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"Fantasies of authenticity: nomads, natives, and travelers. The politics of exile and diaspora in the Maghreb"
Research Proposal

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1. <u>Core research questions</u>

Ever since I can remember I was intrigued by 'otherness'. As a child, there seemed to be an unquestioned parallel in my mind between 'otherness' and 'exotic.' Not that I was preoccupied by 'otherness' *per se,* but I was rather drawn to the feeling of strangeness and foreignness evoked by both distant and close places, spaces, figures, events. Reading stories and tales, I started to have an understanding of the exotic that conjured in my imagination something esoteric, mystical, and impenetrable. The reason why I am starting my research proposal with a brief and shallow incursion into my ideas of the exotic is to foreground the claim that projects are always infused with fantasies and desires, with images and specters that haunt and move us. My fantasies of the exotic involved dunes of sand, luscious oases, and Bedouin hospitality.

In Arabic, Maghreb means 'the land where the sun sets.' A region defined (and known) as the 'West' certainly unsettles commonly held academic (and non-academic) notions of what the West is and where the West lies. To the Arab world on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean (and beyond), this is the West, understood also in the form of disparaging comments often made about Maghrebis as not being 'real' Arabs, or about them speaking a 'dubious' Arabic. Much of the literature dealing with global processes seems to distinguish unproblematically between the 'global' and the 'local'. Even critical theory counterposes to the universal(izing) and totalizing projects of colonialism/modernity/Eurocentrism, the particularized, contingent and contextualized space of the local, thus maintaining the global/local binary intact. Taking the case of the Maghreb into consideration, one is puzzled by the precariousness with which such a binary becomes endowed when applied to the region. The Maghreb has known a

tumultuous and ambiguous history, measured in terms of the waves of invasion that swept the region. As such, it is very difficult to regard the identity of the region in unambiguous and clearly defined terms. Political, social, economic, and cultural claims to the region have been made by Berbers, Phoenicians (particularly Carthaginians), Romans, Arabs, Ottomans, French, Spanish, and Italians.[1]

Contemporary debates over hybridity are carried in terms of refutations of foundationalism in the understanding of identification. Also, within postcolonial studies, such debates concern themselves with issues pertaining to the impacts that various experiences of colonialism have had both on the 'colonized' and on the 'colonizers.' To claim that the recent experiences of colonialism in the Maghreb region have produced some sort of hybridised identifications is to understate the degree to which colonialism had been present in the region. The intriguing aspect of the Maghreb region is that colonial projects, ancient and modern, and under various guises, have been crucial in the construction of various senses of identification within the region. Moreover, the region itself is hard to define geographically: it is usually said to encompass three countries (including the Berber populations): Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. But contesting views claim that the Maghreb includes also Mauritania, Libya, Western Sahara, and even parts of Spain.

Thus, the overarching question that guides my project is the following:

In reading and interpreting literary, aesthetic, and autobiographical works of persons living in the Maghrebin diaspora, what are the forms of knowledge and

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[1] This is not meant to indicate some sort of linear progression in which these particular filters have impacted the region. As discussed later in the methodological section, this listing merely points to the multiplicity of claims and filters that have shaped what we now understand to be the Maghreb.

socio-cultural/political identities <u>produced</u> and how do these works, in turn, <u>produce</u> the 'native'?

The current focus of critical theory lies on specificity, contingency, particularity, which pre-suppose, or at least leave the impression, that locality is somehow disconnected from the global. I find this emphasis troubling and prefer to proceed by perceiving the several Maghrebin cultures, which will be the focus of my study, within the 'web of translocal relationships' of which they are part.

Accordingly, in addressing this question, I will come upon several others that are opened up in pursuing the research.

1. *What are the politics of retrieving the native's voice and subjectivity? How does one 'listen' in ways to retrieve that voice? If some subalterns cannot speak in this complex context, how does one come to understand the use of knowledge and the processes of identity construction?*

2. *In these contexts, how do subjects perceive the relationship between the 'local' and the 'global'? How is the web of 'translocal relationships' represented and performed?*

3. *How does the native's sense of identification construct us*?

Spivak argues that 'the subaltern cannot speak', since speech is an already established privilege of those who dominate (1988). She contends that if the subaltern were in fact speaking, she would not be a subaltern any longer. But in the writings of authors in the Maghrebin diaspora, there is a constant attempt to retrieve the voice (and hence the subjectivity) of the native (subaltern) in various forms.

