking his duties, while the boy claims the farmer has not been paying him adequately. Believing the farmer is a knight, Don Quijote appeals to chivalric ideals in order to convince the farmer to treat the boy more mercifully. When the farmer swears on his knighthood to treat the boy kindly, Don Quijote is then satisfied. However, after Don Quijote leaves, the farmer beats the boy even more harshly.

of the imposition of the Spanish language was the proliferation and mass consumption of cheap, lowbrow Spanish novels:

Hechas tales prevenciones<sup>32</sup> podrá comprobar  
vuestra merced  
los curiosos y sorprendentes derroteros  
que la industria del idioma español  
ha tomado en tales tierras de la mano, sobre todos,  
de su fiel siervo y servidor Marcial Lafuente Estefanía  
y aún de otros si no manifiestamente moriscos  
al menos con trazas de cristianos nuevos  
que, mudando nombres y gentilicios  
dieron en llamarse Silver Kane, Clark Karrados  
Keith Luger o Burton Hare. (17-27)

(These preliminaries settled, your grace  
will ascertain  
the curious and surprising paths  
that the industry of the Spanish language  
has taken in such lands under the guidance, above all,  
of your faithful slave and servant Marcial Lafuente Estefanía  
and still of others, if not manifestly *morisco*,  
at least with traces of New Christians  
that, changing names and nationalities,  
Came to call themselves Silver Kane, Clark Karrados,  
Keith Luger, or Burton Hare.)

Here, the speaker credits not only the aforementioned Estefanía, but also four other writers of popular novels, all of whom were Spanish, and all of whom published their works under pseudonyms.<sup>33</sup> The speaker not only notes that these writers have changed

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<sup>32</sup> The words "hechas tales prevenciones" mimic the text of the original *Quijote*: Chapter 2 of Part I begins with the words, "Hechas, pues, estas prevenciones."

<sup>33</sup> Silver Kane, Burton Hare and Keith Luger are all mentioned in Zamora's interview with Ngom. The alias "Clark Carrados" was used by Luis García Lecha (1919-2005) who wrote approximately 2,300 popular novels of different genres, of which about 600 were science fiction.

their names, but also their “gentilicio,” or national origin, because of the fact that these Spanish writers have taken on decidedly Anglo-sounding aliases (25). He then states ironically that while these writers are not “manifiestamente moriscos” (“manifestly morisco”) (23), they nonetheless bear “trazas de cristianos nuevos” (“traces of new Christians”) (24).

The implication that these writers might be *moriscos*, and that they share something in common with the “new Christians,” hearkens back to the story of early modern expulsions of Jews and Muslims from Spain: we will recall, for example, that the year 1492 marked the fall of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews, and that even the *moriscos* (descendants of Moors who had converted to Christianity) would also be expelled by 1614, just before the publication of part II of *Don Quijote*. Over the course of this period, Muslims and Jews living in Spanish territory were either forced to convert to Catholicism, endure exile or face other punishment, including death. Stanley M. Hordes tells us that New Christians tended to change their names “in favor of more common Spanish names” (4), which allowed them to “[avoid] suspicion on the part of the inquisitors or their Old Christian neighbors” (5). Because Spain’s obsession with preserving so-called *limpieza de sangre* caused “nuevos cristianos” to be perceived as *not Christian enough*, changing their names was a way to hide their *other-ness* and perform belonging to the dominant group.

With regard to popular Western novels, Carmen Camus Camus writes that one of the principal reasons that writers of this type of fiction used pseudonyms was to create the effect of “pseudotranslation”: that is, they wanted to make their work appear to be translated from a foreign language in order to give it more prestige. Because the Western genre originated in the United States, an author who made himself sound more “American” could use a seemingly Anglo alias to lead audiences to believe the novel they were reading was actually written in America by an American. These writers, including, at one point, Estefanía himself (who earlier in his career used pseudonyms such as “Tony Spring” or “Arizona”), used American-sounding pseudonyms to disguise their cultural *other*-ness: after all, they were Spaniards creating narratives about the mythological American West. As Zamora illustrates, their use of pseudonyms to disguise their Spanish-ness thus shares a striking similarity with the “nuevos cristianos” of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, who also used name changes to “perform” a cultural identity different from their own.

Yet it is here where Zamora’s use of multilayered irony makes his critique of Spanish nationalism and colonialism readily apparent. Zamora’s comparison of *moriscos* and new Christians of previous centuries with popular fiction writers from the 20<sup>th</sup> century casts serious doubt on the “purity,” “whiteness” and “superiority” of modern Spain, both during and after its colonial endeavors. Like new Christians and Western writers, Spain, too, has repeatedly tried to disguise its identity throughout history. In the

early modern period, it attempted to rid itself of racial and religious *other*-ness; likewise, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it asserted both racial (white) and religious (Catholic) purity and superiority in order to justify its colonial endeavors in Equatorial Guinea. In other words, Zamora reads both early modern Spain and the Spain of African colonialism as obsessed with performing their “whiteness” and “Europeanness.” For modern Spain, the stakes of asserting European-ness were especially high because, having lost their Latin American empire over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, African colonialism provided a way to try to “keep up with the Joneses” elsewhere in Europe. However, just as the American pseudonyms of Spanish popular fiction writers are transparently artificial to modern readers, so, too, do Spanish attempts at performing racial purity, religious superiority and cultural homogeneity also seem patently “fake.” In other words, in spite of early modern Spain’s historical paranoia about *limpieza de sangre* (which is referenced in the poem by the idea of 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish writers being “manifiestamente moriscos” or having “traces” of New Christians), the stain of Jewish and Muslim *others* would remain forever present in the national consciousness, in spite of concerted and repeated attempts to repress it. Capitalizing on the evident fictionality and artificiality of pseudonyms such as “Silver Kane” or “Burton Hare,” Zamora acerbically ridicules the transparent theatricality of Spanish attempts to perform “whiteness” and “Europeanness” throughout its history, whether in the early modern period, in the modern period, or in the present. The

parallelism he draws between the name-changing of New Christians and the pseudonyms of 20<sup>th</sup> century popular writers highlights the fact that Spain's perennial performance of "whiteness" and "Europeanness" accentuates its desire to disguise its *other*-ness from the world and from itself.

In the next ten lines, the speaker extends the "Westernization" of the *Quijote* even further:

De modo que resulta de gran extravagancia  
constatar cómo pretos y morenos  
han aceptado por verdadero  
el truco de Amadís de Gaula por cierto Buffalo Bill  
o Belianís de Grecia por Cisco Kid  
al tiempo que a la Mancha manchega  
le dicen el Far West  
los porqueros<sup>34</sup> son cowboyses  
y el colt 45 provoca mayor mortandad  
que cualquier cimitarra o lanza. (28-37)

(Hence, it strikes you as extraordinary  
to see that dark-skinned peoples  
have accepted as true  
the switch of Amadis de Gaula for a certain Buffalo Bill  
or Belianis of Greece for Cisco Kid  
at the same time that La Mancha  
is called the Far West  
the swineherds are cowboys  
and the Colt 45 is more lethal  
than any scimitar or lance.)

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<sup>34</sup> The mention of "porqueros" ("swineherds") refers to Chapter 2 of Part 1 of *Don Quijote*, where Don Quijote mistakes an inn for a castle, and consequently believes a swineherd to be a dwarf who is signaling his arrival to the castle's inhabitants.

In this passage, the speaker states that “pretos y morenos” —that is, the black Africans of Equatorial Guinea—have established a relationship with the imagery of the Wild West that is parallel to Don Quijote’s relationship with chivalrous literature (29). By highlighting the similarity between Don Quijote’s devouring of chivalric novels and Equatorial Guineans’ collective consumption of popular Western novels and films, the poem suggests that the Western has somehow changed the perceptions of Guineans in a manner analogous to the effect that chivalric novels had on Don Quijote’s experience of the world. In other words, the poem proposes that Equatorial Guineans see themselves in a sort of “Western,” just as Don Quijote fancied the world around him to resemble a chivalric novel.

In the next few lines, the speaker elaborates further about the impact of the Western genre on Equatorial Guineans:

Item más, no se puede imaginar mi señor  
el estruendo enorme que por estos lares produjo  
la pendencia terrible que hubo  
entre el afamado marshall Wyatt Earp  
y los hermanos Clinton, Clantin o Clanton  
en el Ok corral aquel.  
Y a buen seguro le daría un vuelco al corazón  
saber que la doncella que más se asemeja  
a la tan gentil y bella Dulcinea  
es dama amazona, por más señas,  
que responde al nombre de Juanita Calamidad. (38-48)

(Furthermore, my lord cannot imagine  
the enormous racket that the brawl  
between the famous marshall Wyatt Earp  
and the Clinton, Clantin or Clanton brothers

in the OK Corral produced around these parts.  
And, no doubt, it would upset your heart  
to know that the maiden who most resembles  
the kind and beautiful Dulcinea  
is, by all accounts, an Amazon woman  
who responds to the name of Calamity Jane.)

Here, he informs Don Quijote that the story of the O.K. Corral shootout<sup>35</sup> produced an “enormous racket”<sup>36</sup> amongst Equatorial Guineans, who, we might imagine, were thoroughly engrossed by the thrill and suspense of that widely recounted episode. But even as the speaker explains this to Don Quijote, he mimics the narration of the novel his hero comes from: by pretending not to remember clearly whether the brothers involved in the shootout were named “Clinton,” “Clantin” or “Clanton” (42), the speaker imitates the narrator of the *Quijote*'s first chapter, who indicates that the family name of Alonso Quijano (the man who transforms himself into Don Quijote) might actually have been “Quijada,” “Quesada,” or “Quijana” (I.1). The slippery names of both iconic characters of the Wild West and of Don Quijote himself thus mirror the shifting, unstable identities of writers such as “Burton Hare” and “Silver Kane,” as well as fifteenth and sixteenth century “new Christians,” who had to change their names to stay out of trouble.

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<sup>35</sup> This refers to an actual gunfight between outlaws and local law enforcement that took place in Tombstone, Arizona Territory on Oct. 26, 1881. However, the episode has been so widely recounted in Western films and novels that its narrative and mythical allure have far overshadowed the actual historical event.

<sup>36</sup> The words “estruendo enorme” may constitute a reference to Chapter 20 of Part 1 of *Don Quijote*. In this chapter, the word “estruendo” is repeatedly used to describe a loud pounding that scares Don Quijote and Sancho Panza. However, the next day, they discover the sound was only produced by fulling-hammers used to beat cloth.

The speaker's conflation of the *Quijote* and the Western is further extended when he tells Don Quijote that "the maiden who most resembles / the kind and beautiful Dulcinea" (45-6) is none other than "Juanita Calamidad" —or Calamity Jane<sup>37</sup>, as she is more commonly known in English (48). Again, the slippage of identity and the merging of fiction and history are foregrounded. The name "Juanita Calamidad" is a Spanish translation of the well-known nickname "Calamity Jane," which, in turn, refers not only to a legendary character from films and novels, but also to a historical woman, Martha Jane Canary. Yet, as we know, the fictional character has far overshadowed the historical woman in terms of cultural influence and significance. Furthermore, as in the original *Quijote*, the character we know through fiction has radically transformed the way we view the historical woman: after all the fictions written about her, is it even possible to separate the historical "Martha Jane" from her cinematic and novelistic alter-ego? Zamora's poem thus not only thoroughly destabilizes the dichotomy between fiction and history, but also calls attention to the fictional nature of national and individual identities.

The climactic moment of Equatorial Guineans' "quixotic" transformation occurs in the poem's final lines:

Todo ello sin menoscabo ni la menor merma  
a lo que en puridad atañe

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<sup>37</sup>"Calamity Jane," or Martha Jane Canary, was a frontierswoman and scout who lived from 1851 to 1903. Her life and adventures have been largely mythologized by Western narratives in numerous media, including many films and novels.

para que cada vez que sioux y mohicanos  
diriman sus pependencias y afrentas, acá en Annobón,  
que sus habitantes, señor, dicen Ambo,  
se expresen con gran donaire en ese bello idioma  
que alumbró, de la mano de Cidi Hamete,  
nuestro maestro y bienhechor don Miguel de Cervantes. (49-56)

(All of this with neither detriment nor decline  
as far as purity is concerned  
such that each time that Sioux and Mohicans  
resolve their quarrels and affronts, here in Annobon,  
known as Ambo, my lord, by its inhabitants,  
they may express themselves with great charm in that beautiful language  
that, under the guidance of Cide Hamete, illuminated  
our master and benefactor, don Miguel de Cervantes. )

In these lines, the speaker explains to Don Quijote that Equatorial Guineans can speak and write the “beautiful language” of Spain with “great charm” (54). To seal this point in a dramatic way, he closes the poem by naming “don Miguel de Cervantes” as “our master and benefactor” (56). This, of course, suggests that Guineans revere Cervantes as a sort of linguistic and literary “master.” This adulation of Cervantes echoes the previous treatment of Don Quijote as a “hero” and “savior” of Equatorial Guineans, since it is he who must defeat the “cardsharps and evildoers” that plague their land.

As with the poem’s initial presentation of Don Quijote as a “savior,” the poem’s final, reverential gesture toward Cervantes could, at first glance, be interpreted as a submission to the nationalist, colonial discourses that the *Quijote* has sometimes been used to buttress. However, I argue that such a reading is rendered impossible by the penultimate line, when the poem mentions “Cidi Hamete” Benengeli (more commonly

spelled “Cide”) as guiding or accompanying Cervantes’ hand as he wrote the *Quijote*. In Cervantes’ novel, the adventures of Don Quijote are treated not as fictitious, but as if they were the product of a historical investigation involving different authors and sources. As the story goes, the first eight chapters of *Don Quijote* were supposedly written by an anonymous author. A second author, troubled by the abrupt, unfinished ending of these eight chapters, decides to track the rest of the story down. Discovering that Don Quijote’s adventures were originally documented in Arabic by a Moorish historian named Cide Hamete Benengeli, he rescues these papers from destruction, hires a Romance-speaking *morisco aljamiado* to translate them, and then edits the translation into a polished final version (i.e., the version of the *Quijote* the reader has access to). As Georgina Dopico-Black puts it, “Cide Hamete’s *hijo-libro* [child-book] undergoes a conversion in language, *apadrinado* [godfathered] by a *morisco*, then adopted by a Christian stepfather of dubious heritage” (112, *original emphasis and parenthesis*). Wan Sonya Tang builds on these observations by suggesting that the text’s dual linguistic and religious transformations move the story of the *Quijote* progressively away from both the Arabic language and Islam itself (484). Recalling the fact that the *Quijote* was published in the early seventeenth century, she concludes that the distancing from Islam that occurs in the fictional process of editing and translating Don Quijote’s adventures mirrors Spain’s own attempt to expel its Moorish heritage and present itself as “purely” Catholic and Castilian-speaking (484-5).

And yet, in contrast to Tang's interpretation, other critics have argued that the *Quijote's* mirroring of Spanish national identity foregrounds Spain's inevitable, irreversible plurality. For example, William Childers argues that "The heterogenous structure and multigeneric composition of the Cervantine model affirm the heterogeneity of Spanish society at the threshold of the modern age, even as it was laced under siege by Counter-Reformation orthodoxy and the expanding power of the Absolutist monarchy" (196). In a similar vein, Luce López Baralt demonstrates that Cervantes' novel is an example of what she terms the "mixed breeding" of Spanish literature (580). This critic argues that the novel's final scene, in which Cide Hamete and the pen with which he wrote the *Quijote* jointly agree that their story is final and cannot be altered, reappropriates a key Islamic symbol, present in Muslim texts ranging from those of Moorish Spain to the Qu'ran itself. This symbol is that of the "primordial pen," which authoritatively inscribes the immutable destiny of mankind, ordained by God, on a "Well-Preserved Tablet." On one level, of course, Cide Hamete's voice in this episode stands in for Cervantes' insistence that no other author change or alter the story of the *Quijote*.<sup>38</sup> However, the notion that Cervantes closes the novel not only with a Moorish voice, but also with an explicitly Islamic symbol demonstrates that Islamic influence can *never* be fully erased or eliminated from the *Quijote*—or, for that matter, from the nation

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<sup>38</sup> The notion that no one else should tweak with Cervantes' tale is a thinly veiled reference to Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda's publication of a second volume of *Don Quijote* in 1614, one year before Cervantes published his own Part 2 in 1615. As a result, Cervantes' Part 2 contains many references to Avellaneda's "fake" sequel, distinguishing itself from its false predecessor.

it has come to emblemize. Childers' and López Baralt's analyses allow us to understand how Zamora reads Cide Hamete as a clear and unambiguous indicator of the permanent, immutable "stain" of Islam—and therefore, of *other-ness*—on the *Quijote*. By mentioning Cide Hamete in the penultimate line of his poem, Zamora suggests that if the *Quijote*, a quintessential symbol of Spanish national identity, is inherently "heterogeneous" and "mixed," then so, too, is the nation that it represents, in spite of that nation's numerous attempts to assert its *limpieza de sangre*, "whiteness," or "Europeanness" throughout the centuries.

Furthermore, in these final lines, the speaker renders his sanctification of Don Quijote and Cervantes as "heroes" of Equatorial Guinea thoroughly ambivalent. He accomplishes this by referring to the inhabitants of Annobón as "Sioux and Mohicans" who must resolve ("dirimir") their disputes ("pendencias y afrentas") on their own (52). Firstly, the fact that the inhabitants are now resolving their "pendencias y afrentas" by themselves patently contradicts the speaker's earlier statement that only Don Quijote's "noble and generous arm" can help them. Similarly, the seeming glorification of Quijote or Cervantes as "heroes" is also undermined by the poem's representation of Equatorial Guineans as "Sioux y Mohicanos." This reference immediately directs our attention back to the mythology of the Wild West, in which white, American frontiersmen were engaged in a constant struggle to spread American civilization to the untamed wilderness (Wright 160-1). In these highly conventional representations, Native

Americans were invariably configured as the opponents of white civilization: Western films and novels repeatedly represent them as savages, barbarians and even pests who “had to be conquered and removed” in order for American cultural and political hegemony—i.e., “civilization”—to take root (160). Yet, in spite of the extremely reductive representations of Native Americans prevalent in Western myths, Zamora’s comparison suggests that somehow, Equatorial Guineans might see themselves reflected in Indian characters in Western novels. His reference to Guineans as “Sioux and Mohicans” suggests that, like Don Quijote, they have consumed so many Western novels and films that they now imagine themselves to exist inside one; yet, rather than identifying with the cowboy, as Nerín suggests, they align themselves with the “opponents” of civilization, who, it must be noted, *never* end up as “winners” in a conventional Western fiction.