A comfortably invisible, yet problematic, term insinuates itself in the question above, namely "us." This particular research question will need to address and clarify who is this "us" that will constantly be reiterated within my project. Also, such a question requires me to assign agency, which would show that codes of fantasy and desire are not just present in the text *ex nihilo*. Rather they emerge in the interface between writer and reader and the broader circumstances of production/consumption.[2] In particular, what I mean by "us/our" refers specifically to readers and knowledge producers from Western academia and/or associated with/living within Western(ized) societies. As such, when talking about codes of fantasies and desire, I intend to assign such codes to a certain category, whom I identify as being the producers/consumers of such codes.

4. *Can such attempts at retrieval of voice and thus subjectivity be considered as exercises in negotiating local and global, particular and universal, or are they just a continuation of past processes where local discourses are co-opted into hegemonic, including capitalist and imperialist, narratives?*

2. Theoretical perspectives

2.a. Main theoretical perspectives

No piece of text or thought materializes itself on paper *ex nihilo*. That is why I would like to discuss the bodies of theory, the authors and the key concepts that have inspired and helped me in formulating these questions and in choosing the methodology that I outline in the next section of the proposal. I find myself particularly compelled and influenced by authors coming from postcolonial and post-structural/postmodern perspectives. Nonetheless, I should mention that feminist authors also inform my research and, as such,

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[2] I thank Susie O'Brien for these insights.

I draw heavily on feminist literature. Also, particular novelists have become inspirational in so many ways. Consequently, I feel that it is important to mention them and show why these particular writers have had such an impact on my views.

The postcolonial perspective is concerned with the ways in which the legacies of colonialism (understood as a set of ideas and practices) have affected people previously under colonial rule. However, a distinction needs to be drawn here. In spite of much criticism to the word 'postcolonial' (more specifically such criticism was directed against the dubious implications of the 'post' prefix), postcolonial literature does not assume that colonialism is something that can safely be relegated to the realm of the past, which implies that one can objectively investigate it and retrieve it for exploration.[3] On the contrary, much of postcolonial literature deals with such legacies as on-going processes that impact many aspects of the political, socio-cultural, and economic environments of previously colonized regions. Moreover, certain authors perceive colonialism as a mutual process that has affected both 'colonizers' and the 'colonized', albeit in various degrees. Authors such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Homi Bhabha, Robert J. Young, Ashis Nandy, Rey Chow, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are specifically interested in the psychological dimensions of such violent encounters.

I find fascinating the work of the above mentioned authors, because they explore beyond the hard materiality of such violent legacies (which is something that should not be forgotten), and expose certain codes of fantasies and desires, certain emotions and affective responses that speak as much about the violences of colonialism, as about

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[3] Critics such as Arif Dirlik (1994), Ella Shohat (1992), and even Anthony Appiah (1992) suggest that the 'post' in 'postcolonial' makes a very problematic statement: it implies that colonialism has somehow evaporated with the newly formed states gaining formal independence; that there has been a clear succession in terms of historical periods, meaning that postcolonialism is what naturally followed after colonialism.

(im)possibilities, resistances, and transcendences. As such, these authors will be constantly informing my research and my analysis. Most of these authors (with the exception of Fanon and Memmi) have also been inspired by post-structuralist/postmodernist approaches, which use language-based deconstructive techniques to expose the codes of knowledges and ideas that are naturalized and presented as normalized assumptions. I find this approach compelling because, while undoing the narrative threads of a text and thus illuminating those sets of unexamined and unquestioned assumptions, such a technique serves to destabilize our dearly held preconceived notions; it prompts us to question our own foundations.

2.b. <u>Main authors/key concepts. Influences I cannot or wish not to escape[4]</u>

The questions and the entire structure of my project have been inspired by reading Rey Chow. As such, I am deeply indebted to her insights and analyses. My project revolves around diaspora, a category explored at length by Rey Chow, and which allows me to understand and explore the (im)possibilities of 'reading' between **East** and **West**. What does reading between East and West entail? Such a reading could be understood as an exploration of the symbolic, imaginative and material systems that characterize what is now known as Western and non-Western societies. A binary sneaks in here that requires much attention and a sort of deconstructive analysis, namely **West/non-West**. It is not the binary *per se* that troubles me, but rather the underpinnings of such a binary. A number of questions arise here that relate to the problematic character of such a binary: what constitutes or what is the West? Is the West a particular set of ideas that may be held or promoted by anyone irrespective of their geographical location? In this light, is

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[4] The bolded words represent the key concepts that drive my research project.

West/non-West to be understood mainly as delineated by their geographical limits? What are the ethics of defining 'other' or particular 'sets of ideas' as 'non' or 'not' West? Who is a Western subject? Who is a non-Western subject? Is this subjectivitiy tied to the geographical designation 'West' or is it a matter of spirit or of commitment to particular ideas or of living through a particular world view?[5]

In *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, she talks about the dichotomy between the 'reapolitical' non-West and the 'imaginative' West: 'in an attempt to show how things really are in the non-West and how our discourses produce a non-West that is deprived of **fantasy**, **desires**, and contradictory **emotions**' (1991: xiii). Chow's concerns revolve around the manner in which the non-Western subject *cum* object of research is constructed as the Other who commands 'humorless reverence' and whom 'we cannot hope to know '(ibid). As Western thought patterns have such a strong hold over academic research, Chow observes that the West 'owns not only the components, but also the codes of fantasy' (ibid.). She argues convincingly that fantasy structures can tell us about politics as well as anything else (ibid.)

Another author from whom I drew inspiration for my tentative project is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In *Death of a Discipline*, she suggests that '**language-based literary investigations**' escape or diminish the violences of working *through* 'interested cultural informants' (2003: 13). Spivak disavows the position of the anthropologist and constructs an apologia for the position(ing) of the reader. She suggests that the latter position offers the unique possibility of 'com[ing] close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to **ethical semiosis**' (ibid.).

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[5] I thank Will Coleman for his priceless insights on this issue and for pushing me to consider the implications of using this binary unreflexively.

What this implies is a transcendence of investigations that revolve almost exclusively around language. Instead, the technique proposed by Spivak attempts, in my understanding, to find those points of contact between bodies and literary texts, between and among bodies captured in their countless encounters with otherness. I suppose the best way to explain this is to give some examples.

Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* is one of the most symbolically rich and fascinating accounts of encounters with difference/otherness that I have read.[6] Pamuk's celebrated novel revolves around a murder mystery set in the Ottoman Empire of the 16th century. The apparent reason behind the murder is the commissioning of a book by the Sultan to be illuminated in European style. The European technique of illuminations offends profoundly the sensitivities of traditional artists, for whom the 'Oriental' technique of illumination is not only connected to a particular understanding of the aesthetic, but most importantly it is profoundly infused with religious connotations. The European technique of illumination places emphasis on individuality and on the uniqueness of the subject portrayed. The very idea of portrait is foreign and offensive to Muslim illuminators. Rather, any subject, be it even the Sultan, must be surrounded by a multitude of characters and symbols, that would suggest the subject's positioning within an orderly cosmos, designed by an all-knowing and self-aware divinity. In contrast, the European depiction of subjectivity bestows an autonomy on the subject that seems to transcend the designs of and the need for divine power. Consequently, 'illustrating in a new way signif[ies] a new way of seeing' (2002: 28). Such a statement speaks about the

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[6] Naturally I do not expect that the reader will simply be compelled by my enthusiastic endorsement of this book. Therefore, I strongly recommend the reading of this book for purposes of "self-edification."

manner in which art is no way autonomous within the social realm we inhabit; rather it is constituted by and constitutes this realm.

Also, this book brilliantly questions and explores our stereotypes of 'East' and 'West.' In Pamuk's text, the encounter between the two is inextricably marked by violence, but also by an opening of different horizons. What intrigues and moves me about this narrative is the way in which sign and body are intimately linked, and perceived/captured in their messy ethical relations: the struggle for a particular way of depicting the world, for a specific artistic type, spills over into bodies (people are being killed in the name of art). Pamuk's story reveals the flagrant irony that lies behind any pretensions of the autonomy of art. *My Name Is Red* portrays a world in which there is a deep conflict between the ideal of artistic autonomy and the reality of its involvement with the political. Such an involvement implies an ambivalent relation between the aesthetic and the political, mediated by practices of commodification.