On the one hand, the parallelisms between the Equatorial Guinean experience and the Native American one are clear: like Native Americans, who battled whites for centuries for the right to maintain their traditional lands, customs and livelihood, Equatorial Guineans also struggle against the brutal realities of dictatorship, poverty and capitalist exploitation, all of which were at least partially caused by Spanish colonialism and its aftermath. Yet, on the other hand, in proposing this reading, Zamora challenges the notion that Guineans need an external savior—like a cowboy, a sheriff, or even Don Quijote—to “save” them from their own problems. Rather, by *imitating* Don

Quijote—that is, by learning to view their world as a fiction—Equatorial Guineans can become their own Quijote, using their own “nobles y desprendidos brazos” to resolve their “afrentas” and bring their “malhechores” to justice. In doing so, they can re-write not only the common ending of Westerns, in which the cowboys always defeat the Indians, but also that of coloniality, in which power hierarchies inherited from colonialism maintain the oppression and subjugation of formerly colonized peoples. For Zamora, the act of writing is clearly an essential part of this process. By connecting the resolution of “disputes” to eloquent self-expression in Spanish, this part of the poem suggests that, rather than being saved by Don Quijote, Equatorial Guineans, as the “Indians” in the Europe-Africa “dispute,” must learn to transform themselves into “authors,” who, like Cervantes, can change the world by blurring the distinction between fiction and reality.

Finally, in spite of the poem’s apparently hyperbolic veneration of *Don Quijote*, Cervantes, and the Spanish language, I argue that these last verses also intentionally sabotage any uncritical faith in Equatorial Guinean “Afro-Hispanic” nationalism. By calling attention to the fact that people from Annobon refer to their island as “Ambo,” the speaker highlights the ethnic and linguistic distinctiveness of the Annobonese people, especially because their language, known as “fa d’Ambò,” is a Portuguese creole that hails from before Spanish colonization. The speaker thus subverts the centrality of Spain’s “beautiful language” for Equatorial Guinean identity, showing the Castilian

language to be but one ingredient in that country's cultural and linguistic smorgasbord. The speaker reinforces this fact by referring to Equatorial Guineans as "Sioux y mohicanos." As we have seen, on one level, this comparison clearly invites us to compare Equatorial Guineans to the downtrodden, oppressed Native Americans of conventional Western fictions. Yet, by mentioning two completely different Native American tribes—the Sioux of the Great Plains and the Mahicans of the Hudson River Valley—the speaker subtly alludes to ongoing tensions between various ethnicities and tribes in Equatorial Guinea, and the consequent problems of claiming an unproblematic national identity that essentializes "African-ness" and "Hispanity."

Thus, although the poem initially sets up Equatorial Guineans as hapless victims in need of a savior, its closing, in which they learn to read and write their reality as a mutable, re-writable fiction, transforms them into the "authors" of their own destiny. In doing so, Zamora challenges Nerín's hypothesis that the Western genre offers Equatorial Guinean readers the fantasy of external justice, positing instead the possibility that they re-write the Western by allowing "Indians" to take justice into their own hands. At the same time, the poem's obsequious adulation of the *Quijote*, which might initially appear to glorify Spanish nationalism and colonialism, actually serves to shatter any adherence whatsoever to the idea that either Spain or Equatorial Guinea have stable, coherent national identities. Rather, both countries—as well as the larger continents to which they

belong—are marked by an uneffaceable plurality that confounds the facile distinctions and essentialisms that underlie contemporary forms of racial oppression.

### **3.4 Decolonial Humor: Don Quijote and Conspiración en el green**

In this section, I explore how Zamora's novel, *Conspiración en el green* (*Conspiracy on the green*, 2009) continues and builds on his reflections in "Estefanía." I argue that this novel, too, articulates a decolonial critique by drawing parallelisms between Equatorial Guinea's "real" history and popular fiction.

*Conspiración* is based on a 2004 attempted coup to overthrow the Obiang government of Equatorial Guinea. This "real" coup was orchestrated by Simon Mann, a British mercenary, and financed by numerous investors who sought to capitalize heavily on Equatorial Guinea's vast oil reserves after deposing the dictator. As the journalist Lydia Polgreen points out, there were two aspects of this attempted coup that made it internationally notorious. First, one of the prominent financial backers of the coup was Lord Mark Thatcher, son of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher. Secondly, the facts of this case were eerily reminiscent of the plot of Frederick Forsyth's 1974 novel, *The Dogs of War*, in which foreign financiers hire mercenaries to depose the brutal dictator of a fictional West African country.

Yet, although *The Dogs of War* reads like a fictional thriller, Adam Roberts argues that this novel, too, is based on fact. Although Forsyth has refused to admit it, Roberts asserts that, based on documents in the British National Archive, Forsyth was probably involved in a similar attempted coup in 1973 against the Macías regime in Equatorial Guinea—which, interestingly, took place just before *The Dogs of War* was published (31). Although in *The Dogs of War*, the fictional coup is successfully carried out, the attempted coups in 1973 and in 2004 failed: in both cases, the plotters were discovered before their plans could be executed. However, as Roberts notes, there is an essential difference between the 1973 and 2004 coups: “where the plotters of the real life first attack had a noble goal—removing a deranged dictator [Macías] from power—Mann’s scheme was organised for a more predictable reward. Where the old Equatorial Guinea was repressive and poor, the modern one is both repressive and rich—a far more appealing target for a hired gun” (36).

Zamora’s novel, *Conspiración*, revels in the strangely quixotic blurring of reality and popular fiction that the 2004 coup epitomized. Divided into eighteen chapters, the novel tells two parallel stories in alternating fashion from the point of view of a third person, omniscient narrator. The first half of each chapter narrates the adventures of Ton D’Awal, a middle aged, Equatorial Guinean exile who works in Madrid as a private detective. Once a revolutionary involved in a failed coup d’état to bring down the brutal Macías government in the 1970s, D’Awal has since grown extremely disillusioned and

cynical regarding the possibility that a coup could improve life in Equatorial Guinea. (After all, when Teodoro Obiang wrested power from his maniacally cruel uncle in 1979, the overthrow did not bring about democracy or peace, as many hoped; rather, this “revolution” merely initiated another brutal dictatorship.) Because D’Awal is struggling financially, he accepts a well-remunerated job offer from the Spanish *Centro Nacional de Inteligencia*, or CNI, to track down any and all information regarding rumors of a possible coup in Equatorial Guinea. His employers refuse to tell him whether the Spanish government supports or opposes any such plans for a coup; D’Awal’s job is exclusively to gather intelligence for them to use as they see fit.

The second half of each chapter is set in “Club Royal,” an exclusive golf course in Cape Town, South Africa. This narrative thread tells the story of a wealthy British aristocrat, Lord Mark,<sup>39</sup> who is playing a game of golf alone. He has sought the solitude and concentration of golf to evaluate an offer made to him by a character only known as “el libanés” (“the Lebanese man”).<sup>40</sup> The *libanés* has requested that Lord Mark contribute financial support to a coup that will overthrow President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, allowing the corporate investors and plotters to control profits from that country’s oil

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<sup>39</sup> This character is a fictionalized rendering of Lord Mark Thatcher, son of Margaret Thatcher. In his book on the historical 2004 coup, Roberts offers this succinct explanation of Thatcher’s role: “Businessman and friend of [Simon] Mann...Financier of helicopter intended by others for use in coup. Son of Baroness Thatcher” (x).

<sup>40</sup> This character is a fictional portrayal of Ely Calil, whom Roberts describes as: “Tycoon and friend of...Mann and Thatcher. Well-connected in West Africa. Accused by Equatorial Guinea of being the chief financier of the plot. Lebanese-Nigerian” (xii).

reserves. As Lord Mark ponders *el libanés's* proposal, he vividly recalls their previous discussions about the logistics of planning a coup, as well as the cultural and political specificities of Equatorial Guinea that these logistics would have to take into account. But Lord Mark's flashbacks are frequently interrupted by the particulars of his golf game: his mind continually returns to the subtleties of golf, such as perfecting his grip, mastering his swing, choosing the right club for each stroke, avoiding sand bunks and water hazards, and even calculating the effect of the weather. In each of the novel's eighteen chapters, Lord Mark scores a hole, completing the eighteen-hole course at the novel's end.

The oscillation between Lord Mark's thoughts about playing golf and participating in a coup d'état is symbolically significant in this novel. Whether he is musing about politics or sports, the Spanish word "golpe" recurs repeatedly in his thoughts: this word, which literally means "hit," is used to refer both to a coup d'état (*golpe de estado*), as well as striking or putting a golf ball. The novel thus creates an extended metaphor between golf and a coup d'état: like a game of golf, a successful coup d'état requires extensive preparation and perfectly precise execution. However, just as the slightest uncontrollable variable, such as light rain or a gentle wind, can ruin even the best golfer's game, so, too, is an excellently planned coup d'état subject to the uncontrollable caprices of chance.

As the novel develops, the detective D'Awal — who is aided by two hilariously bumbling, yet occasionally intelligent assistants, Minupli and Chaviota — does everything he can to hunt down clues about the rumors of a coup. He consults with numerous members of the Equatorial Guinean exile community in Madrid, especially those formerly or currently involved in the opposition movement against the Obiang government. However, in spite of his efforts, which lead him to travel to Barcelona and even the United States, he is unsuccessful in obtaining any information whatsoever about the actual coup that the *libanés* has proposed to Lord Mark. At the end of the novel, at his birthday celebration, D'Awal receives a tell-all letter from Thompson Bohó, his revolutionary, Equatorial Guinean friend based in the United States, whom D'Awal had visited earlier in the novel. In this letter, Bohó claims that he has been organizing his own coup from abroad all along, but that he tricked D'Awal into visiting him in order to extract information about the *other* coup D'Awal was investigating. Immediately after receiving the letter, D'Awal submits a report to the CNI, explaining that the rumored coup was Bohó's. However, the reader knows D'Awal's report is incorrect: it is Lord Mark's coup, not Bohó's, that D'Awal should have discovered and reported. D'Awal also seems to intuit the insufficiency of his work: that night, laying in bed, he does not feel remotely relieved or satisfied; instead, “no pudo impedir que un sombrío presentimiento tomara por asalto la pequeña habitación” (“he couldn't stop a somber feeling from invading the small bedroom”) (408).

Meanwhile, Lord Mark, after an average, but not excellent game of golf, finally scores the very last hole of the course below par. Ecstatic at the result of this last hole, he runs to meet the *libanés* at the club house to tell him that he has decided to support the coup. However, his excitement over his victorious performance on the last hole is soon disrupted: as he drinks champagne with the *libanés*, Lord Mark calculates that his overall score is seven above par for the course. Although the novel ends right at this moment, his unexceptional score suggests that the attempt to overthrow Obiang will similarly fail to obtain a desirable result—just as it did in “real life.”

To understand the novel’s social critique, we must first consider the relationship of this attempted coup (in both its “real” and “fictional” renditions) to Quijano and Mignolo’s discussion of coloniality. We will recall that coloniality refers to the interrelated networks of power structures, such as race and capitalism, that, while initiated by European colonialism, have nonetheless outlived it, and continue to shape the contemporary global order. In this novel, the ongoing operations of “coloniality” are manifest in the fact that wealthy financiers are in a position to manipulate the destiny of the Equatorial Guinean state and its inhabitants, in spite of this state’s supposed “independence.” Hence, although the novel is set in a “postcolonial” age, the hierarchies of power initiated during colonialism nonetheless remain firmly in place. The novel’s search for a “way out” of this predicament thus must transcend the idea of a “coup”, or of a change in government in general. By showing Equatorial Guinea to be caught

between the machinations of Western financiers and the unchecked brutality of deranged dictators, the novel suggests that no coup, no matter how brilliantly executed, will truly alter the deeply entrenched hierarchies of power that have left the country's residents either silenced by oppression at home, or forced into exile abroad. In order to escape the conundrum, the novel must propose a radical alternative: or, as Mignolo puts it, a "de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality" ("Delinking" 453).

I argue that to understand the novel's proposal of an "epistemic shift," we must turn to its reading of *Don Quijote*. The most significant mention of Cervantes' masterpiece in Zamora's novel occurs in Chapter 3, when D'Awal has met with a group of Guinean intellectuals that calls itself "El Club de la Puta Parió" ("The Club of the Whore Gave Birth"), which is named for a *mesón* of the same name (73). This club is presented as a haven for D'Awal: we are told that it "era de los escasos pecios, por no decir el único, que había conseguido salvar a D'Awal de su proceloso exilio" ("it was one of the scarce pieces of flotsam, if not the only one, that had managed to save D'Awal from his tempestuous exile") (72-3). His assistants, Minupli and Chaviota, have slightly differing opinions about the club's function: Minupli believes the club's role is primarily a forum for intellectual debate, while Chaviota believes that "era un auténtico senado en la sombra del que un día, no muy lejano, brotarían las definitivas pautas que servirían para arrancar a África del sopor y el atraso" ("it was an authentic senate from whose shadow would emerge, in the not-so-distant future, the definitive guidelines that would

serve to bring Africa out of slumber and backwardness" (73). Chaviota's opinion that this Club has the power to re-imagine a new, different Africa apart from its ongoing travails, such as poverty and dictatorship, can be read as the potential "epistemic shift" that, for Mignolo, is necessary to "delink" from the "colonial matrix of power."

But what solutions for an "epistemic shift" are proposed in this meeting? At one point, the animated discussion of the members of the "Club de la Puta Parió" turns to a philosophical debate about humor. Virtually all the members agree that a sense of humor is a positive trait: one member states that "la hilaridad...es un triunfo, quién sabe si el primero, del hombre de las cavernas" ("Hilarity...is a triumph, perhaps the first of primitive man"); another states that "la risa es fiesta y la capacidad de tronchase de uno mismo" ("Laughter is a celebration and the ability to crack up at oneself"); another, still, states that "Estar en posesión de sentido del humor, significa disfrutar de perspectiva y visión periférica" ("Being in possession of a sense of humor means to enjoy peripheral vision and perspective") (75). Arriving at the question of whether African dictators have a sense of humor, everyone agrees that they do not. At this point, a young, unnamed member declares that "otro gallo nos cantaría a los ecuatoguineanos" ("things would be different for us Equatorial Guineans") if the former dictator, Macías Nguema, had read *Don Quijote* (78). When another member asks the young man to explain himself, he responds: "Una vez que uno lee El Quijote [sic], esa gracia infusa llamada sentido del humor se instala de por vida en todos tus actos. Es puro bálsamo de Fierabrás" ("Once

someone reads the *Quijote*, that infused virtue known as a sense of humor installs itself for life in all your acts. It is simply the balm of Fierabras" (78).

This conversation is central both to the novel's interpretation of the *Quijote* and to its proposal of an "epistemic shift" away from coloniality. In order to begin to unpack this commentary, we must first analyze the young speaker's comment. First, his reference to humor as a "gracia infusa" ("infused virtue") comes from the writings of Thomas Aquinas, who distinguishes "infused" virtues from "acquired" ones: although "acquired" virtues are developed through human effort alone, "infused" virtues can be obtained only with divine assistance—in other words, the individual must assent to God's inspiration in order to obtain them (Drefcinski). The young man's comment thus implies that a sense of humor is akin to a virtue that can be "infused" in someone from a "divine" source—namely, the novel *Don Quijote*.

The young man's notion that *Don Quijote* is like the "balm of Fierabras" is drawn from the *Quijote* itself. In chivalric literature, the balm of Fierabras refers to two barrels of balm that were stolen from the tomb of Christ, which have the capacity to heal any ailment or injury (*Fierabras*, ed. Kroeber and Servois, p. 17, v. 522-34). In Cervantes' novel, Don Quijote, who claims to have obtained the recipe for this panacea (I.10), attempts to make the potion using oil, wine, salt and rosemary (I.17) after having been badly beaten the Yanguesans (I.16). The potion makes him tremendously ill, but because he feels better after he sleeps, he is convinced it has worked properly (I.17). Returning to

Zamora's novel, we can see that the young man's comment that the *Quijote* itself is like a heal-all potion is extremely multi-layered. In addition to praising the *Quijote's* ingenious use of humor, he also suggests that this humor has a healing or reparative power that can somehow change or improve Africa's destiny—all while citing one of the *Quijote's* most hilarious episodes.

At the same time, the story of the balm of Fierabras is a prime example of how Don Quijote's excessive reading of chivalric literature changes his perception of reality. With this in mind, we must return to the other club members' comments about humor: namely, that humor enables one to "troncharse de uno mismo" ("crack up at oneself"), as well as "disfrutar de perspectiva y visión periférica" ("to enjoy peripheral vision and perspective") (75). Both of these comments suggest the capacity of looking beyond oneself or the status quo: humor, we are told, creates the possibility of acquiring a new, self-reflexive perspective, and of seeing things in a way they had previously never been seen. The theory that emerges from this conversation is that humor, by offering a new way of seeing oneself and the world, has the capacity to enact radical change—even, as Chaviota suggests, the power to "arrancar a África del sopor y el atraso" ("bring Africa out of slumber and backwardness") (73).

Glenda Carpio makes a comparable argument about the use of humor in African American literary and cultural traditions in her seminal study, *Laughing Fit to Kill*

(which, coincidentally, also begins with a quote about humor from the *Quijote*<sup>41</sup>). Carpio begins by noting the critical tendency to interpret African American humor through lens of the “relief theory,” which suggests that humor “has provided a balm, a release of anger and aggression, a way of coping with the painful consequences of racism” (5). Yet, because it would be reductive to reduce all of African American humor to a “coping mechanism,” Carpio also highlights the importance of the “incongruity theory” (6). This theory, she says, suggests that “the playing of ‘what if’ games that suspend normativity” enables us “to question the habits of mind that we may fall into as we critique race” (6). For Carpio, the “incongruity theory” reveals African American humor to be not only an attempt to “cope,” but also “an energetic mode of social and political critique” (7).

I argue that Zamora’s reinterpretation of the *Quijote* in his novel, *Conspiración en el green*, is more aligned with the “incongruity” theory than with the “coping” theory. As the story of the balm of Fierabrás suggests, one of the *Quijote*’s central themes is the way in which the consumption of fictions alters one’s perception of the world: in other words, fiction becomes the world, and the world itself becomes a fiction. Following Carpio’s insight, we can see how Zamora’s novel asks his readers to play a “what-if” game: namely, what if the stories of Equatorial Guinea, Africa and colonialism more

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<sup>41</sup> Carpio cites from the Prologue: “Procurad también que, leyendo vuestra historia, el melancólico se mueva a risa, el risueño la acreciente, el simple no se enfade, el discreto se admire de la invención, el grave no la desprecie, ni el prudente deje de alabarla” (“Another thing to strive for: reading your history should move the melancholy to laughter, increase the joy of the cheerful, not irritate the simple, fill the clever with admiration for its invention, not give the serious reason to scorn it, and allow the prudent to praise it.”)

generally were also just illusory “fictions?” Drawing on the resemblance of Equatorial Guinea’s “real-life” story to popular fiction such as *The Dogs of War*, Zamora, too, asks us to think of Equatorial Guinea’s troubled history—and, by extension, the multiform systems of oppressions that constitute “coloniality”—as “fictions” that can be re-interpreted or re-written. As I show in the next section, the novel articulates this decolonial, “quixotic” critique through its numerous representations of popular fiction and its consumption.