Another novel that has profoundly inspired me is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. One of the striking features of this book is its language. While conceiving a language that would be used by young children (since the story is narrated from the perspective of 5 year old children), Roy is actually creating a language that accomplishes reversals and transcendences on so many levels: on the one hand, the bizarre, almost surreal language she is using mocks the English of which the subjects/objects of the British Empire are so proud. Such a language represents more than a returned gaze of the '**native**' towards her/his oppressor, it embodies the 'native' as the gazer, as the source of a subjectivity that transcends the colonial encounter, to paraphrase Rey Chow.[7] Therefore, I felt that Roy manages to use language in way in which it is infused with so

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[7] A more detailed discussion on the 'native' will be undertaken in the next two sections.

much bodily violence, that the impression produced is inescapable and unforgettable. The translation she manages to perform from 'body to ethical semiosis' struck me as an intriguing illustration of what it is implied in reading between East and West.

Considering that the focus of my project will fall on Maghrebi authors, there is one particular author who captured my imagination. It is not so much her sociological analyses that have inspired me – although they are wonderfully insightful -- it is rather her autobiographical writings that I find mesmerizing in their honesty. Fatema Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* and *Scheherazade Goes West* are personal accounts of her encounters with difference/otherness, and of the negotiations and insights that such encounters provoke. In an attempt to de-stabilize the hegemonic status of Western thinking and imagination, Mernissi performs a re-reading and a re-capturing of the Western structures of fantasies and desires regarding the harem. I would call this method that of the 'returned gaze': Mernissi watches the West watching the East, and the insights she brings to the surface are stunning.

In *Scheherazade Goes West*, she wants to understand why the Western portrayal of the harem (as captured by the paintings of Ingrès, Matisse, Picasso) lacks the subversion and the tension that permeated the harem in which she grew up (2001: 19); and why the West discarded Scheherazade's 'brainy sensuality and political message' (2001: 68). Mernissi illuminates in her texts a world that is largely unknown to Westerners, a world of perplexing nuances and paradoxes. Her women are endowed with a distinct sense of individuality as well as with an awareness of their complex social roles. The women Mernissi brings to the attention of the reader are not passive beings, deprived of agency and ability to exact any transformation. Rather they are agents,

painfully aware of their limitations and restrictions, but with a deep sense of their political role. Moreover, there is such beauty and depth in the creativity with which these women subvert the dominant masculinity of their world. In *Dreams of Trespass*, she examines her childhood in a harem, the women in her life and their stories, the men in her life and their views. The reader is confronted with a narrative that exudes honesty, depth, and a sense of tension and struggle.

Since I find that literary texts provide an inescapable bias – one that I would never wish to escape - and inspiration for my thinking and my work, I decided to pursue my project through 'language-based literary investigations.' Why am I particularly attracted by this sort of technique will be explained in greater detail in the next section that deals with various methodological issues.

3. **<u>Methodological considerations</u>**

I will search for answers and clues to my core research questions by carrying out a close, interpretive reading of literary and autobiographical texts written by persons belonging to the Maghrebin diaspora living in Western Europe. In making this methodological choice, several issues arise that I will address as a means for elaborating my approach to the dissertation

- **Why choose literary texts for your study? Why not the work of social scientists?**

Paraphrasing Clifford Geertz (1975), Cynthia Weber brilliantly suggests that IR theory can be viewed as an 'ensemble of stories' we tell about the world (2001: 129-30). I

deeply believe that to be accurate. Also, Phillip Darby (1998) sees IR as an imaginative form of writing. What this suggests is my refusal to accept the claim of social scientists that they impartially observe the world and then reproduce its workings and dynamics into theories of international politics. Social reality is not 'out there' awaiting our discovery, just as history does not point to a past that is 'back there' awaiting our re-capture. Talking about social reality, just as talking about historical events, implies the use of narratives that determine what is to be used, what to be discarded, which parts fall into focus, and what gets to be marginalized.

So, why choose literary texts? I think that in the act of creative writing (which implies the (re)creation of worlds we have seen, witnessed, dreamed of or feared) there is a more or less conscious transposition of our codes of fantasies, emotions and desires into the texts we create. Such codes of fantasies, desires and emotions speak about views and practices that constitute us and which we constitute in our turn. As such, the more conscious infusion of literary texts with fantasies, emotions, and desires make them fertile ground for the exploration of socio-political myths that we create and that create us. Such explorations are particularly important for the study of how identities are produced and thus how the 'native' is constructed. These processes of production are complex and the literary imagination exploring identities alerts us to these complexities in useful ways not normally available to social scientists. Social science methodologies, with the exception, perhaps, of some ethnographic approaches, tend to concentrate on reducing complexity in favour of conceptual rigor and parsimony. They also tend to objectify emotions, a crucial area of exploration for my thesis.

To push this point even further, I embrace Darby's suggestion that 'narrative truth may have a greater utility than historical truth' (1998: 23). Let's consider for example Mernissi's *Scheherazade Goes West*. She wants to understand why the Western portrayal of the harem (as captured by the paintings of Ingrès, Matisse, Picasso) lacks the subversion and the tension that permeated the harem in which she grew up (2001: 19); and why the West discarded Scheherazade's 'brainy sensuality and political message' (2001: 68). More to the point, Mernissi points to the paradox that the harem portrayed by the Western imagination has enjoyed a wider circulation and credibility than the actual harem that was experienced and portrayed in the Arab world. Mernissi claims that the harem imagined by the West has not existed except in the imagination of the West. Yet, it is this sort of harem that is suffocatingly present in each of us, and in most aesthetic productions. Thus it was the 'fictional' not the 'factual' harem that colours our fantasies of the exotic. In this light, I am choosing literary texts since such texts speak richly and compellingly about our world views, our politics, and our senses of who we are. Sometimes it is important and useful to juxtapose these literary representations of world views and politics to social science analyses, as Mernissi shows in her life work.

- **Why choose writers from diaspora as opposed to other possibilities?**

There is something in leaving, in uprooting and re-locating oneself that confers in the one who leaves a perspective that is as complex as it is fraught with tensions. To leave what one considers one's "home" (whether by choice or not) is also to alter one's perceptions of what one left behind, what one found, and of the way in which one situates oneself. Ien Ang refers to this dynamic of leaving, traveling, fleeing, re-locating as the permanent tension between 'where you're from' and 'where you're at' (see Ien Ang 1994). I find

such a tension to be extremely productive, in so far as it allows me to have a better understanding of the ways in which people conceptualize, feel and experience difference (both inside and outside them), the relationships between here and there, what they have left behind and what they have encountered.

This sort of nomadism provokes a re-thinking of one's locales, of the places and spaces one encounters, and of the relationships between here and there. As such I see the diaspora as a more dynamic ground for exploring the 'web of translocal relationships.' Moreover, these experiences tend to throw into sharp relief the complex issues surrounding the construction of identities and the competing valorizations of forms of knowledge. I choose diaspora writers not only because I find the space of diaspora as more dynamic, in so far as these people constantly shift between different locales, spaces, places, and loyalties, but also I find it more immediate and more personalized. I wish to look at personal(ized) narratives of exile and migration. Such narratives are extremely valuable in so far as they provide a link between immediacy and distance: they speak of the former since personalized narratives (whether autobiographical or fictional) are always infused with a sense of closeness and of immediate experience. They also speak of the latter in so far as they are journals and narratives of intellectuals, who define themselves not only by their immediate background and location, but also through their translocal ties/links to other intellectuals, through their exposure to universals (in the sense that Anna Tsing conceptualizes them), and to widely circulated (and circulating) sets of ideas.

- **Why focus on the Maghrebin diaspora and not the Indian one or the Chinese one or . . . ? Will the focus fall on writers from the Maghrebin diaspora**

living in Western Europe only or also in other parts of the world (like North America)?

As stated in my background statement, I have always been fascinated by the Maghreb, by its perplexing mix and interplay of cultures, histories, and voices. I wish to clarify that I do not perceive the many invasions and civilizations that have laid claims to the region as succeeding each other in a linear progressive manner: I do not see that every civilization that has stirred the region of the Maghreb has supplanted and transformed the previous in a way in which the prevailing/conquering discourse has become the main filter through which previous discourses and practices get to be articulated. Rather I perceive multivalent discourses and practices, some that get to be filtered through the prevailing discourse some that contest it, and some that have an ambiguous relationship with the current hegemonic set of ideas/practices.

Why the Maghrebin diaspora? Through my reading thus far, I get the sense that the proximity between the Maghreb and the immediate diaspora, which is Western Europe (particularly France, Spain, and Italy) has produced tensions, possibilities and ambiguities that are more acute than in other cases. The relative close distance between the Maghreb and the diaspora has enabled the expression of ambiguous perceptions of 'home', the West, the non-West. Also such a proximity has produced tensions that are as much reasons for concern (consider for example the recent violent clashes between French police and Arab immigrants), as they are possibilities for re-thinking issues such as identity, constructions of the 'native', and the politics of culture and cultural politics.