### **3.5 *Popular Fiction and its Consequences in Conspiración***

To examine more fully how Zamora’s invitation to read Equatorial Guinea as a “fiction” can be understood as a form of decolonial resistance, we must turn to some of the numerous appearances of popular fiction and film in the novel. Zamora makes it abundantly clear that many of his novel’s exiled Guinean characters are avid consumers of pop culture, and have been for most of their lives. For several characters, popular fiction is especially associated with childhood. For example, in Chapter 1, D’Awal recalls a conversation he once had with his friend, Thompson Bohó, with whom he participated in an attempted coup against Macías in the 1970s. In D’Awal’s flashback, Bohó is explaining the complex reasons for which the coup failed; D’Awal sarcastically replies that his story “huele a intriga de esas novelas baratas que devorábamos a espuestas en

Santa Isabel<sup>42</sup> (“smells of an intrigue from those tons of cheap novels we used to devour in Santa Isabel”) (35). This statement reveals that, as children under Spanish colonial rule, both D’Awal and Bohó read all the swashbuckling stories that they could get their hands on. Similarly, in Chapter 17, we meet Luisito Ripalakasa, an activist for Bubi independence who consumed great amounts of popular fiction as a child.<sup>43</sup> D’Awal, who is of Ripalakasa’s same age, remembers clearly how threadbare Ripalakasa’s pants always were: “tenían los bolsillos siempre rotos de rastrear el fondo en busca de la última peseta para hacerse con...un tebeo del Capitán Trueno en el quiosco de la Plaza de España, o una entrada para ver por enésima vez *Las Aventuras del Capitán Maravillas* [sic] en el cine Marfil” (“their pockets were always torn from his scraping the bottom in search of the last *peseta* to get a...comic of Captain Thunder at the newsstand in Plaza de España, or a ticket to see the *Adventures of Captain Marvel* in the Cine Marfil for the millionth time”) (379) Additionally, Ripalakasa also reminds D’Awal how the two of them used to watch movies together at the Cine Marfil (388).

It is interesting to note that, in the cases of D’Awal, Bohó, and Ripalakasa, there appears to be a connection between consuming popular culture as children and becoming revolutionaries as adults: all three characters read and watched movies a great

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<sup>42</sup> Santa Isabel was the name of the city of Malabo, now Equatorial Guinea’s capital, during Spanish colonial rule.

<sup>43</sup> This refers to the Bubi ethnic group, one of the ethnic minorities of Equatorial Guinea. This group has repeatedly organized separatist movements against the Fang ethnic majority, to which the dictators Macías and Obiang both belong.

deal as children, and, at least at some point in their adult life, were motivated to actively oppose the Macías and Obiang governments. The connection between childhood reading and adult activism is also perceptible in a fourth character: Ehanoviale, also a defender of Bubi independence, whom D'Awal visits in chapter 2. During their meeting, Ehanoviale recounts an episode to D'Awal in which he was imprisoned and tortured at Black Beach, Equatorial Guinea's notoriously horrific prison (which is referred to in the novel as "Blay Bich"). On this occasion, Ehanoviale was being tortured by a doctor he personally knew: during their youth, the doctor was "un pobre niño torpe, cojo y tartamudo" ("a poor, clumsy, crippled and stuttering child"), whom Ehanoviale would bully by stealing his copies of Estefanía's Wild West-themed novels (54). Although this may seem like a relatively insignificant childhood prank, we must recall Nerín's previously discussed analysis, according to which the scarcity of books in Equatorial Guinea made Estefanía's novels highly valuable. By mentioning this fact, Ehanoviale's narration suggests two important details. The first is the fact that both Ehanoviale and the awkward doctor-to-be, like their compatriots D'Awal, Bohó and Ripalakasa, loved reading popular fiction as children. The second is that, although the doctor was ostensibly torturing Ehanoviale for his anti-government political activities, the doctor also had a personal motive: that of avenging Ehanoviale's own "torture" of him during childhood, which consisted of robbing him of one of his most prized possessions.

We are thus presented with a considerable number of characters who consume popular fiction as children, such as Westerns and comics, and who then go on to oppose the oppressive government that rules them for at least part of their adult life. The parallelism with *Don Quijote* is apparent, and, at first glance, it might seem that the author is proposing a connection between reading and activism in order to glorify “quixotic,” revolutionary heroism. After all, just as Don Quijote’s excessive reading enables him to imagine himself as a knight-errant, so, too, do some of the characters in Zamora’s novel derive “heroic” inspiration from plot-driven popular fictions with a clear distinction between “good” and “evil.” This interpretation echoes Nerín’s hypothesis, in which popular fictions such as Western novels enable Equatorial Guineans to imagine “vengeance” against their oppressors. Following this reasoning, it seems quite plausible that many of the novel’s characters—including D’Awal, in his younger days—would have drawn some of their revolutionary impulses from fictional stories such as Westerns, where justice is always swift, and where good always triumphs over evil.

However, an urgent question remains. If we are to accept the idea that the novel romanticizes the “quixotic” consumption of popular fictions because such fictions lead viewers and spectators to engage in political resistance, what sense do we make of the fact that the revolutionary causes that these characters represent are all portrayed as failures? As we know, D’Awal and Bohó’s idealistic coup from the 1970s was

unsuccessful. Ripalakasa, we are told, did not fare much better: he returned to Equatorial Guinea from Madrid upon Obiang's successful coup against Macías, but the experience left him "frustrado y humillado" ("frustrated and humiliated") (380). Exiled in Barcelona, he now relies on subsidies from activist groups, since he is unable to support himself. Ehanoviale, similarly, has changed: although D'Awal remembers the once passionate activist as always being able to "burlarse de sí mismo y de todo lo que le rodeaba" ("make fun of himself and of everything around him") (48), the man D'Awal encounters in the novel's present is described as "amargado" ("embittered"), and as "alguien que carecía de motivos para reírse de nadie y, menos, de sí mismo" ("someone who lacked reasons to laugh at anyone, much less himself") (49). The fact that Ehanoviale has lost the ability to laugh is especially significant: recalling the importance of humor signalled by the "Club de la Puta Parió," we must understand Ehanoviale's loss of laughter as an indication of disillusionment and despair. Bohó, it seems, is the only one of the bunch who has not lost faith in his ability to fight for a coup-based revolution: at the end of the novel, in his letter to D'Awal, he declares that he has been planning a new coup during D'Awal's entire search. Yet, the novel never shows us the fruits of his labor: we can only conclude that his effort, like every single other coup mentioned in the novel, will either end in failure or disappointment.

But perhaps D'Awal himself is the most disenchanted of this group of former idealists. In Chapter 1, the omniscient narrator offers this portrait of him:

La edad y la experiencia le habían vuelto extremadamente cauto y desconfiado. Ya nada de este galápago cínico y de curtidas escamas, metido a investigador privado y obligado a aceptar los encargos más peregrinos para poder llegar a fin de mes, recordaba a aquel arrogante militante del Movimiento de Salvación Nacional que aterrizó...en la capital de Nigeria, con la misión de coordinar la última fase de la Operación Peces Tropicales, diseñada y planificada en la madrileña calle Cochabamba para acabar con la dictadura de Papá Macías. (24)

(Age and experience had made him extremely careful and distrustful. Nothing about this cynical, tough-scaled turtle, now a private investigator forced to accept the most humbling jobs to make ends meet, still resembled that arrogant militant of the Movement for National Salvation that landed...in the capital of Nigeria with the mission of coordinating the last phase of Operation Tropical Fish, designed and planned on Cochabamba Street in Madrid to bring an end to the dictatorship of Papá Macías.)

In this paragraph, we learn that D'Awal was once a revolutionary who attempted to bring down the dictator Macías. However, by now, D'Awal, like so many others, appears to have lost faith in the ability of coups or similar movements to bring about change. Furthermore, in addition to being cynical, he is also somewhat ineffective as a detective: in spite of his efforts, we know that by the novel's end, he never manages to discover the conspiracy being plotted by Lord Mark and the *libanés*. Hence, although the younger version of D'Awal (or Ehanoviale, or Ripalakasa) might be comparable with the enthusiastic, optimistic Don Quijote at the beginning of his adventures, his older self is much more reminiscent of the end of *Don Quijote*, when the protagonist renounces the chivalric code he so had ardently followed and dies of a fever, leading to the definitive extinction of knights-errant and their idealistic chivalry.

However, I believe that to arrive at this novel's search for a decolonial alternative, there is one more key character that must be taken into consideration: Papá Motuda, D'Awal's "viejo y socarrón amigo ndowe" ("old, sarcastic Ndowe friend")<sup>44</sup> (47). In some ways, Papá Motuda is strikingly similar to the other characters we have discussed. Like these other characters, Papá Motuda was active in several revolutionary movements as a young man, such as the "Movimiento de Salvación Nacional" and the "Movimiento Nacional de Liberación de Guinea Ecuatorial" (92-3). Also, like other characters, Motuda has also grown disillusioned and poor in his older years: he lives reclusively in a welfare pension in Alcalá de Henares, and his long term alcohol abuse has caused him serious liver and bladder damage. As the narrator puts it, "El tiempo, el exilio y el alcohol habían tratado de manera inmisericorde a Papá Motuda" ("Time, exile and alcohol had treated Papá Motuda mercilessly") (113). Furthermore, like the other characters, Motuda, too, is portrayed as having once been a voracious reader:

En los días sobrios, Motuda leía bastante. Sin disciplina ni lógica alguna. Se atrevía hasta con Fanon, aunque sus preferencias verdaderas se hallaban entre dos autores de novelas del oeste: Clark Carrados y Keith Luger. Aún así, de tan extraña mezcolanza siempre sacaba conclusiones que aplicaba a su realidad de apátrida sin perspectivas. (94)

(On his sober days, Motuda would read a lot. With no discipline or logic whatsoever. He would even try Fanon, although his true preferences lay in two Western novelists: Clark Carrados and Keith Luger. Even so, from such a strange mixture he always drew conclusions that he would apply to his reality as a stateless person with no prospects.)

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<sup>44</sup> The Ndowe people are one of Equatorial Guinea's oppressed minority ethnic groups.

So far, Motuda seems to resemble the other characters in almost every way. Although this passage highlights the “strangeness” of reading Western novels alongside the anti-colonial theoretical works of Frantz Fanon, not even this distinguishes him completely: Bohó and D’Awal also mention having read Fanon in Chapter 10 (240).

What is different about Motuda, however, is the *interpretation* he derives from this “strange mixture” of readings. In a flashback, shortly after remembering Motuda’s penchant for Western novels, D’Awal recalls that Motuda once explained to him:

En el pasado, cuando algunos nos refugiamos en Camerún para hacer frente desde allí a la represión colonial española, éramos considerados unos héroes. Pero después, perseguidos por Macías, pasamos a ser un estorbo. Fue en ese momento cuando me di cuenta perfecta de que los africanos se habían preparado durante años, de manera concienzuda, para pelear contra el hombre blanco, pero no para presentar batalla ante sus propias contradicciones en forma de dictaduras, partidos únicos o genocidios contra otras etnias. *El blanco fue un enemigo visible y previsible...* Fue muy duro descubrir, así de pronto, que Macías no era ningún nacionalista, sino un fascista y un genocida de tomo y lomo. Al igual que su heredero, Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Fue allí, donde empezamos a estrellarnos. A quedarnos sin respuestas, ante una nueva trampa para la que no nos habíamos preparado ni el Munge ni el Monalige ni ninguno de los cientos de movimientos de liberación que nacieron en África con el fin de conseguir nuestras independencias. (95)

(In the past, when some of us took refuge in Cameroon to face Spanish colonial repression from there, we were considered heroes. But afterwards, persecuted by Macías, we began to be seen as a nuisance. It was in that moment when I realized that Africans had been preparing themselves painstakingly for years to fight against the white man, but not to wage battle against their own contradictions in the form of dictatorships, single parties and genocides against other ethnic groups. *The white man was a visible, predictable enemy...* It was very hard to discover so suddenly that Macías was no nationalist, but a Fascist guilty of genocide, through and through. Just like his heir, Obiang Nguemea Mbasogo. It was there that we began to have problems. To be left without answers before a

new trap which none of us was prepared for—not the Munge, nor the Monalige, nor any of the hundreds of liberation movements that were born in Africa with the goal of obtaining independence.)

In this passage, Motuda reflects on the most difficult realization that he and others who fought for independence had to face: namely, that independence did not bring about liberation, but only dictatorship and oppression. One of the most important problems, he says, was the reductive construction of the “white man” into a “visible, predictable enemy”: by viewing the colonizers as “bad guys,” it was all too easy to assume that the elimination of European colonialism would bring about the liberating peace and autonomy that they, as anti-colonial militants, so ardently desired. However, as Motuda’s reflection shows, the facile opposition of “Guineans” against “Spaniards,” or of “Africans” against “Europeans” only led to disaster, because such an opposition erased all of the internal complexities, divisions and power struggles within each of those categories. In short, the construction of an independent, Equatorial Guinean “nation” was not the “balm of Fierabras” that the militants hoped it would be.

Returning to the role of popular fiction, we must consider how reading Fanon and Westerns could have influenced Motuda’s reflections on the question of African independence. I argue that Motuda, although he loved these novels, learned to read them as *patently* or *transparently* fictional. As Will Wright demonstrates, two underlying assumptions are central to the mythology of the Wild West: on one hand, the white, male cowboy must save “a new frontier community is threatened by greedy villains” (7);

on the other, he must also “defeat the Indians in order to civilize the wilderness” (160). Explaining the logic of these myths in terms of social theory, Wright argues that “the image of ‘savage Indians’ ...typically suggests that certain groups of people, usually non-white people, are so irrational and inferior that the laws and rights for rational individuals simply do not apply. Violence is therefore justified against such savagery for the sake of rational individuals” (161). Western mythology is thus predicated on a polarizing division between “white” and “nonwhite,” as though each of those categories had no internal complexity, and as if white and nonwhite equality were utterly inconceivable.

As Motuda illustrates, the polarized division between white and nonwhite that is so strongly perceptible in Western novels was also strongly felt in many African struggles for independence. Yet, Motuda shows that such a division led militants such as himself to a grave error: namely, the belief that “colonialism” and “coloniality” were one in the same. By eliminating colonialism and expelling the white oppressor, Motuda and other militants believed that they would achieve freedom and autonomy. However, not only did independence allow for the rise of cruel dictators and the exacerbation of ethnic tensions, but, as the novel’s “coup” story illustrates, it did not really eliminate Europe’s power to control and manipulate African countries, even in a postcolonial age. As in “Estefanía,” the problem of racial difference complicates the reading of Westerns that Nerín proposes. Although Nerín argues that Westerns offer Guinean readers a fantasy of

salvation, I argue that Motuda's reflections present "race" as a fiction; that is, as a patently constructed, artificial discourse which must be revised. This is not to suggest that the material consequences of racial hierarchies are merely imaginary, and therefore not "real": but rather, that their "reality" is, in fact, artificial, and, like fiction, can be reshaped or re-interpreted.

While the failure of every coup and resistance movement that this novel portrays may lead one to conclude that this novel is unmitigatedly cynical, I argue that the novel's ultimate lesson is to illustrate that the real "salvation" of Equatorial Guinea lies *beyond* coups and nationalisms, whether at the level of the state or particular ethnic groups. Instead, as the discussion at the *Club de la puta parió* illustrates, the novel suggests that quixotic humor is necessary to transcend the brutality, corruption, mismanagement and neglect that plague contemporary Equatorial Guinea. Because these problems are rooted in coloniality, only a new, self-reflexive point of view can offer the perspective necessary to reimagine Equatorial Guinea at a structural level. Even though so many militants' hopes for change, which appear to have been nourished by various forms of popular culture, are ultimately left unfulfilled, the novel implies that their readings of these popular texts were misguided. Instead of simply deriving a fantasy of rebellion against a simplistically construed villain (such as a dictator, or European colonizers), a more fruitful reading would have allowed these readers to use

fiction and humor as tools to critique the deeply entrenched roots of coloniality, and, in doing so, re-envision their world completely.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Francisco Zamora Lobo re-reads the most iconically Spanish classic, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, across three works in three different genres—the essays in *Cómo ser negro y no morir en Aravaca* (1994), the poem “Estefanía” (1999), and the novel *Conspiración en el green* (2009). In all three cases, I have argued that Zamora disengages from essentialistic notions of national identity that the *Quijote* has often been used to bolster. Instead, Zamora exploits the *Quijote*’s portrayal of fiction and reality as indistinguishable in order to portray some of the most ingrained myths of the world we live in—such as racial difference, European cultural superiority, African backwardness, or the division of the world into reductive nationalisms—as fictions. The critical power in such a portrayal is not to suggest that these problems are not real, but rather, that they have been historically *created* over time, and as such, they can also be *undone*. As with the other writers I have studied, the metaphor of rewriting is crucial to Zamora’s interpretation of the *Quijote*: just as Zamora himself can easily invent new adventures for *Don Quijote*, or apply its trajectory of excessive reading, idealism and disillusionment to the context of coups in contemporary Equatorial Guinea, so, too, must

we adopt a radically new worldview in order to envision strategies that can effectively combat the ingrained power structures of coloniality.