For example, taking into account the relative proximity between the Maghrebi diaspora and the Maghreb, one wonders why exile, migration, re-location produces such

a deep *Angst* in the texts of the Maghrebi writers, in which one can discern a constant obsession with re-creating the figure of the 'native.' Moreover, another intriguing aspect is also the existence of a number of prominent French intellectuals who project fantasies about the Maghreb *and* about the native in the Maghreb in their writings. Thus it is not surprising that both Maghrebi and French writers have been involved not only in literary productions about the Maghreb, but also in other aesthetic productions, such as photography that attempts and claims to capture the 'true' spirit of the Maghreb and its inhabitants.

- **How will I decide which texts to read? How many? Will I choose both men and women authors? Will I try to look at authors who have written at different time periods?**

I am focusing on prominent and well-known authors, both Maghrebi and French, who have written about the Maghreb. My selection criterion is the way in which their narratives deal with re-creations of the native and in which their texts attempt and/or claim to bring forward the native's voice/subjectivity. Another interesting aspect of such texts is that they do not only bring forward various figures and voices of the native, but also the native is always a nomad, a traveler, a refugee. This nomadism can also be another criterion for selecting my texts. However, I do not wish to set too many limits or restrictions on my selection of texts, since I find valuable the practice of following my instinct and exploring narratives that intrigue me, and which I might consider appropriate for my project.

For the purpose of having a variety of perspectives and experiences, I will look at texts written by both men and women authors. Also, I will look at texts that have been

written in different time periods, although I do not think that the time span envisioned will be too extensive. I need to take into consideration that I have only two years to complete this project. Therefore I need to limit my choices. My point of departure will be to read the following authors: Tahar Ben-Jelloun, Michel Tournier, J.M. Le Clezio, Assia Djebar, Leila Sebbar, Monia Hejaiej, and Fatema Mernissi. Many of these have also been involved in photographic projects about the Maghreb and its people. Also, most interestingly, in the writings of such authors, instances of nomadism and the nomad 'natives' are almost inextricably linked to philosophical digressions on the violences and possibilities of images, and to the politics of visuality. As such, I think it would be crucial to explore their other aesthetic involvements as well, because it would offer me a better understanding about their re-conceptualization of the Maghrebi space, *and* about the politics that inform their attempts to re-capture the native's voice, the native's gaze, or native's surroundings.

- **When I read these texts, how will I do so 'productively'?**

I turn towards literary productions (but I do not focus exclusively on them) in order to assess what are the terms in which the native's voice and subjectivity is explored and retrieved. I believe that such productions can be considered as sites where our codes of fantasy and desire come through more clearly. Within the creative moment of producing worlds, ideas, characters, subjects, events – as is the case with literary, photographic, and cinematic productions – there is a movement towards expressing our desires, obsessions, preoccupations through the projection of *other* worlds. Such projects/projections bespeak our fears and anxieties, and our hopes and fantasies. Also, I believe such

projects/projections are imbued with ways in which we perceive the relationship between 'local' and 'global', 'universal' and 'particular.'

As such, a 'productive' reading will imply exploring the codes of fantasies, desires and emotions that infuse these texts, and investigating the politics that informs such codes. A caveat must be mentioned here: my purpose in exploring these codes of fantasies, desires and emotions should not be conceived in essentialist terms. The idea is not that by exposing and exploring certain codes of fantasies will I somehow strip the narratives down to their 'genuine' dimensions, in which they can reveal what 'really' lies 'out there.' Rather, the purpose of my reading, among others, is to point to the important role that codes of fantasy and desire play in the production of world views. Such codes are not only producers of views and practices, but also they are products of various views and practices. This (re)production, speaks profoundly, I think, about the political aspect of aesthetic productions, but also about the ways that codes of fantasies and desires constantly inform and permeate our narratives of research.

For example, in Michel Tournier's novel *Gaspard, Melchior, and Balthazar*, there is an obsessive preoccupation with the tyranny of the image, and its falsifying effects. Balthazar, king of Nippur, finds a mirror-portrait of a mysterious and unknown beauty, with whom he falls in love. When his father produces the girl that had inspired that portrait, he discovers that it was the portrait that had been the source of his love, the 'original' left him quite disappointed. Instead of expecting the portrait to resemble the 'original', he reverses his desire and expects that the original resemble the portrait. One manner of 'productively' reading this text is to reflect on the larger implications involved by the narrative message, which is the author's preoccupation with the concept and

practices of image. To what extent do we expect that the subjects of our research, 'our' natives, 'our' marginalized voices, resemble the portraits we have forged in ourselves about natives as silenced objects and marginalized others? Can such portraits not be considered as part and parcel of those forms of knowledge and senses of identities author-ed and authorized by colonialism/imperialism? I believe they are. And if so, to what extent are we aware of it or willing to be accountable for them?