#### 4. Recycling “Gods” and “Ghettos”: Jadelin Mabiala Gangbo’s *Rometta e Giulio*

The Congolese-Italian writer Jadelin Mabiala Gangbo stands out in the corpus of Italian migrant writing for two major reasons. The first of these, as Anna Frabetti and Sabrina Brancato (“Translating”) have noted, is that Gangbo’s life story is not that of the typical “migrant” or “migrant writer.” Born in Brazzaville in 1976, Gangbo moved with his family to Bologna at the age of four. Shortly thereafter, his parents returned to Africa, leaving the young Jadelin and his siblings to be raised by Italian social services in orphanages and foster homes. Thus, although technically an immigrant, Gangbo spent almost his entire youth in Italy. As a result, his memory and knowledge of his native Congo are extremely limited, and Italian is essentially his mother tongue. In this sense, he differs from the majority of other “migrant writers,” for whom Italian is a second language. Yet, despite his thoroughly Italian cultural background, he has stated that he has never been considered fully Italian because of his black skin, which, especially during his childhood, was read as a telltale sign of foreign origin (Carpinelli). Furthermore, in spite of growing up in Italy, Gangbo explained that, as a non-citizen, he was forced to renew his residence permit (*permesso di soggiorno*) on a regular basis until well into his adult years (“Quinto seminario”). Finally, even though Brancato argues

that Gangbo is “not an immigrant” at all,<sup>1</sup> his work has nonetheless been consistently studied within the framework of Italian migrant writing (“Translating” 59).<sup>2</sup>

Gangbo also stands out amongst “migrant” writers in Italy as one of its most critically successful practitioners. We will recall, for a moment, Jennifer Burns’ observation that Italian migrant writing evolved from autobiographical “diaries” to literary experimentation from the 1990s to the 2000s (“Outside Voices” 137). While the trajectory of Gangbo’s four novels confirms this observation,<sup>3</sup> I argue that his second novel, *Rometta e Giulio* (2001), is particularly exemplary of this evolution due to its formal experimentation with narrative structure and language, as well as its metafictional reflections on the dichotomy of literary “ghettos” and “godliness.” Ironic, playful, and irreverent, *Rometta e Giulio* recycles numerous elements from William Shakespeare’s classic play, *Romeo and Juliet*, in order to tell the story of a writer whose novel rebels against him, and who is ultimately unable to control his fictional world or the characters that live within it. The novel is particularly distinct from migrant narratives in Italian of the early 1990s, such as Salah Methnani’s *Immigrato*, Mohamed Bouchane’s *Chiamatemi Ali*, or Pap Kouma’s *Io, venditore di elefanti*. Unlike these first-person, autobiographical narratives which were often co-authored by migrant and

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<sup>1</sup> I argue that this claim is disputable, depending on how exactly one defines “migrant.”

<sup>2</sup> Gangbo has repeatedly been invited to conferences and workshops on migrant writing in Italy. His work has also been studied alongside other migrant writers (See Parati, Vandeventer, Romani and Benelli).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to *Rometta e Giulio*, Gangbo’s other three novels include: *Verso la notte bakonga* (1999), *Una congrega di falliti* (2007) and *Due volte* (2009).

Italian writers, *Rometta e Giulio* is extremely conscious of its textuality: in addition to being both metafictional and explicitly intertextual, it is also aware of its audience, given the fact that the narrator, Jadelin, repeatedly addresses the reader as “Sire” (“Sir”). In a similar vein, the narration also alternates between high poetic (i.e., mock-Shakespearian) and contemporary slang registers.

Interestingly, one of the most frequently discussed features of *Rometta e Giulio* is the front cover of the 2001 edition, published by Feltrinelli. This image depicts two black feet standing on a balcony, with apartments on the other side of the street visible in the background. In an interview with Tiziana Carpinelli from 2004, Gangbo explained that because the balcony is immediately associated with one of *Romeo and Juliet*'s most famous scenes, it serves as a sort of bridge between Shakespeare's play and Gangbo's rewriting of it. Similarly, as we will see later on in this chapter, Gangbo explained that the novel's protagonist, a fictional writer named Jadelin (like his “real-life” author), rarely leaves his house, “scrive alla finestra e guarda il mondo dall'alto, come un dio” (“writes at the window and watches the world from on high, like a god”)<sup>4</sup> (Carpinelli).

Following Gangbo's explanation, Elena Benelli argues that the image of the writer's feet on the balcony illustrates that “the author finds himself in between tradition and innovation, between official and alternative discourse, and between classical and

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<sup>4</sup> In the interest of space, primary sources (critical theory, literary texts, and interviews with Gangbo) first published in Italian will be cited first in the original language, then in English. Secondary sources (such as literary criticism or sociology) will be cited directly in English. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

modern language" (184). Sabrina Brancato echoes Benelli's point, arguing that the balcony is a "border" that serves simultaneously as "a way out" of his world, and "a way in" to that of his characters ("Translating" 60). But she also adds that "the black feet contrast with the familiar image of Shakespeare's head appearing on international editions of his collected works. This opposition points to one of the text's main concerns: the challenge of the authority of a god-like author" (60).

Read together, Gangbo's, Benelli's and Brancato's comments illustrate what I consider to be this novel's self-conscious critique of its own status as "migrant writing." On one hand, by referencing Shakespeare, the novel's cover introduces the idea of literary godliness. And, in fact, "godliness" is the status that the fictional Jadelin, who has just published an unsuccessful first novel, intends to obtain with his new work, which, he hopes, will be "qualcosa che superi Shakespeare" ("something that surpasses Shakespeare") (36). On the other hand, however, is the idea of literary lowliness: although Jadelin watches the world below him from his balcony "like a god," the cover shows us only his bare, black feet, which, as Brancato mentions, are visually striking because they are exactly the opposite of Shakespeare's white face. Furthermore, Jadelin spends most of his time cloistered in his filthy apartment: although the balcony may indeed serve as a "way in" to his fictional universe, it also highlights his isolation from his own, "real" world. In fact, the only time the balcony truly serves as a "way out" of his jail-like apartment is at the novel's dramatic end, in which Jadelin jumps out the

window in an attempt to escape the havoc and chaos unleashed by his uncontrollable fictional creation.

I argue that both the balcony and the bare, black feet depicted on the novel's cover serve as metaliterary reflections on migrant writing, which has frequently been referred to as a stifling, limiting category by scholars and writers alike. In Chapter 1 of this thesis, we examined Amara Lakhous' searing critique of the publishing industry's expectations of migrant writing, which, according to Lakhous, were so conventional that Lakhous equated them to a "pizza recipe" ("Xenofobia e razzismo"). Similarly, in her interview with Maria Cristina Mauceri, Italo-Somali writer Igiaba Scego denounced the idea that "migrant writers" must only write about the experience of immigration, referring to this expectation repeatedly as a "cage" ("gabbia"). And scholar Lucia Quaquarelli has warned that the fabrication of a literary category such as "migrant writing" runs the risk of initiating an extremely problematic "rediscovery of the author," as well as imposing the role of "native informant" on migrant writers (60).

But few have been as openly critical of migrant writing as Gangbo himself. In a 2002 interview with author Davide Bregola, Gangbo expressed disdain for the critical and academic attention bestowed on migrant writers, quipping that "i convegni da 'riserva indiana' mi hanno già stancato" ("the Indian reservation conferences have worn me out") (44). Gangbo's comparison of this literary category to an "Indian reservation" is particularly striking: it suggests that the exclusion of these writers from mainstream

Italian writing is a fundamentally colonizing, perhaps even racist gesture. Gangbo voiced a similar idea to Tiziana Carpinelli, telling her that his “pride” led him to prefer to remain outside the “ghetto” of Italian migrant writing, even though it was “inevitable” that he be associated with it. Likewise, in 2006, he told Anna Frabetti: “io detesto essere confinato alla ‘letteratura migrante,’ mi fa schifo anche il nome” (“I detest being confined by ‘migrant literature’, even the name disgusts me”) (67). In this interview, he even repudiated what he saw as the questionable literary talent of several so-called “migrant writers,” arguing that a significant number of them “non sono scrittori, ma semplicemente mediatori culturali” (“are not writers, but merely cultural mediators”) (67). He also asserted that a considerable portion of their works were not “degne di essere considerate letteratura” (“worthy of being considered literature”) because they did little more than narrate “alcune esperienze personali come potrebbe fare un qualsiasi individuo slegato dagli strumenti letterari” (“some personal experiences just as any individual could do without recourse to literary tools”) (67).

Gangbo’s repeated references to his own “pride” as a writer, as well as his accusations that some “migrant writers” are lacking in talent, suggest his desire to surpass the confines of a second-class literary designation in order to be ranked alongside Italy’s literary masters. With this context in mind, the image of the bare feet on a balcony that introduces his novel acquires a new significance. Gangbo’s feeling of suffocation resulting from the label of “migrant witer” mirrors his fictional protagonist’s

self-cloistering in a cluttered, filthy apartment. Furthermore, just as the fictional Jadelin tries to “surpass Shakespeare,” the real-life Gangbo also yearns to indulge his literary “pride,” that is, to be seen as more than *just* a “migrant writer.” Hence, the balcony’s function as “border” can also be read as a prison from which Gangbo yearns to escape: namely, the prison of *other*-ness imposed upon him by the designation of “migrant writer.”

Yet, despite his seemingly damning condemnations of migrant writing, Gangbo nonetheless has, on occasion, recognized its potential for effecting social change. In a 2005 seminar on migrant writing organized by the literary magazine *Sagarana*, Gangbo explained that although “questo termine ‘Migrante’ ... suona come una malattia infettiva” (“this term ‘Migrant’... sounds like an infectious disease”), the fact of being excluded from the larger body of “Italian literature” was also beneficial because it enabled these other writers to form reciprocal support networks, and to obtain recognition as “scrittori d’eccezione” (“writers of exception”). Similarly, in the Frabetti interview, he moderated his harsh comments by musing about the productive potential of understanding the term “migrant” as an openly-defined, transitional criterion for literary classification:

Migrare in fondo è un viaggio, giusto? Essere scrittori migranti vuol dire di conseguenza essere scrittori in viaggio?...Quindi limitiamoci a ottimizzare la nostra qualità di viaggiatori attraverso la scrittura, approfondendola e lavorandoci con sincerità e serietà. Poi, magari, tra una trentina di anni, scopriremo che il termine migrante e l’emarginazione sono stati un passaggio indispensabile alla maturazione di qualcosa d’altro (67-8).

(Migrating is really a journey, right? To be migrant writers therefore means to be writers on a journey?... Then let us limit ourselves to optimizing our quality as travelers through writing, deepening it and working on it sincerely and seriously. Then, maybe, in thirty years, we will discover that the term migrant and the marginalization [that it created] were a necessary step toward the maturation of something else.)

Gangbo's comments on migrant writing in these interviews ultimately stem from his literary ambitions as a writer. On one hand, he knows that "migrant writing" can both essentialize migrants as *others* and impose a glass ceiling on their literary careers. On the other hand, he also acknowledges the possibility of migrant writing to have a positive impact on racist and xenophobic sentiment, to bring recognition to writers who would otherwise be overlooked, as well as to create solidarity between networks of writers.

While both Benelli and Brancato have discussed Gangbo's opposition to the "migrant" label, neither scholar has examined how his literary works are themselves self-conscious of their categorization as "migrant writing," and consequently, how they challenge the very category into which they are repeatedly woven. In my approach, I consider the novel's awareness of its designation as "migrant writing" to be its central concern. I contend that this novel represents itself as trapped in a polarized binary of literary "godliness" and "lowliness," and that it anxiously yearns to surpass the "ghetto" of migrancy in order to achieve the "divinity" of Shakespearean theater. And yet, I argue that as the novel progresses, it rethinks the very dichotomy between "godliness" and "lowliness" that it initially establishes. Even though the novel resists

the reductive effects of “migrant writing,” its depiction of a fictional world’s revolution against its tyrannical, egomaniacal author also articulates a powerful critique of unbridled literary ambition. Thus, while the novel aspires to surpass “migrant writing,” it also critiques the very notion of acquiring canonical status and the inherently imperialist desire for self-aggrandizement that underlies such ambition.

Significantly, in *Rometta e Giulio*, the binary between literary “ghettos” and “godliness” is framed in terms of gender: as we will see, the male characters’ anxiety about literary success or failure surfaces in the novel as a simultaneous desire for virility and fear of emasculation. Yet, just as I argue that the novel ultimately questions its own polarization of literary glory and marginality, I also suggest that its ultimate goal is to imagine a way out of the masculinity crises that afflict its main characters. Hence, my analysis of masculinity in Gangbo’s text differs significantly from other scholars’ critiques of Gangbo’s representation of gender, especially regarding women. For example, Graziella Parati argues that “in *Rometta e Giulio*, the female protagonist is the object of desire for both the protagonist and Jadelin...but other women are reductively defined as ‘cunts.’ The female body...is abused, and as an object of contention between men is filled with meaning that leaves little room for the individuation of an independent female identity in the narrative” (85). Similarly, Allison Van Deventer makes a comparable claim about Gangbo’s first novel, *Verso la notte bakonga*, declaring that the protagonist’s negotiation of the Italian and African facets of his identity

“obscures the exploitive use of women’s bodies as terrains for working out his crisis of racialized masculinity” (46). While I do not directly dispute these scholars’ analyses, I do argue that the question of gender *Rometta e Giulio* must be explored in further depth. Although *Rometta e Giulio*’s male characters repeatedly demonstrate misogynistic behavior, the novel nonetheless presents its characters’ masculinity crises as an insufferable prison that must ultimately be broken down—just like the binary of literary “gods” and “ghettos.”

In order to unpack the novel’s dual critique of both the reification of subaltern identity and the universalizing gesture of literary “godliness,” I will use Franco Cassano’s philosophical vision of the Mediterranean as a space that balances the “fundamentalisms of land and sea” —or, in other words, the competing dangers of exclusive, place-based identities and the rootless flow of global capitalism. These concepts will allow me to trace the novel’s inextricably intertwined metaphors of rewriting and the Italian South. My analysis will show that, just as Cassano imagines the Mediterranean as a space where the “fundamentalisms of land and sea” balance each other, *Rometta e Giulio* represents the Italian South and the Mediterranean seas as conceptual geographies where the “fundamentalisms” of literary “greatness” and “ghettos” can be radically reshaped and rewritten.

#### 4.1 *Cassano on the Mediterranean*

In this section, I provide a brief overview of key concepts from Cassano's seminal work, *Il pensiero meridiano* (*Southern Thought*), that grounds my reading of Gangbo's novel. In particular, I hope to illustrate how Cassano's philosophy will allow us to navigate both the pitfalls and the productive potential inherent in imagining the "Mediterranean" as a useful conceptual framework, especially in terms of exploring the key linkages between migrant writing and Southern European identity.

In my view, Cassano's work is extremely important to the growing corpus of cultural studies work on the Mediterranean because it offers a solution to certain theoretical impasses that this field has otherwise been unable to surmount. Perhaps one of the most fundamental challenges is the theoretical ambiguity of the term "Mediterranean," given that the term can be applied to a vast range of time periods and cultures. As Armando Gnisci observes, the ability of the "Mediterranean" to incite such an abundant variety of academic debates in so many cultural and historical contexts means that "the Mediterranean risks drowning—a curious paradox for a sea—in a sea of chatter" (165). Additionally, Anna Botta has highlighted what she terms to be the "Scylla" and "Charybdis" of contemporary Mediterranean studies (5). The "Scylla," she writes, is Michael Herzfeld's notion of "Mediterraneism," which, in Botta's words, refers to the fact that "the Mediterranean is most often uncritically assumed as the

methodological frame of scholarly studies that end up reinforcing, consciously or unconsciously, stereotypical views that imply its subaltern status" (4). Against the problem of reifying stereotypes is the "Charybdis" of Mediterranean studies, wherein theorizations of the Mediterranean are driven by a "nostalgia for lost grandeur" (5). The nostalgic idealization of the Mediterranean as utopia has been described most compellingly by Roberto Dainotto, who warns that the celebration of such notions as Mediterranean "liquidity," "hybridity" or "multiculturalism" obscures deeply entrenched power hierarchies between Europe and other parts of the world, while cooperating with the globalizing flow of late capitalism.

I believe that Cassano's work successfully resists both the "Scylla" of reducing the Mediterranean to stereotypes and the "Charybdis" of uncritically idealizing Mediterranean "liquidity" by theorizing how the Mediterranean balances both of these tendencies, which Cassano terms the "fundamentalisms of land and sea." In order to understand this fully, we must first explore the introductory premises of Cassano's volume. In the "Introduction" to *Southern Thought*, Cassano defines two interrelated goals of his philosophical approach to thinking about the South. These include: "restituire al sud l'antica dignità di soggetto del pensiero" ("giv[ing] back to the South its ancient dignity as the subject of thought") and "interrompere una lunga sequenza in cui esso è stato pensato da altri" ("interrupt[ing] the long sequence whereby it has been

thought by others”) (5/1-2).<sup>5</sup> Cassano’s use of the term “South” is intentionally ambiguous: while rooted in the historical, economic and cultural marginalization of Southern Italy and Southern Europe, his notion of the “South” is also intended to enable the formation of linkages and relationships between these European geographies and other “Souths,” such as Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (xxxiii-xxxiv/liii-liv).

The main objective of Cassano’s “southern thought” is to liberate the “South” from notions of inferiority, backwardness and primitiveness that have been historically imposed on it. Instead, Cassano argues that Southern worldviews, traditions, and ways of life should be valorized for their capacity to critique hegemonic visions of modernity, progress, and Eurocentrism. For Cassano, the dominant understanding of “modernity,” which was defined and imposed by Northern Europe, is a crucial target of Southern Thought’s critique. Departing from the traditional idea that the Italian South is characterized by a delayed or underdeveloped modernity with respect to the North, he offers a new proposal: “non pensare il sud alla luce della modernità, ma al contrario pensare la modernità alla luce del sud” (“not to think of the South in the light of modernity, but rather to think of modernity in light of the South”) (5/1).

Essential to Cassano’s vision of a Southern critique of Northern hegemony is his notion of the Mediterranean. There are two key aspects of his conceptual vision of the

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<sup>5</sup> Page numbers refer first to the original Italian edition, and second to Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme’s English edition.

Mediterranean that will guide my analysis. While some cultural critics have emphasized the importance of cultural, linguistic and political “fluidity” that characterizes the contemporary Mediterranean, Cassano’s analysis accentuates the fact that the Mediterranean is traversed by borders, both political and imaginary. In “Parallels and Meridians” (the prologue to *Southern Thought*), he argues that: “Oggi Mediterraneo vuol dire mettere al centro il confine, la linea di divisione e contatto tra gli uomini e le civiltà” (“Mediterranean today means putting the border, that line of division and contact between people and civilizations, center stage”) (xxiv/xlvi). For Cassano, reflecting on the Mediterranean’s function as a border between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and between the Global North and South, brings about a heightened perception of the limits of one’s culture—or, in his terms, a “coscienza della finitezza” (“awareness of our finitude”) (xxiv/xlvi). As he puts it, “Sul Mediterraneo non si va a cercare la pienezza di un’origine, ma a sperimentare la propria contingenza. Esso illustra il limite dell’Europa e dell’Occidente” (“We do not go to the Mediterranean to seek the fullness of our origins but to experience our contingency. The Mediterranean shows us the limits of Europe and of the West”) (xxiv/xlvi). The intensified awareness of one’s own cultural “finitude” and “contingency,” which Cassano associates with the Mediterranean, is an important step in resisting the universalizing ambitions of Eurocentrism and Western capitalist modernity,

The second key aspect of Cassano's philosophical vision of the Mediterranean is his idea that the Mediterranean offers a balance between two competing "fundamentalisms" — that of land and that of sea. On one hand, the "fundamentalism of land" is characterized by an "ossessione per la fissità, la sicurezza e l'appropriazione" ("obsession with fixity, assuredness, and appropriation") ("Di terra e di mare" 24/"Of Land and Sea" 18). This "fundamentalism" provokes the essentialization of imaginary ideas of "roots" and "origins" and the reification of identities, which, in turn, invariably create profound asymmetries of power and deeply entrenched systems of exclusion. But for Cassano, the "fundamentalism of the sea" is just as pernicious as its land-based counterpart. The "fundamentalism of the sea" consists of the exaltation of characteristics often associated with water, such as boundless fluidity, liquidity and mobility. When the "fundamentalism of the sea" is unchecked, "Lo sradicamento è festeggiato come una virtù" ("Uprooting is celebrated like a virtue") (40/32). This rootlessness, in turn, leads to the unleashed pursuit of competition, an extreme reliance on technology, and an abandonment of all moderation—all of which, for Cassano, are the hallmark fallacies of Western capitalist modernity.

Yet, the Mediterranean offers a model for achieving equilibrium between the fundamentalisms of land and sea: because Mediterranean cultures have required their inhabitants to rely equally and interdependently on land and sea, "L'uomo mediterraneo...limita l'una tramite l'altro e nel suo ritardo tecnologico; nei suoi vizi, c'è

anche una misura che altri hanno smarrito" ("Mediterranean man...restrains one through the other; and, in his technological delay, in his vices, there is also a moderation that others have lost") (43/34). In Cassano's view, "misura" ("moderation") is a vital, critical response to the capitalist West's legacy of unrestrained conquest and dominance. The Mediterranean, through its Southern worldview, opens the door to this alternative philosophical possibility.

Cassano's overall argument that the Mediterranean enables a Southern-based critique of dominant notions of progress and modernity is thus based on the following notions: (1) that the Mediterranean intensifies one's awareness of the limits of one's culturally determined worldview and predispositions, and (2) that Mediterranean space offers a balance between the exclusions and asymmetries of closed, fixed identities, on one hand, and the unbridled, globalizing tide of Western capitalist hegemony, on the other. I will use this vision of the Mediterranean as an important key to interpreting Gangbo's novel, *Rometta e Giulio*. In the following sections, I will use Cassano's theories to illustrate how this novel uses both the Italian South and the Mediterranean sea as symbolic geographies from which to stage not only a metafictional world's revolution against its author, but also this novel's own rebellion against the dichotomy of literary "godliness" and "lowliness."

## 4.2 *Romeo and Juliet become Rometta e Giulieo*

Before demonstrating the relevance of Cassano's theoretical vision of the Mediterranean to Gangbo's novel, it is first necessary to offer a critical overview of *Rometta e Giulieo*. As the title indicates, this novel is an experimental rewriting of Shakespeare's classic sixteenth century tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. However, Shakespeare is not the novel's only major intertextual referent: rather, I will show that this novel is anxiously cognizant of its place in the evolution of Italian migrant writing. I argue that the tension between the canonical status of Shakespeare and the emergent, more peripheral status of migrant writing is a central thematic concern of Gangbo's novel. Hence, in this section, I first offer a summary of Gangbo's novel, then illustrate its precarious place between Shakespeare and Italian migrant writing. In later sections, I will use Cassano's theories to illustrate how the novel revises its initial polarization of Shakespeare and migrant writing.

Gangbo's novel, *Rometta e Giulieo*, tells the story of a writer writing a novel. As such, the melding of distinct levels of fiction occurs throughout the work. Like the real-life writer Gangbo, this novel's protagonist is a writer named Jadelin, and is an African who lives in Italy—specifically, in Bologna. Having previously written an unsuccessful novel, the fictional Jadelin and his Italian editor, Tonino, struggle to come up with ideas for something more successful—something, we will recall, that they hope

will “surpass Shakespeare.” Because Jadelin has not produced anything publishable in a considerable amount of time, his editor, Tonino, not only tries to help Jadelin brainstorm for ideas, but also constantly harasses him to work faster and to submit his novel-in-progress for publication as soon as possible. Yet, the heat of the blazing Italian summer has made Jadelin “delirious” — he is affected by a “malattia,” or sickness, that leads him to produce a story that he cannot fully control.

The snakelike story emerging from Jadelin’s imagination, which he refers to as a “cancro dissennato,” or “insane cancer,” is set in the city of Verogna—a composite of Shakespeare’s Verona and Gangbo’s contemporary Bologna. In this novel-within-the-novel, Rometta, an Italian university student, and Giulio, a Chinese pizza boy, fall madly in love with each other. Yet, because Jadelin, the writer, also falls in love with his protagonist, Rometta, he decides to create numerous obstacles between Rometta and Giulio. Jadelin’s ultimate intention is to conquer Rometta’s love for himself. As the novel progresses, it takes on a cat-and-mouse quality: the characters scurry around to find ways to reunite, but are constantly hindered by the author’s efforts to keep them apart. A series of plot twists leads Rometta and Giulio away from Verogna to the remote, distant South of Italy. There, Jadelin enters his own novel as a character in order to have the chance to win Rometta’s love.

Once in the South, Rometta and Giulio recognize Jadelin as their author, and rebel against his tyranny. Rometta begs Jadelin to erase her love for Giulio; Giulio kills

the fictional Jadelin by shooting him in the head. When the fictional Jadelin dies, the “real” Jadelin wakes up, finding himself back at his computer in his apartment in the “real” Bologna. Horrified by his lack of control over his own story, Jadelin attempts to erase the story of Rometta and Giulieo from his computer. But when he discovers that the stubborn file refuses to disappear completely, and that his perception of his reality is still indistinguishably melded with the fictional world of Rometta and Giulieo, he decides to escape the horrors of being an author altogether by jumping out the window of his apartment. As he falls, he imagines landing in the perfectly blue Mediterranean waters of his fictional Southern Italy; yet, he also acknowledges that he might very well land on hard asphalt. The novel does not tell us the outcome of his jump.

Gangbo’s novel—or, more precisely, the fictional Jadelin’s meta-novel—shares several, basic characteristics with Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. However, its recycling of Shakespeare is prominently off-kilter: we might say that Jadelin’s meta-novel conserves numerous *trappings* of Shakespeare’s tragedy, but that it significantly distorts these trappings, rather than attempting to reproduce them in an ostensibly faithful way. The first recycled element is the use of character names. While nearly all of the characters in the meta-novel have names from *Romeo and Juliet*, Jadelin’s characters mostly bear little resemblance to their Shakespearian counterparts. One noticeable tendency is the switching of genders: we not only see Romeo become “Rometta” and Juliet “Giulieo,” but we also witness Tybalt (Juliet’s cousin) become “Tibalda”

(Rometta's roommate, also a university student), and Mercutio (Romeo's hotheaded friend) become "Sister Mercutio" (an aging nun in Southern Italy who raised Giulio in an orphanage). The non-correspondence between Shakespeare's and Jadelin's characters is especially visible in the case of "Capuleti" and "Montecchi": although these characters bear the names of Shakespeare's famous rivals, Capulet and Montague, their role in Jadelin's meta-novel is extremely minor and primarily humorous in nature.

The asymmetry between Shakespeare's tragedy and Gangbo's novel is also perceptible in other "deformed" commonalities. Like Shakespeare's original, Jadelin's meta-novel revolves around star-crossed lovers whose "happy ending" will never come to fruition. However, as Gabriella Romani notes, Rometta and Giulio's love is not rendered impossible by a social prohibition, as in Shakespeare; rather, its failure is caused by their author, whose love for Rometta leads him to do everything he can to obstruct her relationship with Giulio (106). The author's intrusion into his fictional world is also highlighted through the use of language. While Jadelin's real world is always narrated in contemporary, colloquial Italian, the characters of his meta-novel speak only in a high poetic register. Needless to say, the mock-Shakespearian language of Jadelin's meta-novel produces a jarring contrast with the slang of the novel's "real" world. The language difference between these two "worlds" becomes especially significant when Jadelin enters his own fictional universe: in this world, his own

characters regard him as a “straniero” (“foreigner”) because his speech is markedly different from everyone else’s.

Graziella Parati has referred the contrasting registers of language in this novel as an act of “breaking and entering” not only into the Italian language, but also into “a literary tradition that proves inadequate as a host of disparate identity constructions” (82). However, Sabrina Brancato implicitly challenges this interpretation by observing that Gangbo’s linguistic dexterity actually accentuates the fact that “he [inhabits] the Italian language from within” – or, in other words, that Gangbo doesn’t have to “break in” to Italian because his command of it is clearly native (“Translating” 59). As a result, Brancato suggests, Gangbo’s work stands out from that of other Italian migrant writers, “whose mother tongue echoes through their writing” (59). Yet, I propose that both Parati and Brancato are right: like his polarization of literary “godliness” and “lowliness,” Gangbo’s theatrical juxtaposition of linguistic registers communicates an anxious tension between exclusion and belonging, between native-ness and foreign-ness, and between literary glorification and marginality.

Finally, as I discussed earlier, the balcony is a key symbol in both Shakespeare’s and Gangbo’s texts. While much could potentially be said about the possible relations of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* to Gangbo’s *Rometta e Giulio*, I believe that the balcony’s primary function is its recognizability. As Marjorie Garber notes, because *Romeo and Juliet* is “the normative love story of our time,” practically any love scene

involving a balcony “is automatically assimilated as a version of *Romeo*” (34). Yet, while in Shakespeare, the balcony functions as a spatial and symbolic boundary between the ill-fated lovers, in Gangbo’s text, the balcony serves as the physical site from which the fictional Jadelin writes his novel. As such, in Gangbo’s novel, the balcony serves as a border between fiction and reality—and, consequently, as a border between the fictional Jadelin and his character, Rometta. Yet, like the use of language, the symbol of the balcony also accentuates the tension between Jadelin’s “godly” status as creator of his fictional universe, and—to borrow Jadelin’s own metaphor—his powerlessness as an “insect” looking in on a world he cannot control (*Rometta* 82).

While *Rometta e Giulio*’s reconfiguration of Shakespeare is easy to detect, I argue that this novel also intentionally reflects on its place within the emerging migrant literary canon in Italy. Let us recall, for a moment, the founding texts of Italian migrant writing from the early 1990s: Salah Methnani’s *Immigrato*, Pap Kouma’s *Io, venditore di elefanti*, and Mohamed Bouchane’s *Chiamatemi Alí*. These texts garnered attention for their presumably authentic representation of “the migrant’s perspective.” However, as I mentioned earlier, two of these three texts were actually co-written by migrant and Italian authors, while the other was “co-edited” with Italians. As Jennifer Burns has argued, the phenomenon of co-authorship in early Italian migrant writing has both productive and problematic implications: on one hand, an editor’s or co-author’s participation may be interpreted as “a gesture of hospitality, inviting both author and

reader into a dialogue with the 'other' ...previously considered incomprehensible" ("Borders within the text" 388). Yet, on the other hand, the editor or co-author's intervention "provides a sort of textual scaffolding to a text which implicitly is too weak to stand alone;" consequently, "what appears to be a gesture of support might also be interpreted as the confirmation of a lack" (388). Thus, although these early migrant narratives were read as authentic representations of migrants' lives, their mixture of migrant and Italian voices underscores complex power dynamics that undermine both the authenticity and literary status of the subaltern voice they intended to foreground.

Although it is clear how Gangbo's novel is radically different from the foundational narratives of Italian migrant writing, I argue that *Rometta e Giulio* intentionally parodies these earlier texts. First, because the protagonist of Gangbo's novel is an African writer living in Italy named Jadelin, he appears to be an autobiographical projection of the "real life" author, Jadelin Mabilia Gangbo. The seeming correspondence between author and protagonist is noticeably similar to all of the aforementioned texts, which use the first person to narrate the "real life" experiences of their authors. Similarly, it is significant that Tonino, an Italian literary agent, helps the fictional Jadelin imagine a story for his novel, but then pressures him to write it faster. This novel's portrayal of the power dynamics between author and editor is also strongly reminiscent of early Italian migrant narratives, which were co-authored or co-edited by migrant writers and Italians.

However, even as Gangbo's novel recalls early Italian migrant writing by invoking the tropes of autobiographical authenticity and migrant/Italian co-authorship, it also pokes fun at this literary corpus. For example, the fictional Jadelin tells us that while he considered making Giulio Colombian, he ultimately opted to make him Chinese. The flippancy with which he treats such distinct nationalities, both of which are decidedly un-African, disrupts the audience's desire to read Giulio as a literary self-portrait of the fictional Jadelin. In doing so, the novel simultaneously upsets the reader's yearning to read the character Jadelin as a projection of the real-life Gangbo, while also challenging our eagerness to read Gangbo as the unassailable messenger of a migrant's "true story." The novel further ruptures the reader's desire to equate migrant writers to their fictional protagonists through the leitmotif of mirrors and reflections: on several occasions in the novel, a character sees her image in a mirror or another reflective surface, but is thoroughly startled and dismayed when she does not recognize herself.

Similarly, Jadelin's story bears no trace whatsoever of the documentary-style "realism" characteristic of Khouma, Bouchane, or Methnani's earlier narratives. In addition to having a whimsical, meandering plot, Gangbo's characters rebel against their author, whose uncertainty about his authorial power leads him to commit a possible suicide. I argue that Gangbo's portrayal of a fictional rebellion mirrors his own refusal to comply with the formulaic conventions of Italian migrant writing at the time he wrote. Rather than submitting to the stifling task of "performing" migrant authenticity through

his writing, Gangbo's novel suggests that no story can be boxed into the suffocating confines of "objective reality," and, furthermore, that all fiction necessarily revolts against the labels and categories that critics, editors and publishers choose to impose on it.

Gangbo's simultaneous invocation of, and resistance against Shakespeare and Italian migrant writing indicates his novel's portrayal of the seemingly irresolvable tension between literary "godliness" and "lowliness." In the next two sections, I will discuss this polarization in light of Cassano's theories of the Mediterranean. I will first focus on Jadelin's ambivalent friendship with his editor, Tonino, and will then explore Jadelin's relationship with his own fictional universe. I will argue that the hierarchies of power between editor and author, and between author and novel jointly epitomize Cassano's ideas of the "fundamentalisms of land and sea."

### ***4.3 Dual Fundamentalisms: The Case of Tonino***

Tonino, Jadelin's publishing agent, is a central character that has heretofore been ignored in critical readings of *Rometta e Giulio*. About fifty years old, Tonino is very vulgar in his speech, and is unrelenting in his demands to make Jadelin produce his novel faster. He is also confined to a wheelchair, being paralyzed at the waist. Despite their presumably professional relationship, Jadelin and Tonino are connected by a

strange friendship: when Tonino sees that Jadelin is trying to write his novel in the isolation and filth of his apartment, he insists that the two travel to Croatia to enjoy beaches and prostitutes together. But their friendship does not stop Jadelin from describing Tonino in rather repellent terms throughout the novel. Introducing readers to this character, Jadelin states that: “Non faceva che sudare, ingolfarsi di bomboloni ed esibire la sua prestigiosa vita di agente editoriale” (“He did nothing other than sweat, stuff his face with doughnuts and show off his prestigious life as a publishing agent”) (34). In spite of his airs, Tonino’s success is moderate at best: we are told that he “aveva importato un buon numero di autori d’oltreoceano tra i quali molti continuano a fruttargli più grana di quanto si aspettasse la critica, ma nulla di esorbitante” (“had imported a good number of authors from overseas, several of whom continue to put more cash in his pocket than critics had expected, but nothing exorbitant” (34).

It is especially compelling that that Tonino specializes in “autori d’oltreoceano” (“overseas authors”) who have turned out to be relatively marketable, despite low critical expectations. I argue that this detail allows us to read him as representative of the editorial interest in Italian migrant writing. In Chapter 1, we witnessed Amara Lakhous’ denunciation of the publishing industry’s formulaic expectations of migrant writers, which he likened to a “pizza recipe.”<sup>6</sup> Lakhous also expressed disapproval of the excessive editorial control some publishers exert over writers’ works, which he referred

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<sup>6</sup>Lakhous made this comment at a seminar on migrant writing organized by the magazine *Sagarana* in 2001.

to as a form of “colonization.”<sup>7</sup> For Lakhous, the “colonization” of migrant writing through the “pizza recipe” formula occurred through the well-intentioned demand of readers and publishers for authentic, autobiographical narratives of migrant suffering. Yet, as Lakhous shows, such a demand is an affront against writers’ creative autonomy, and imprisons them within the confines of narrating an “objectivity” that, in his view, does not exist.

In *Rometta e Giulio*, Gangbo reproduces Lakhous’ vision of the “colonizing” editor through Tonino, whose relationship with his “overseas” writers is clearly exploitative. Like contemporary migrant writers, Tonino’s “overseas” writers are marketable enough to “put more cash in his pocket,” even though they are dismissed by critics as not good enough to belong to the larger Italian canon. Keeping in mind the context of Italian migrant writing, Gangbo’s mention of low critical expectations of “overseas” writers recalls the supposed “authenticity” required of the migrant voice. In other words, although migrant writers are expected to “sell” their authenticity to the reader, it is their very presentation of first-hand, lived experience that allows their texts to be seen as non-literary, and therefore inferior in quality to “real” Italian literature. Tonino’s self-interested investment in publishing these “overseas” writers becomes increasingly apparent as the novel progresses, given his repeated and insistent attempts to rush Jadelin into perfecting and submitting his novel-in-progress as soon as possible.

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<sup>7</sup> Lakhous made this remark in a 2005 interview with fellow migrant writer, Uxax Cristina Ali Farah.

Tonino's symbolic association with contemporary Italian migrant writing becomes even more transparent when we consider his role in the creation of *Rometta e Giulio*: the narrative makes it clear that the idea for this novel is born from Tonino and Jadelin's joint brainstorming (36). As I observed earlier, the fact that Tonino is so intimately involved in its inception recalls early texts of Italian migrant writing, which were co-written by migrant authors and Italian editors or journalists. The problem of co-authorship casts doubt on the supposed "authenticity" of the migrant experience that these texts are supposed to represent. Hence, keeping in mind Jennifer Burns' discussion of the implicit power hierarchies embedded in the Italian/migrant co-authored autobiographical text, we may see how Gangbo's novel critiques the dynamic of coercion between the editor Tonino and the writer Jadelin. While it is true that Tonino helps Jadelin brainstorm, it is also true that his editorial meddling is clearly motivated by his own economic interests, and that the option for Jadelin simply *not* to write or submit anything is unacceptable to him.