Another possibility for 'productively' reading this text is to try to expose the codes of fantasies and desire that make possible the motif of the image. What does this tell us about the author's obsession with searching for authenticity? Why is this search for authenticity performed outside of his/her locale, in 'exotic' places? In this context, one could argue that retrieving the native's voice and subjectivity speaks more about our desire to 'seek security and order in an amorphous [post]modern society', than about a 'genuine' attempt to **see** our others and listen to their voices. There seems to be an interesting connection between a search for authenticity inside and the search for authenticity outside (materialized in *projections/projects* of authenticity), which I find largely under-explored.

One potential problem that I foresee is that of my project falling into a nativistic fantasy that attempts to retrieve some sense of authenticity by trying to erase and underplay the impact of colonialism on senses of identification and forms of knowledge. With this concern in mind, I think it is important to clarify that my project attempts to conceive of modes of knowledge and subjectivity that transcend the anti-colonial discourse, while not underplaying the effects of colonialism. Taking Rey Chow's article ("Where have all the natives gone?") as a point of departure, I find extremely intriguing

the idea of conceiving of forms of knowledge in which the colonizer feels looked at by the native's gaze. What this idea implies, is a reversal of current forms of knowledge and construction of identities, in which the 'native' is captured (even trapped, I would argue) in a framework, whether traditional or critical, or even radical, which cannot conceive of the 'native' beyond her image as the colonizer's *other*, beyond assertions of her absolute difference and specificity.

Specifically, when engaging with various texts, these are the questions that are going to constitute the premises on which I select and read these particular narratives:

Who is a native in this text?

What identity/identities do natives have?

How do natives speak? Do they speak?

What assumptions are made about forms of knowledge in the text?

Upon whom does the native gaze?

How are these persons constructed? and so on . . .[8]

Naturally, this is a tentative list and I leave it open, since they will evolve and change as I read more. New questions will come to mind and it is likely that I might question my original formulation of 'reading' questions. Actually this is my secret hope…

4. <u>Wishful thinking. Expected contributions of my dissertation to knowledge</u>

I am a scholar of international relations – or at least that is how I fancy myself - and I aim and hope that this thesis will contribute to continuing development of critical theories in this field. To understand the nature of my contributions, I begin with some tentative

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[8] I thank Susie O'Brien for suggesting that I should have in mind a set of questions when reading the texts I select, and I am grateful to Will Coleman for helping me formulate them.

thoughts on what I am expecting to learn about each of my questions in this proposal. After outlining these tentative thoughts, I will suggest how this kind of research will push forward international relations theory.

Considering that the main concern of my project revolves around the politics that inform the production of the 'native', I would argue that the ways in which the 'native' is constructed *as 'native'*, that the attempts to retrieve the native's voice and subjectivity, are framed within a discourse that privileges colonialism/imperialism as its main system of reference. At this point, it is important to mention that I am greatly indebted to Rey Chow's insights on issues of subalternity, the native, and diasporic constructions of identity. I concur with her arguments that it is with the coming of colonialism that one witnesses the process of 'becoming native.' What this statement implies is that the 'native's agency is constructed mainly in terms of resistance to the gaze of the colonizer. What most attempts at re-capturing the native's voice and subjectivity fail to put forth is the way in which the native is not just the objectified and oppressed party of colonialism's projects, rather she needs to be viewed and re-presented as 'the gaze that exceeds the moment of colonisation' (1993: 51). Her sense of identification needs to be captured in terms of the 'existence before becoming native,' which precedes the arrival of the colonizer. At this point, the issue on which I would like to focus is the possibility of conceiving of modes of subjectivity that do not necessarily privilege colonialism as the master-narrative that writes/creates the native.