Tonino's coercive, exploitative relationship with the "foreign" writers he represents, including Jadelin, must be analyzed in terms of Tonino's anxieties about performing masculinity. These anxieties are markedly visible in his misogynistic treatment of foreign women, as well as in his homophobic suppression of his own same-sex desire. In one scene, describing a party he hosted at his house for other male friends, Tonino nudges one friend to tell the others about some of the female guests, saying,

“dieglielo tu se quelle tre rumene avevano più sale nella zucca o nella patacca” (“Tell them if those three Romanian women were smarter in the head or in the snatch”) (33). This comment implies that Tonino invited sex workers to his party as entertainment, and that he considers it important to brag about this to other men. The fact that the women he mentions are from Romania is particularly important, given the stereotypical associations that often link Romanian women in Italy to sex labor. As Gail Kligman and Stephanie Limoncelli point out, Romania is a key transit country through which Eastern European women and girls are trafficked as sex workers into Western Europe, including Italy (125-6). Cara Margaret Uccellini observes that the Italian media, by making a spectacle of the misery of Romanian sex workers, perpetuates the already strong stigma in Italian society that Romanians, whether male or female, “must be involved in crime” of some sort or another, “ranging from petty theft to kidnapping and prostitution” (74).

Hence, Tonino epitomizes a striking contradiction: while he works to publish “foreign” writers in Italy, he nonetheless treats foreign women as disposable objects for his own satisfaction, thereby taking advantage of the economic, social and gender-based disadvantages they face. Tonino’s exploitative attitude toward non-Italian women surfaces again later on in the novel, when he accompanies Jadelin on a vacation to Croatia. Before their departure, Tonino emphasizes that Croatia is so inexpensive that the whole trip will only cost “gli spicci di un mendicante” (“a beggar’s coins”) (83). After arriving, as the two are lying on the beach, Tonino tells Jadelin that he has always had a

penchant for “chiappe nere” (“black buttocks”), expressing his particular enjoyment of Aretha Franklin’s backside (85). He also takes Jadelin to a brothel where the prostitutes know Tonino personally, given his frequent previous visits. This detail reveals that he has travelled to Croatia on previous occasions to indulge in sex tourism at low prices (86). His penchant for Eastern European and African-descended women suggests not only that he has a fondness for racial and cultural *other-ness*, but also that he finds it convenient to exploit the social vulnerability of women who belong to these groups.

But what, we may wonder, is the source of Tonino’s racist misogyny? As we will see, his Tonino’s repeated articulations of both virulent homophobia and homosexual desire reveal his underlying anxieties about his performance of maleness. These issues first become apparent to the reader in Jadelin’s description of how Tonino came to be paralyzed. One morning, after hosting a wild party in his house, Tonino went to his neighborhood café for breakfast, but was dismayed to notice that the other patrons, who had attended the party, were snickering and laughing at him under their breaths. After someone cracks a joke about a mole on Tonino’s rear end, Tonino becomes extremely suspicious that his male friends may have taken advantage of him sexually during his drunken stupor. He then decides to consult a female lover to discover whether there is, in fact, a mole on his bum. Once she confirms the mole’s presence, Tonino, in a fit of rage, attempts to beat up everyone in the bar. However, in response to this provocation, the other patrons thrash Tonino so severely that he is left paraplegic.

This incident reveals that Tonino's vision of sexual power corresponds with Leo Bersani's famous axiom, "*To be penetrated is to abdicate power*" (212, *original emphasis*). Although his anger at the prospect of being sexually assaulted while inebriated might seem justifiable, in reality, the lack of compelling evidence suggests that it is irrelevant to Tonino whether he was *really* raped at all. Tonino is not worried about not having *consented* to receive anal sex; rather, following Bersani, Tonino believes that *all* receptive anal sex inherently implies a total "abdication" of male power. Hence, this incident demonstrates that Tonino suffers from a deep-seated anxiety about how other men view his virility. Although he viciously denigrates the female Romanian guests who attended his party, he is so horrified at the mere *suspicion* of being similarly objectified and *penetrated* that he rashly attacks all the men in the café, who respond by rendering him unable to walk for life.

As we can see, Tonino's hypermasculine performance is simultaneously grounded in his misogynistic objectification of women, as well as in his homophobic fear of emasculation. The root of this hypermasculinity becomes even more transparent when we consider his repeated expressions of erotic desire toward Jadelin. Such expressions are particularly evident in their trip to Croatia. As the two men are lying on the beach—a scenario which, in itself, carries a strong erotic charge—Tonino jokingly tells Jadelin, "*posso sempre farti in culo*" right before he mentions his taste for "black buttocks". Tonino's remark has two meanings: in the context of their conversation, it is a

jovial variant of the common Italian insult, “vaffanculo” (roughly the equivalent of “fuck you”). However, literally translated, Tonino’s remark means, “I can always do you up the ass.” Although Tonino is not explicitly referring to sex with Jadelin in this moment, the fact that the next sentence out of his mouth articulates his lust for “black buttocks” endows his quip with a double-entendre: after all, Jadelin’s buttocks, like Aretha Franklin’s, are black. Later, at the brothel, Tonino asks Jadelin to share a prostitute with him, but Jadelin refuses. While Tonino’s offer is couched in terms of heterosexual male desire, it nonetheless implies an irrepressible desire to share sexual intimacy with Jadelin. In doing so, Tonino’s proposal loudly recalls Eve Sedgwick’s theorization of the homosocial erotic triangle, which elucidates “the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic property for the primary purpose of *cementing the bonds of men with men*” (26, *emphasis mine*). Furthermore, on several occasions, Tonino facetiously accuses Jadelin of wanting to kiss him or of falling in love with him, even when there is no evidence to support such a claim. In my view, these apparently jocular comments betray Tonino’s reluctant awareness of his own unstated desire for Jadelin.

Tonino’s sexual boasting, his degrading treatment of women (especially black and non-Italian women), and his desperate attempts to distance himself from homosexuality reveal his profound insecurity about his own masculinity. Specifically, he is intensely anxious about performing virility, and hence, about being seen as not “man” enough. I argue that Tonino’s masculinity complex sheds significant light on his work as

a publishing agent. Tonino's desire to sexually consume black and migrant women is clearly a way of bolstering his imperiled sense of manhood, so potently emblemized by his paralysis. Similarly, his interest in making foreign writers produce literature at top speed is a fundamentally self-serving, exploitative practice. His two habits of economically exploiting his writers and sexually objectifying migrant or nonwhite women converge in his relationship with Jadelin: for Tonino, Jadelin is both a potential source of income, as well as an object of sexual desire. In particular, it is Jadelin's perceived *foreignness* that draws Tonino to him: in his "friendship" with Jadelin, Tonino's economic need for publishing "overseas" writers becomes inseparable from his lust for "black buttocks." His desire for Jadelin to provide him both money and sexual satisfaction is thoroughly interwoven with his fear of feminization: just as Tonino felt driven to avenge a sexual assault that may never have taken place, he also feels compelled to disguise his attraction to Jadelin in heterosexual terms (i.e., sharing a prostitute) in order to protect his precarious sense of manhood.

Tonino's reification not only of the "foreignness" of both the "overseas" writers he represents, but also of the black, Croatian and Romanian women he lusts after, demonstrates what Cassano refers to as "fundamentalism of land" and "the fundamentalism of sea." We will recall Cassano's idea that the "fundamentalism of land" represents an "obsession with fixity, assuredness, and appropriation" (18). Read in this light, Tonino's objectification of foreign writers and women can be seen as a

desire to impose exclusive gender, racial and national boundaries on them in order to reify entrenched hierarchies of power. In other words, women and writers imagined to be “foreign” are the objects of Tonino’s economic and sexual desire precisely because he perceives them as both “feminized” and “ethnically other.” Just as Tonino is especially attracted to non-Italian women, he also wants to publish non-Italian writers because of his imagined ability to exploit their marketability. Although paralyzed, Tonino capitalizes on his access to power as an Italian and as a man in order to maximize the benefit he can extract from “overseas” writers and minority women.

The parallelism between Tonino’s attempt to coerce Jadelin into writing and his objectification of non-Italian women allows this character to be read as a scathing indictment of migrant writing. If Tonino represents Italian editors, publishers and consumers of migrant writing, his treatment of Jadelin suggests that the demand to make migrant writers write really stems from a desire to protect Italy’s insecure sense of national pride, just as Tonino attempts to defend his threatened sense of masculinity. In this sense, migrant writing is shown to have the opposite effect from that which it was intended to accomplish: instead of breaking down the rigid power hierarchy between “natives” and “others,” this literary category is predicated on a problematic desire for the *other*, and thus, only reinforces the native/migrant dichotomy. Hence, Tonino’s essentialization of ethnic and gender identities in order to ensure his own gain clearly

illustrates the “obsession for fixity” that characterizes Cassano’s “fundamentalism of land”.

Yet, on the other hand, Tonino’s behavior also epitomizes Cassano’s notion of the “fundamentalism of the sea.” We will recall that for Cassano, the “fundamentalism of the sea” refers to the idea that the idealization of mobility, fluidity and “rootlessness” leads to the unbridled pursuit of competition and the abandonment of moderation. Tonino’s exploitation of foreign women and “overseas” writers not only leads to the intensification of ethnic and gender boundaries, but also to the “liquidation” of the boundary that separates editors from authors. As an editor, Tonino’s work, in theory, ought to be balanced by a respect for authors’ autonomy over their own creative process. However, because Tonino is so economically reliant on the success of the authors he represents, he cannot resist the urge to interfere in his authors’ creative work and to pressure them into performing as rapidly as possible. Tonino’s intentional destruction of the boundary between editor and author, which is intimately connected to his oscillation between economic and erotic desire for Jadelin, is thus analogous to Cassano’s vision of the “fundamentalism of the sea”. His utter refusal to respect limits on his role in Jadelin’s literary work suggests that he views himself as having a “rootless” power in Jadelin’s life: rather than restricting his involvement specifically to the work of an editor, Tonino also attempts to act as a co-author, a demanding boss, a travel companion, a bosom buddy, and, implicitly, as an aspiring bedfellow. The “liquidity” of roles that

Tonino plays in Jadelin's life is clearly intended to maximize Tonino's coercive power: even when he and Jadelin go on vacation together, Tonino's ultimate intention in affording Jadelin relaxation on the beach is to enable him to produce literature more effectively, thereby producing more profit for Tonino.

I argue that Tonino's anxiety about performing masculinity can be interpreted as a symbol of Italy's own national anxiety with respect to Europe, especially northern Europe. Recalling Dainotto's argument that Southern Europe was constituted as an "internal other" of European identity, we can see how Tonino's desire to prove his maleness bears a striking resemblance to Italy's own attempts to perform its belonging to Europe. Yet, as Tonino's constant fear of feminization illustrates, Italy's performance of European belonging betrays the insecurity of every supposed "north" to lose its "north-ness" and degenerate (back) into a "south." Given his role as Jadelin's editor, Tonino's self-serving exploitation of "overseas writers" illustrates that migrant writing may not be very successful at challenging exclusive nationalisms or the black/white racial divide, and that instead, it may only serve to buttress them.

#### **4.4 *More Dual Fundamentalisms: The Case of Jadelin***

While it is clear that Tonino *attempts* to coerce Jadelin into writing a novel, Jadelin also repeatedly demonstrates that Tonino's power over him is extremely limited.

For as the fictional Jadelin obsessively writes his novel over the course of *Rometta e Giulio*, he refers to it as a “delirio” (“delirium”), a “malattia” (“disease”), and a “cancro dissennato” (“insane cancer”) because he sees himself as having no control over the path it will take. Although Tonino is primarily concerned with making Jadelin finish the novel promptly, Jadelin is unable to fulfill this request because his story’s plot continues to emerge from his brain with innumerable twists and turns. At one point, when Tonino admonishes Jadelin for being in a distracted, disorganized mental state that is not conducive to writing, Jadelin simply ignores him, stating to himself: “Ma chi lo ascoltava...Ero altrove” (“No one was listening to him...I was somewhere else”) (70). It is clear, then, that Jadelin’s novel has a life of its own: neither he nor Tonino has the power to cut it short, or to commodify it as an easily packaged product.

Tonino’s impotence in forcing Jadelin to produce a profitable novel is extremely significant because it mirrors Jadelin’s own impotence with regard to controlling his story. The notion that Tonino and Jadelin share underlying similarities may seem surprising to some readers because, at first glance, they appear to have very little in common at all. They are not only separated by profession, race, and able-bodiedness, but also by age: because Jadelin is only twenty-three years old, the fifty-something year old Tonino exclaims at one point, “Potrei farti da nonno, Gesù!” (“I could be your grandfather, Christ!”) (85). Yet, in spite of these differences, I argue that literary impotence makes these two characters mirror images of each other. I also argue that the

“mirroring” quality between Tonino and Jadelin allows us to read this novel as not only as an indictment of the limitations of “migrant writing,” but also as a critique of self-aggrandizing literary individualism—that is, the desire to be universally regarded as a “great” writer.

We have already seen how Tonino’s interest in publishing “overseas” writers parallels his lust for non-Italian women, and that both of these impulses are attempts to compensate for his threatened sense of masculine power. Like Tonino, Jadelin’s character is marked by a fundamental insecurity: that of his ability as a writer. We are told that Jadelin’s desire to write a new novel that will “surpass Shakespeare” (37) emerged from the failure of his previous publication, a “librone” (“big book”) entitled *La seconda volta di Clemente (Clemente’s Second Time)* (32). Clearly, Jadelin’s expectations of this earlier work were very high: “sembrava potesse portarmi a gonfiare lo stomaco nei migliori ristoranti e rimanere quieto come un nonno per il decennio a venire” (“It seemed as though it would allow me to stuff my belly in the best restaurants and stay as still as a grandpa for the next decade”) (32). However, Jadelin was thoroughly disappointed by the book’s lack of success: “invece quella porcheria balbuziente si era paralizzata alle mille copie vendute...Perciò, ero semplicemente rimasto a grattarmi la testa col portafogli ridotto a un flaccido contenitore” (“instead, that babbling piece of trash was paralyzed at a thousand copies...thus, I was simply left to scratch my head with my wallet reduced to a flaccid container”) (32).

The rhetorical choices that Jadelin uses to describe this novel share several striking commonalities with his description of Tonino. First, the fact that Jadelin's idea of success amounts to "gonfiare lo stomaco nei migliori ristoranti" ("stuffing my belly in the best restaurants") anticipates his repulsive description of Tonino as someone who does nothing other than "ingolfarsi di bomboloni" ("stuff his face with doughnuts") and "esibire la sua prestigiosa vita" ("show off his prestigious life") (34). Second, the fact that Jadelin imagines a successful life to consist of "rimanere quieto come un nonno" ("staying as still as a grandpa") is also eerily suggestive of Tonino: as we know, Tonino later refers to himself as old enough to be Jadelin's grandfather (85). Furthermore, Tonino always "stays still" in the sense that he is paralyzed from the waist down. Jadelin brings up the question of paralysis more directly in the same sentence: he describes his earlier book as "paralizzata" ("paralyzed") after only a thousand copies were sold. This word choice is undeniably evocative of Tonino, who remains confined to a wheelchair after trying to avenge an imaginary sexual assault. Finally, Jadelin also echoes Tonino's anxieties about performing male sexuality by describing his empty wallet as a "flaccido contenitore" ("flaccid container"). The term "flaccid," of course, suggests sexual dysfunction, as though the failure of Jadelin's novel and his consequent impoverishment are signs of a lack of virility. Similarly, by describing his *wallet* as "flaccid," Jadelin suggests a link between money and sex that is also unmistakably reminiscent of Tonino. After all, Tonino's desire to make financial profit off of the labor

of “overseas” writers parallels his sexual exploitation of foreign women, whom he uses to buttress his precarious sense of masculine power.

The rhetorical parallelisms between Jadelin’s description of Tonino and his account of his failed novel invite us to read these two characters as doubles of each other. The mirror-effect between the two characters is significant because, just as Tonino’s character articulates a scathing indictment of “migrant writing,” I contend that Jadelin’s character can be read as an acerbic critique of the aspiration to universal literary greatness. To understand this critique, we must consider the strongest commonality Tonino and Jadelin share: namely, their objectifying view of women. In Jadelin’s case, this attitude is most clearly manifest in his possessive sexual desire for his (meta)fictional protagonist, Rometta.

The fictional Rometta is born when Jadelin notices a beautiful, “real” young woman on the street: “Per me, quella era Rometta” (“For me, she was Rometta”), he says (14). Upon seeing this woman, Jadelin instantly begins reimagining her as a fictional character—and, specifically, a character with whom he is infatuated. Although Jadelin’s novel in progress will tell the tale of how Rometta and Giulio, a Chinese pizza boy, fall in love with each other, their love is obstructed by Jadelin’s constant attempts to compete with Giulio for Rometta’s attention. As Jadelin’s novel develops, he puts obstacles between Rometta and Giulio to keep them apart; Rometta and Giulio, meanwhile, struggle to get around those obstacles.

This dynamic is evident in the very first chapter of the *real* novel, *Rometta e Giulio*. When Rometta expresses displeasure at her unattractive reflection in her bathroom mirror, Jadelin intervenes in his own fiction, remarking, “seppur fosse così che a me piaceva” (“even though that’s how I liked her”) (17). Hence, Jadelin is indifferent to Rometta’s disgust with her reflection; instead, he observes that he has constructed her image to gratify himself, not her. Significantly, Rometta accuses the mirror of reflecting her inaccurately, calling it “intinto nell’invidia” (“tinted in jealousy”) and “spregevole” (“disdainful”) for its negative portrayal of her (17). She even accuses it of making her look like a “mostro” (“monster”) because it is infatuated with her, suggesting that the uncomely reflection is the mirror’s way of possessing her all for itself (18). Enraged, she threatens to shatter the mirror and use the shards to make a misshapen vase that will be unable to show anything but deformed reflections (18).

Rometta’s rebellion against the mirror is crucial to understanding her relationship with her author, Jadelin. Rometta’s aversion to her own reflection suggests not only that she is aware of the mirror’s creative power, but also that she will rebel against that power if it displeases her. Additionally, given Jadelin’s predilection for the same image that repels Rometta, Rometta’s characterization of the mirror as a jealous lover is strikingly accurate. It is as if she is *almost aware* of her own status as a fictional character, and *almost aware* of the fact that someone is trying to control her from a vantage point she cannot perceive. In other words, it is as if she sees *her author* in the

mirror, rather than *herself*. Her rebellion against the mirror's reflective power thus foreshadows her rebellion against Jadelin at the novel's end, in which she begs him to erase her love for Giulio so she can stop fighting all the obstacles that block their path to happiness.

Jadelin's desire to control and possess Rometta increases in intensity as the novel progresses. One of his most decisive attempts to separate her from Giulio occurs when he chooses to kill off Sister Mercutio, an elderly nun in Southern Italy who cared for Giulio in her orphanage during his childhood. Cognizant of Giulio's close relationship with Sister Mercutio, Jadelin knows that Giulio will journey to her remote, Southern convent if he believes she is on the verge of death. By invoking the classic plot device of *deus ex machina* to eliminate Sister Mercutio, Jadelin is clearly trying to play a sort of "god" in his literary world. However, what is distinctive about this use of *deus ex machina* is that it is motivated by self-interest: the fictional Jadelin is not interested in creating a believable, suspenseful or morally compelling story, but rather, in forcing his female protagonist to dedicate her affections only to him. As he puts it, his decision to put distance between Rometta and Giulio is driven by a singular desire: "Stare solo con Rometta. Traffigerle i pensieri. Violare l'intimità che nascondeva" ("To be alone with Rometta. To pierce her thoughts. To violate the intimacy she was hiding") (68).

On one level, Jadelin's desire to "pierce" Rometta's thoughts might seem understandable, given any author's interest in creating a complex character with

psychological depth. However, Jadelin's word choice at this moment bears very strong sexual connotations. The idea of "trafiggere" ("piercing") Rometta's thoughts suggests sexual penetration. This idea becomes even more marked in the idea of "violating her intimacy." In Italian, both the words "violare" and "intimità" are linked to sex: "intimità" can refer specifically to someone's love life, while "violare" is etymologically related to the word "violenza," which, in addition to meaning "violence," can also signify "rape." Jadelin's desire to "penetrate" or even "rape" his character indicates an aggressive, self-aggrandizing desire to possess her. Beyond the more typical authorial violence of killing off a minor character such as Sister Mercutio to advance the plot, his yearning to "violate" or "pierce" Rometta's mind (and, implicitly, her body) is indicative of a deeper sadism that is, at root, undeniably misogynistic.

Furthermore, Jadelin's possessive desire also suggests an underlying insecurity: given the failure of his previous novel, Jadelin's impulse to control or possess his new character may stem from feelings of literary impotence—which, we will recall, Jadelin references as a kind of "flaccidity." Jadelin's literary and sexual impotence is manifest again in this same chapter, when, in spite of his stated desire to "pierce" Rometta's thoughts, he is unable to finish the sentence "*Rometta, seduta sul letto, pensava a...*" ("*Rometta, sitting on the bed, was thinking about...*") (69, *original emphasis*). Frustrated, he picks up the keyboard, throws it against the monitor, and shouts, "Ti ammazzo, io! Ti ammazzo!" ("I'll kill you, I'll kill you!") (69). In spite of his supposed authorial and

masculine power, his violent rage is clearly an expression of his utter inability to control the fictional, female Rometta. Although as an author, he *should* have power over her character, he is unable to control her thoughts and desires the way he would like to.

Toward the novel's end, Jadelin's attempts to overcome his literary impotence reach a feverishly paranoid pitch. Once he has separated Rometta and Giulieo by eliminating Sister Mercutio, Giulieo travels to the South of Italy, just as Jadelin planned. Then, Jadelin makes it impossible for him to return home from the South by constantly delaying and rescheduling all the North-bound trains and by turning the roads into an inescapable labyrinth. Rometta, desperate to find her vanished lover, also travels to the same Southern town in search of Giulieo. At this point, Jadelin becomes more determined than ever to keep the two lovers apart. Thus, he writes himself into his own fiction as a character. Once inside his fictional universe, he plays no less than three different characters. At first, he is a receptionist at a hotel where Rometta has arrived to search for her lost Giulieo. Later, he dresses up as a priest, calling himself Don Lorenzo, and pretends to befriend Giulieo, even though he repeatedly deceives Giulieo to keep him from being reunited with Rometta. Finally, he also attempts to falsely befriend Rometta by playing himself, "Jadelin."

As we can see, Jadelin's desire to dominate his protagonist Rometta both literarily and sexually, which is intimately related to his writerly insecurities, leads him to lose all control over his narrative. Ironically, Rometta's initial threat to shatter her

bathroom mirror for attempting to control her reflection comes true at the novel's end: not only does Jadelin's fictional universe become chaotic and disorderly, but so does Jadelin's performance of identities, given that he switches schizophrenically from one role to another to keep Rometta and Giulieo apart. Because Jadelin's hysterical pursuit of Rometta betrays his intense anxiety about literary "virility," he is essentially a double of Tonino. After all, Tonino also reinforces his besieged male pride by objectifying women (especially if they are not Italian), and also pursues his own version of literary success by demanding that non-Italian writers produce literature for him to publish.

Like Tonino, Jadelin's behavior toward Rometta embodies Cassano's notions of the "fundamentalisms of land and sea." Jadelin's pursuit of Rometta's love essentializes traditional notions of gender, in which the male is figured as sexually dominant and the female is imagined to be sexually submissive. Hence, Jadelin exploits gender as a boundary upon which to maximize power for himself, while pigeonholing Rometta into obeying his tyranny (or, at least, *trying* to do so). Yet, as we have seen, his attempt to force Rometta into embodying a hyper-feminine fantasy reveals his underlying fears of literary emasculation, so potently suggested by his feelings of "flaccidity" after the nonsuccess of his earlier novel. His reliance on conventional gender roles to cement his dominance over his female character may thus be read in terms of Cassano's "fundamentalism of land," given his obsession with maintaining the "fixity, assuredness, and appropriation" of stable gender roles and identities (18).

Yet, like Tonino, Jadelin's actions are also thoroughly demonstrative of Cassano's vision of the "fundamentalism of the sea." Just as Tonino "liquidates" the boundary between editor and author, Jadelin erodes the boundary between author and character, "spilling" into his fictional world with no concept of its deserved autonomy. Rather than attempting to endow his story with verisimilitude, philosophical complexity, or even a basic level of entertainment value, he expunges all of these values from consideration, focusing his efforts instead on coercing his fictional female protagonist into falling in love with him. The "liquidity" of Jadelin's authorial tyranny is especially v

isible in his performance of multiple roles in his own novel: his desperation and paranoia are so pronounced that he "overflows" uncontrollably from one role to another, mistakenly believing that doing so will better enable him to win Rometta's love. Ironically, it is this very "liquidity" of roles that leads to his demise as an author: Rometta recognizes the person who presents himself as "Jadelin" as the same person who also pretended to be the receptionist at her hotel. Fully aware that Jadelin is the creator of her universe and that he alone is responsible for the misery she has endured searching for Giulio, she implores him to free her from loving Giulio so that she can live her life in peace. When Giulio, too, discovers Jadelin's "real" identity as author, he shoots Jadelin in the head, thereby "killing" his fictional self. Jadelin then wakes up in his "real" apartment in Bologna, now expelled from his own literary world. Again, Rometta's rebellion against her bathroom mirror prefigures this authorial "death":

although Jadelin has attempted to “inundate” his literary world with authorial terrorism, by the end, this power is shattered and rendered “paralyzed” from wreaking further havoc.

In short, Jadelin and Tonino function together as twin elements of a two-pronged critique about what literature, especially “migrant” literature, should accomplish. On one hand, the fact that Tonino’s efforts to coerce Jadelin into writing are inextricably bound up with racism, misogyny, and insecurity about male power can be read as a scorching critique of “migrant writing.” In light of Dainotto’s analysis about Northern Europe’s *other-ing* of Southern Europe, Tonino’s anxieties about performing his virility point to Italian culture’s insecurity about performing its “European-ness.” Consequently, Tonino’s exploitative relationships with “overseas” writers and “foreign” women suggest that migrant writing may only serve to sustain, rather than dismantle, exclusive nationalisms and racial hierarchies. Yet, as I have shown, Gangbo’s novel goes further than simply critiquing migrant writing. For if a so-called “migrant writer” should aspire to greater literary heights than “migrant writing” will allow, then what should those heights look like? By illustrating how the fictional Jadelin’s paranoia about his literary talents leads him to annihilate his own potential for literary creativity, the novel also suggests that the desire to “surpass Shakespeare” is also fundamentally misguided and self-destructive.

As we can see, Cassano's theory of "fundamentalisms of land and sea" is extremely useful because it allows us to break down the seeming binary of literary "godliness" and "lowliness." Specifically, Cassano's theory enables us to see how *both* "migrant writing" and Shakespearian greatness are engendered through the same process: namely, the defensive exacerbation of traditional social hierarchies (such as race or gender), as well as the insistent refusal of limits on individual power. Recalling Quaquarelli's formulation that the canonization of migrant writing risks instituting a "rediscovery of the author," we can see how the construction of literary "lowliness" and "godliness" are both motivated by a reification of the authorial voice. In other words, by essentializing the "authenticity" of subaltern writers or the "genius" of canonical ones, these categories *both* accrue power to individuals and groups who are already socially empowered, rather than to those who have traditionally been marginalized. Hence, reading Gangbo through Cassano makes these two seemingly opposite poles appear strikingly similar. Such a reading reveals that, despite the optimistic or progressive attachments many readers have to migrant writing, this category does not undermine Shakespearean canonicity at all, but rather, works in tandem with it. Similarly, this reading demonstrates both the fabrication of a migrant canon and the deification of Shakespeare to be compensatory attempts for underlying sociocultural insecurities, such as Italy's anxiety about performing European-ness.

#### 4.5 *Grasping for "Misura": the Reciprocity of Rewriting and the Mediterranean*

Given that Tonino and Jadelin jointly embody Cassano's notions of the "fundamentalisms of land and sea," we must ask ourselves: does *Rometta e Giulio* propose a solution to these fundamentalisms, and if so, what is it? Let us recall, for a moment, Cassano's vision of Mediterranean geographies as enabling the "fundamentalisms of land and sea" to reciprocally balance each other. For Cassano, the Mediterranean's balance of competing fundamentalisms provides a sense of "misura," or "moderation," that is otherwise lost in the contemporary West's perpetual quest for economic, political and cultural dominance. I argue that Cassano's theory of Mediterranean "misura" is an important key through which to interpret Gangbo's representation of the Italian South and the Mediterranean sea in his novel, *Rometta e Giulio*. Specifically, I suggest that the novel's staging of the characters' rebellion against authorial terrorism in the Italian South invokes a historical-cultural imaginary of the South as a site of resistance against the hegemony of the monolithic Italian State, whose economic and cultural power has traditionally been concentrated in the North. At the same time, I also argue that Cassano's vision of the Mediterranean enables us to unpack the novel's alternative to the binary of literary "gods" and "ghettos." In my view, the novel proposes a conception of literature based on repetition and rewriting in order to

displace the notion of authorial “authenticity” associated with migrant writing, as well as the authorial “genius” associated with Shakespeare.

In order to approach the relevance of Cassano’s theory of the Mediterranean, let us begin by analyzing the representation of Jadelin’s fictional South. We will recall that Jadelin first manipulates Giulio into travelling to the South to visit the dying Sister Mercutio, and then traps him there by interfering with outbound train service to the North. Although Giulio first misses the train by forgetting to stamp his ticket, the failures of all his subsequent attempts are mysteriously inexplicable. For example, the next train he tries to take leaves ten minutes early (a rare occurrence anywhere in Italy!); then, he notices that the display board with departure times goes completely haywire. He exclaims: “La mia destinazione, il mio orario, tutto sta ruotando. Tutto sta ruotando per subire ennesime metamorfosi... Per Dio, non v’è più nulla. È stato annullato, il treno, non v’è più nulla...” (“My destination, my schedule, everything is spinning. Everything is spinning and undergoing countless transformations... For God’s sake, there is nothing left. The train has been cancelled, and there are no more”) (93, *original ellipsis*). We later discover that the sudden interruption in train service is due to a national strike. The novel implies that the apparently coincidental obstacles that prevent Giulio from returning to Verogna are actually the result of Jadelin’s authorial meddling; Jadelin purposefully writes these setbacks into his novel to keep Giulio away from Rometta.

Yet, there is something about the sudden cancellation of trains, the inaccurate departure times and schedules, and the unexpected train strike that seems decidedly unextraordinary. After all, according to dominant stereotypes within Italian culture and beyond, Southern Italy is *always* characterized by technological backwardness, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a disregard for punctuality. Hence, the string of transportation-related frustrations is strangely believable because it meshes well with prevalent Southern stereotypes, even if the novel stretches these stereotypes to an outlandish extreme. The novel's playful amplification of Southern stereotypes occurs again when Giulio is driving to a train station to pick up Rometta, who has finally managed to reach the South by train. However, Giulio is shocked to notice that the view from his car appears to be repeating itself: things that he had passed a while back are reappearing out his window. Realizing that the street has been turned into a labyrinth, he shouts: "Noi stiamo tornando al capo come una serpe che si avvinghia su se medesima" ("We are returning to the beginning like a snake that clings to itself") (113). The representation of Southern Italian roads as inescapably serpentine again appeals to deeply rooted historical stereotypes, such as the idea that the Italian South is unmodern, closed in on itself, and impenetrable to outsiders.

Although the novel appears to invoke negative stereotypes about the South, Cassano's theory of "Southern thought" invites us to read the South not as an inferior version of a modern, European "North," but rather, to read the "North" in light of the

South's supposed deficiencies. Seen from this angle, Jadelin's attempt to cloak his efforts to separate Rometta and Giulio in the trappings of the South's presumed backwardness foreshadows the crumbling of his own authorial power. For, in light of Cassano's argument that Southern "vices" should be read as a form of opposing Northern dominance, we may also associate the characters' ultimate defiance of their fictional author with the historical backdrop of Southern Italy's own challenges to the hegemony of the Italian state, especially in the late nineteenth century. As Gabriella Gribaudi observes, following Italy's Unification in the 1860s, the Northern ruling class had great difficulty legitimizing the new government's rule in the South, given the Northern administrators' "total lack of understanding of the culture and institutions" of this region (75). As a result, she writes, Northern elites felt justified to defend state authority "even at gunpoint" so that, summarizing Nelson Moe, "the tumour represented by the Southerners' behavior would [not] grow and infect the rest of the nation" (75). The militarization of the South increased to such an extent that, as Christopher Duggan notes, "between 1861 and 1865, almost two-thirds of the entire Italian army was deployed in trying to maintain order in southern Italy" (140). In this period, many Southern intellectuals known as *meridionalisti* critiqued the primarily Northern, bourgeois government, arguing that the state "had become brutal and repressive, like a colonizing force" (Urbinati 135). Needless to say, the mass deployment of state violence upon Southern Italy exacerbated age-old problems, such as brigandage (*brigantaggio*).

Although brigandage was widespread in the South well before the *Risorgimento*, the disillusionment following Unification caused this phenomenon to evolve into a significant form of anti-government and anti-North political resistance. Hence, the novel resuscitates the historical specter of Southern *brigantaggio* by staging the characters' revolt against Jadelin in the South. In doing so, it portrays the imposition of Eurocentric Italian nationalism upon Southern Italy as a form of colonialism or terrorism, thereby mirroring Jadelin's "colonization" of his fictional world.

The novel's representation of the South as both backward and rebellious is important because of the connections it bears to the novel's theory of literature. We must remember that in this novel, the South is purely metafictional: while informed by the "historical" South, the South we encounter in *Rometta e Giulio* exists within the fictional world Jadelin has created. Even so, Jadelin's imaginary South is thoroughly intertwined with dominant conceptions of Southern *ungovernability*: he takes advantage of the South's reputation as untamed by modernity in order to thwart the romance between his two characters. And yet, it is that very ungovernability that turns against him: his characters, Rometta and Giulio, become just as ungovernable as the region that surrounds them. Hence, they refuse to be subjected to Jadelin's control, just as the nineteenth-century brigands challenged the authority of the newly formed Italian state. In doing so, Rometta and Giulio undermine the self-aggrandizing literary values of Tonino and Jadelin, who strive to coerce literature into filling their pockets, calming

their insecurities about masculinity, and quenching their sexual thirst. In Gangbo's novel, literature itself becomes a kind of "South:" it continuously revolts against the "North" of editorial and authorial attempts to domesticate it.

Yet, in order to fully understand the novel's alternative proposal to the binary of literary "godliness" and "ghettoes," and the consequent essentialization of authorial identity through genius (Shakespeare) or authenticity (migrant writing), we must also direct our attention to the novel's depiction of the Mediterranean sea. The first major appearance of the Mediterranean occurs when Jadelin, inside his own novel, is scurrying back and forth between the house where Giulio is staying and Rometta's hotel. With Giulio, Jadelin pretends to be a priest named "Don Lorenzo;" with Rometta, he uses his real name, and pretends to have only coincidentally occupied the hotel room next to her. Obviously, his offer of friendship to each of them is deceitful, since his real goal is to hamper their efforts to find one another. At one point, on the way to Rometta's hotel, he becomes extremely frustrated at the obstacles that impede his movement: namely, the heavy traffic, and an officer who won't let him pass without a stamp (*bollino*). Recalling that this is supposed to be *his* fictional world, he begins to reflect: "Cominciavo a chiedermi chi fosse realmente il fautore di quel mondo. Doveva essere un romanzo, per Dio, un'opera *mia*, sotto il *mio* controllo...Proveniva tutto dalla mente mia o era un mondo a sé, vivo e vegeto?" ("I started to wonder who was really the creator of that world. It was supposed to be a novel, for Christ's sake, *my* work, under *my* control...Did

everything come from my mind, or was it a living, breathing world in its own right?" (141, *original emphasis*). Troubled at the thought that his fictional world might not really be *his*, he spontaneously changes his route, travelling further and further in the countryside. Passing hills, cornfields and valleys, he observes that he is heading toward "le argini del mondo" ("the embankment of the world") (142). He finally arrives at the sea, and decides to wade in the water.

Jadelin's use of the metaphor "embankment of the world" to describe the beach is suggestive because it calls to mind Southern Italy's function as border: the coastline, it would seem, serves as a kind of dyke or bulwark that contains Europe within itself, separating it from the non-Europe of Africa and the no-man's land (or everyman's land?) of the Mediterranean. The rhetorical emphasis on the Southern Italian coast's function as *border* immediately recalls Cassano, who writes that: "Mediterranean today means putting the *border*, that line of division and contact between people and civilizations, center stage" (xlvi, *emphasis mine*). Because the Southern Italian coast represents a kind of absolute limit beyond which imaginary notions such as "Italy" and "Europe" end, it also calls to mind Cassano's observation that "We do not go to the Mediterranean to seek the fullness of our origins but to experience our contingency. The Mediterranean shows us the limits of Europe and of the West" (xlvi). Hence, the coast's function as "embankment of the world" highlights its role as a borderland that

accentuates what Cassano calls the “contingency” or “finitude” of Europe’s territory and identity.

Cassano’s idea that the Mediterranean provides a feeling of “finitude” is crucial to understand the significance of Jadelin’s spontaneous beach excursion. Momentarily liberated from his anxious fixation with possessing Rometta and controlling his chaotic fictional universe, he allows himself to be mesmerized by the water crashing against the rocks and the movement of the waves. First perching on the rocks, he then proceeds to enter the water below: “Scesi con me stesso dentro agli occhi, col suono mio dentro le orecchie” (“I descended with myself in my eyes, and with the sound of myself in my ears”) (142). Here, Jadelin refers to the reflective properties of the water and the rocky cliff: seeing his image reflected in the water, the reflection itself is reflected in his eyes. Similarly, the “sound of himself” bounces off the rocks, producing an audible echo. Enchanted, Jadelin starts dancing when he is thigh-deep in the water.

Although this episode has been overlooked in critical readings of the novel, I believe that it is of crucial importance for several reasons. First, this is the first moment in the novel in which Jadelin actually recognizes himself in a reflection. While Jadelin is surprised by his reflection on several occasions, the most prominent occurrence takes place much earlier in the novel, while he is feverishly writing his novel in his apartment. This episode accentuates the obsessive quality of his compulsion to write: he compares himself to a “*sagoma curva sul monitor*” (“silhouette bent over the monitor”) that peers

into his fictional world like an “insetto rotto nella finestra della notte” (“insect broken in night’s window”) (82). At one point, he catches his reflection in a mirror next to the computer, but explains that the face he sees is not his own:

Il viso riflesso sullo specchio aveva la pelle ritratta, tremendamente sgualcita, le labbra legnose e gli occhi chiusi. Mi ci ero avvicinato incredulo, non capivo come riuscissi a vedere se le palpebre coprivano gli occhi. Così presi a toccarmeli, e quelli che sentivo erano occhi, solamente occhi umidi, mentre sullo specchio continuavo a vedere pelle che sembrava non finire mai. Ma la demenza...stava nel fascino che provavo per quella maschera cieca, un gusto pignolo, una sadica commiserazione, e distraendomi un istante mi accorsi che la barba e i capelli erano diventati bianchi....Credo fosse stata una sorta d’invito a frenare. Dovevo abbandonare tutto, filarmela come un delinquente. (82-3)

(The face reflected in the mirror had detached, tremendously wrinkled skin, stiff lips and closed eyes. I approached it in disbelief; I couldn’t understand how I could see if my eyelids were covering my eyes. So I started to touch them, and what I felt were eyes, only moist eyes, while in the mirror I continued to see skin that seemed to never end. But my stupor...was due to the fascination I felt for that blind mask, a fastidious pleasure, a sadistic commiseration, and, in a moment of distraction, I realized that my beard and hair had turned white....I think this was a sort of invitation to back off. I had to abandon it all, to run away like a delinquent.)

In this passage, Jadelin describes his reflection as being so deformed that his face appears to have suddenly aged, in spite of his mere twenty-three years of age. He realizes that this untimely aging is due precisely to his irresistible urge not only to write his novel, but also to micromanage his characters’ actions. He interprets his unsightly countenance as a sort of warning that his quest for authorial omnipotence is going too far; if he does not give it up, his self-deformation will only become more pronounced.

Yet, the “sadistic” (or rather, masochistic) pleasure he experiences at his gradual self-destruction is so strong that he does not yet feel compelled to change his behavior.

This episode provides an important counterpoint to the scene in which Jadelin wades in the fictional Mediterranean sea. If earlier, Jadelin’s obsessive pursuit of literary deification causes him to see his own face as totally distorted, the moment in which he momentarily abandons his quest to dominate his characters leads him to see *himself* in the water’s reflections, and to hear *himself* in the echoes that bounce off the rocks. This moment of self-recognition is important because it hearkens back to Cassano’s theory that the Mediterranean’s function as border zone leads to a greater self-awareness, or, in his words, a consciousness of one’s own “finitude” and “contingency” (xlvi). It is precisely this awareness of his own human and literary limitations that allows him to abandon, if only for a moment, his fixation with literary virility, his compulsion to meddle in his fictional world, and his underlying fear of being excluded from Shakespearian literary heights. Hence, we may read this scene as epitomizing Cassano’s notion that the Mediterranean allows the “fundamentalisms of land and sea” to balance each other. Jadelin’s moment of visual and aural self-recognition in the Mediterranean offers him a temporary respite from the “fundamentalism of land,” which, in his case, is manifest in his reification of entrenched gender hierarchies in order to justify his own feelings of virility. At the same time, he is also momentarily released from the

“fundamentalism of the sea,” that is, his reckless, authorial war against the integrity and autonomy of his fictional world.

Furthermore, I argue that this episode’s representation of image as *reflection* and of sound as *echo* contributes to the novel’s alternative vision of literature as rewriting. Concretely, I suggest that in this scene, the ripple effect of sound and image becomes a metaphor for fiction itself. Like a reflection, fiction cannot be controlled, but it *can* be reproduced and rewritten indefinitely. As the novel shows, this reproducibility of fiction undermines the presumed authenticity or “genius quality” of the author’s voice, even to the point of *rebellling* against these notions of authorial power. Although in other parts of the novel, Jadelin is deeply troubled by the prospect of losing his authorial control, at this moment, he greets it with peace.

My reading of reflection and echo as metaphors for rewriting is further supported by the novel’s distortions of *Romeo and Juliet*, which might be considered as *reflections* or *echoes* of Shakespeare in their own right. Because this novel inaccurately reproduces various features of *Romeo and Juliet*, it empties Shakespeare’s play of thematic content, reducing it to a hollow form that can be infinitely broken down and reconstructed. And yet, Gangbo is hardly the first person to recycle *Romeo and Juliet* in this way: this tragedy has been reproduced, readapted and recycled so incessantly in popular culture from movies, to musicals, to manga comic books, to household jokes, that, in spite of its canonical status, it has simultaneously been rendered a cliché. The

novel's recycling of *Romeo and Juliet* is thus extremely multilayered: although on one level, it portrays a writer's frustrated and ultimately destructive attempts to "surpass Shakespeare," on another, it glorifies the *infinite reproducibility* of Shakespeare as a recognizable cultural icon to which new meanings can be endlessly reassigned. In doing so, the novel acknowledges that both it and Shakespeare's play are themselves merely "echoes" of the widely disseminated love story of Romeo and Juliet.

However, the awareness Jadelin acquires of his human "finitude" and "contingency" lasts only a moment: he returns to his relentless pursuit of Rometta, but shortly thereafter, Giulio, in a fit of anti-authoritarian rage, shoots him in the head. Killed off from his own novel, Jadelin finds himself once again in his own, "real" world; thus, he decides to erase the story of Rometta and Giulio and start afresh. Yet, his perception of reality is still tainted by his fiction: as he reviews his unsuccessful novels at a bookstore in Bologna to see if he might revise and improve them, the clerk notices that he has a mark on his forehead, which Jadelin believes to be a scar from the shot Giulio inflicted on him. Later, Jadelin discovers the file of *Rometta e Giulio* to be stuck on his computer, despite his attempt to delete it. Furthermore, momentarily re-entering his fictional world, he finds that Rometta has bled to death in the bathtub—it appears that she has committed suicide. But this fictional vision is suddenly interrupted when he receives a phone call from Tonino. While Jadelin has been devastated by his failed struggle with his novel, Tonino remains glaringly unchanged: after castigating Jadelin

for not answering the phone in days, he then complains in extremely crass terms about a missed sexual opportunity with a woman, and then brags about having discovered a new writer who will make him rich.

This moment represents the climax of Jadelin's impotence: Giulieo has defeated him by "killing" him out of his own novel, while Rometta has shattered his hopes of possessing her by killing herself. He now has no choice but to return to the humiliating rut of his own literary mediocrity, on one hand, and his despicable agent's self-serving demands for profitability, on the other. Having reached maximum frustration on all sides, he steps out on a window sill in his apartment. In the novel's final paragraphs, he thinks to himself:

Si stava bene con i piedi sul davanzale, Sire....appoggiai la spalla alla cornice della finestra e mi sentivo ancora un fautore, dopotutto, un coniglio con la testa di cane, un ragno senza zampe che divora un elefante. Ero ancora il *bastardo*, il figlio di puttana sul davanzale di una finestra, che guarda in alto e intravede le cose del cielo, poi china gli occhi e vede gli schiaffi del mare dove potrebbe esserci l'asfalto.

Toccava a me scegliere, Sire, toccava a me scegliere cosa vedere.

Il mare o l'asfalto.

L'avrei deciso in volo. Capito all'impatto. (165, *original emphasis*)

(It felt nice to have my feet on the window sill, Sir...I leaned my shoulder on the window frame and I felt that after all, I was still a follower: a rabbit with the head of a dog, a spider without legs that devours an elephant. I was still a *bastard*, the son of a whore on the on a window sill that looks up and sees things in the sky, who then lowers his eyes and sees the crashing waves of the sea where there might be asphalt.

It was up to me to choose, Sir. It was up to me to choose what to see.

The sea, or asphalt.

I would decide in flight. And understand upon impact.)

At this moment, Jadelin decides that the only escape from the miserable frustration of his dead-end life is to imitate Rometta by committing suicide. Given his history of unexceptional writing, his downfall at the hands of his own fictional world, and his continued subservience to his loathsome agent, his dream of becoming a literary “god” has been permanently dashed. His comparison of himself to monstrous, hybrid animals rearticulates his deeply felt anxiety about literary virility: not only has he not become like Shakespeare, but he remains a “bastard,” or illegitimate impostor, in the world of letters. I argue that the notion of being a “bastard” or a “son of a whore” are veiled references to both Jadelin and Gangbo’s “migrant” status: because of their foreign birth and black skin, they will *always* be considered *illegitimate* Italians, and hence, *migrant* writers. Hence, in contrast to Lakhous’ novel *Scontro di civiltà*, in which the protagonist Ahmed/Amedeo considers it possible to one day reach the status of “figlio adottivo” (“adoptive son”) of Italy, Gangbo’s novel ends by suggesting that Jadelin’s perceived illegitimacy will *never* allow him to achieve this “adopted” status (*Scontro* 142/101)<sup>8</sup>.

However, I argue that this ending is not entirely pessimistic. The absolute blurring of fiction and reality that dominates Jadelin’s perception at the end of the novel enables him to see not just hard asphalt beneath the window, but also “gli schiaffi del mare” (“the crashing waves of the sea”). By empowering himself to view the “real” asphalt as the “fictional” sea, Jadelin’s unfulfilled longing seems to have changed.

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<sup>8</sup> Page numbers refer first to Lakhous’ Italian version, then to Ann Goldstein’s English translation.

Rather than continuing to desire literary omnipotence and sexual virility, he yearns for the sense of peace and balance that he experienced so fleetingly while wading in the fictional Mediterranean. If that earlier episode demonstrates Jadelin's temporary abandonment of his anxieties about writing, masculinity and ethnic belonging, his desire to leap from his stifling apartment into the imaginary Mediterranean at the end of his novel suggests that he now hungers for that sense of *misura* (moderation) that he previously experienced so briefly. While the novel does not reveal the consequences of the jump, we cannot help but read this authorial suicide as liberating, rather than wholly cynical. For just as Rometta's suicide liberates her both from her author's hounding and from her asphyxiating love for Giulio, Jadelin's suicide releases him from his obsessive preoccupation about literary virility and emasculation—or, in other words, his angst about belonging to a literary "Olympus," or a literary "ghetto."

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

By reading Gangbo's novel, *Rometta e Giulio*, through the lens of Franco Cassano's theoretical vision of the Mediterranean, I have attempted to accomplish several goals. First, I have argued that Gangbo's novel contrasts the desire to surpass the label of "migrant" writing with its critique of the self-aggrandizing aspiration to universal canonization. At the same time, I have also argued that the novel destabilizes

the polarization of a universal canon against literary “ghettoes” by illustrating how these two categories are built upon the same assumptions, and serve the same goals: namely, they both reify the authorial voice in order to maintain or even intensify socially engrained hierarchies, such as gender, race or national belonging. As a result, the novel suggests that migrant writing might not constitute a real challenge to Eurocentrism, exclusive nationalisms, or racial hierarchies, but may instead only serve to bolster them. In order to analyze these dynamics, I have used Cassano’s vocabulary of the “fundamentalisms of land and sea,” which describes the problematic nature of both the essentialization of identities and social boundaries, on one hand, as well as of the glorification of boundless “uprooting,” on the other.

Finally, I have argued that the novel proposes to escape the quandary of these “fundamentalisms” through Cassano’s notion of *misura*, or moderation. This idea envisions the Mediterranean as a conceptual space where the “fundamentalisms of land and sea” neutralize each other, thereby constituting a form of resistance to Western imperialism, and, by extension, deep-seated asymmetries of social power. Hence, just as Tonino and Jadelin become mirrors of each other’s attempts to domesticate literature into serving their interests, literature’s rebellion against authorial and editorial despotism mirrors Southern Italy’s resistance to Northern hegemony. The fruit of this rebellion is, in my view, the novel’s elegy of literary rewriting, recycling and revision: by undercutting the authorial genius and authenticity, literature—like Shakespeare’s own

*Romeo and Juliet*—can break out of the prisons of “high” and “low,” escape its forced servitude to entrenched power dynamics, and survive indefinitely, even in the wake of authorial death—or suicide.

## Conclusion

I began this dissertation by quoting Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, a twentieth century Spanish novelist: “Every north, in spite of its ambition to be a north, is a south compared to another possible north.” Vázquez Montalbán’s statement attaches a double meaning to the terms “north” and “south.” On one hand, he refers to the asymmetries of power between “north” and “south” at both the European and global levels. Yet, on the other, by suggesting that even the most powerful “north” is a “south,” he invites us to reimagine the North/South dichotomy altogether, urging us instead to search for something *beyond* such deeply entrenched hierarchies. It is important to note that, for Vázquez Montalbán, utopia is not the goal; rather, his statement implies that there is *always* “another possible north” that must be continually pursued. By suggesting that we must *reimagine* the “norths” and “souths” we already know in order to pursue a different “north,” Vázquez Montalbán highlights the creative and political power of the imagination to reshape the world around us.

In this thesis, I have interpreted several writers’ literary struggles against *otherness* in a Southern European context as a search for that “other possible north.” By readapting European literary works and films, these writers’ works call attention to what Sara Ahmed calls “stranger fetishism,” that is, the ways in which the expulsion and the welcoming of the *other* work in tandem with each other. In doing so, these writers illustrate that the various forms of racial, ethnic, national and religious exclusion imposed on them are a consequence of their host countries’ insecurity about being

trapped between the Europe's South and the world's North. Thus, these writers highlight the ties that bind Europe's South to the Global South: by always attempting to overcome their perceived South-ness within Europe, Spain and Italy "anxiously repeat" numerous forms of exclusion upon anyone imagined to be *less European* than them (Bhabha, "The other question" 95).

We have seen how Amara Lakhous readapts the *commedia all'italiana* in order embrace of the theatricality of social customs and identities. Juxtaposing the *commedia* to Neorealism's attempt to represent reality objectivity, Lakhous refutes the presumed fixity of national, ethnic, and racial identities, as well as the notion that migrant writers should perform these identities through their work. We have also seen how Najat El Hachmi challenges the *other-ing* imposed upon migrants in Catalonia rewriting Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del diamant*. Accentuating the parallelisms between Moroccan and Catalan feminist resistance, she undermines the desire of Catalan nationalists to portray Catalonia as more open to migrants than the rest of Spain, or as better for women than the Muslim world. In addition, Zamora's repeated allusions to the *Quijote* serve to blur the distinctions normally imposed between Africa and Europe. In doing so, he reminds Spain of its inextricable embeddedness with Muslim and African cultures, while also portraying Equatorial Guinean nationalism as a fiction that fails to challenge Western global hegemony. Finally, in Gangbo's novel, *Rometta e Giulio*, we have seen how the the "North"/"South" binary might be rethought altogether. By showing how Shakespearian canonicity and the "ghetto" of migrant writing both emerge from a kind of performance anxiety, Gangbo undermines the division between "North" and "South"

not only at the level of Europe and the world, but also within the literary realm. For Gangbo, only way to escape polarizing hierarchies is by embracing literature as a form of endless repetition, recycling and revision.

I believe that my analysis of these writers' works from a southern European perspective opens several pathways for future research. While the limited scope of this dissertation has led me to concentrate my analysis on literary production in Italy and Spain, it would be greatly beneficial to explore how creative media other than literature can be mobilized to critique both racism and "stranger fetishism" in Southern Europe. Of particular interest are artists such as Gabriella Ghermandi, who, in addition to her work as a writer, also uses performance to reshape the memory of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia (Clò). Similarly, Concha Buika, a Spanish vocalist born to Equatorial Guinean parents, has expanded the critical possibilities of "canon revision" through her jazz-inspired renditions of traditional Spanish *coplas*. It would also be extremely fruitful to compare so-called "migrant" or "Afro-European" writers who work in Italy and Spain to those who are based elsewhere in Southern Europe, especially in Portugal and Greece. Given that Portugal's African empire was established several centuries before Spain's or Italy's, while Greece never had one at all, it would be important to examine how the specificities of these countries' historical relationships to Africa might produce different findings than what we have seen in a Spanish and Italian context.

Furthermore, it would be fascinating to consider critiques of "migrant writing," such as those articulated by Lakhous or Gangbo, in the context of emerging works of "migrant cinema." In light of Lakhous' rejection of realism as a form of reifying migrant

identity, it would be useful to examine how documentary films about migration in Southern Europe position themselves in relation to the notion of “truth.” Do such films envision themselves as part of a “truth-telling” project, such as the diary-like narratives of early Italian migrant writing? Or do they reject the pretense to objectivity as a form of coercion, as Lakhous does? Similarly, we might wonder if Gangbo’s parodic critique of co-authored migrant texts could be applied to films that were co-directed by an “Italian” and a “migrant.” One case in point might be Dagmawi Yimer and Andrea Segre’s documentary, *Come un uomo sulla terra* (*Like a man on the earth*, 2008), which deals with contemporary immigration in Lampedusa.

Finally, in coming years, it will be crucial to remain attuned to shifting migration patterns in Southern Europe. Will Europe’s ongoing debt crisis transform Southern European countries, once again, into net producers of emigration? As current migrants from the Global South and their children come of age, it will be necessary to examine how their literary and artistic expressions continue to shape the cultures of their host countries, especially the historically ingrained boundaries that distinguish those who belong to Europe or the nation from those who do not.

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## Biography

Martin Repinecz was born in Houston, Texas, USA on June 2, 1983. He attended St. Thomas More Parish School and Strake Jesuit College Preparatory, graduating from the latter in 2001. He then attended Washington University in St. Louis, where he majored in Spanish and Italian with a minor in English Composition. He graduated *summa cum laude* in 2005. During his undergraduate years, he studied abroad at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, taking courses in Latin American literature. After graduating from Washington University, he returned to Madrid to work as an English teacher in 2005 and 2006. Following this experience, he began a Ph.D. program in Romance Studies at Duke University, specializing in modern and contemporary Spanish and Italian studies. He continued to work, study and conduct research in Italy and Spain every subsequent summer, spending the 2010-11 academic year in Rome on a Fulbright fellowship. Upon completion of his doctorate in summer 2013, he will begin working as Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of San Diego, where he will teach courses in modern Peninsular studies and advanced Spanish language.