Thus I argue that within critical attempts at retrieving the native's voice there is an idealization of the native as the *other*, the oppressed, and wronged/marginalized subject, which speaks ironically to the notion that 'defilement and sanctification belong

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to the same symbolic order', which is that of colonial/imperialistic discourse (1993: 54). One possible answer to the question of what are the politics of retrieving the native's voice/subjectivity *as the native*, is that our fascination and obsession with 'the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures' is perhaps a symptom of a desire to cling on to and re-capture 'an unchanging certainty' that is situated somewhere *outside* of our experience with a fast paced consumerist society (1993: 52). Taking my cue from Lacan's topos of the 'non-duped', we seem to constantly attempt to salvage the other as the 'non-duped', as the site of authenticity and true knowledge. In this context, my preliminary answer is that retrieving the native's voice and subjectivity speaks more about our desire to 'seek security and order in an amorphous [post]modern society', than about a 'genuine' attempt to **see** our others and listen to their voices (ibid.). There seems to be an interesting connection between a search for authenticity inside and the search for authenticity outside (materialized in *projections/projects* of authenticity), which I find largely under-explored. Such a desire for viewing/seeing the subjects of our research as the 'non-duped' speaks also about a desire to seize control.

I turn towards literary productions (but I do not focus exclusively on them) in order to assess what are the terms in which the native's voice and subjectivity is explored and retrieved. I believe that such productions can be considered as sites where our codes of fantasy and desire come through more clearly. Within the creative moment of producing worlds, ideas, characters, subjects, events – as is the case with literary, photographic, cinematic productions – there is a movement towards expressing our desires, obsessions, preoccupations through the projection of *other* worlds. Such projects/projections bespeak our fears and anxieties, and our hopes and fantasies. Also, I

believe such projects/projections are imbued with ways in which we perceive the relationship between 'local' and 'global', 'universal' and 'particular.' The question of how subjects perceive the relationship between the 'local' and the 'global' is inextricable from the notion of the site from where such perceptions might be retrieved. I find Anna Tsing's conceptualization of 'global connections' very compelling. She argues that universals are constantly enacted and engaged in the 'sticky materiality' of our daily encounters (2004: 1). Local knowledges speak about specificity, contingency and historicity, but they are rarely fixed and immutable; rather they move, they circulate, and they get transformed.

My feeling is that when looking at the complex context of the Maghreb it will be impossible to clearly differentiate between 'local' and 'global', universal and particular. Instead, what I will find is perhaps a messy picture: hybridised forms of knowledges and senses of identities that will speak of countless encounters that exceed that of colonialism (not necessarily dismissing it). This kind of picture implies that colonialism will be *one* of the discourses and practices that produces and authors forms of knowledge and senses of identifications, but perhaps it is not the ultimate system of reference. I would argue that this sort of framework allows us to perceive our subjects in terms of both 'defilement' and 'indifference', as Rey Chow encourages us to do. What this kind of perception implies is that we can see the possibility for people affected by imperialistic/colonising projects as possessing both a capacity for resisting and distrusting the symbolic hegemonic orders that fooled them and at the same time as not letting go of the "illusion" which has structured their survival (Chow 1993: 53).

My preliminary claim revolves thus around a 'web of translocal relationships' (Dirlik 1994) that is represented and performed as a dizzying and somewhat treacherous *mélange* of hegemonic discourses and practices, various resistances, and countless complicities. All of these produce a site of what I would call metamorphosised authenticity, which implies that the global, the universal, the hegemonic is never simply superimposed on the local. Rather my feeling is that knowledges with pretensions of universality and globality constantly get metamorphosised in their countless encounters with various sites and locales. This framework, I believe, allows us to perceive our subjects as products, but also as producers, as transformers, as *gazers*.

In the writings of the Maghrebin diaspora (people who either live outside of the Maghreb or have had experiences with living abroad, or even French writers who somehow identify themselves as different, as outside their own space/locale) there is a constant attempt to retrieve the voice (and hence the subjectivity) of the native in various forms. Since my argument is that attempts to retrieve the voice/subjectivity of the native has more to do with *our* fantasies and desires, and with *our* perceptions and readings, then it would be fair to say that these writings speak about the authors' fantasies and desires, and about their projects/projections. Nonetheless, I would also argue that it is never the case that the writer's gaze completely overwrites the voice/authority of the 'native' in ways in which the native's *presence* is lost. Rather, in the construction of our project/projection the relationship between gazer and gazed is more dynamic and mutual (although sorely unequal) than we think.

As such, while we construct the native, the native constructs us as well: her presence inscribes our discourse in ways of which we are not perhaps aware. I believe

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that the text is as much an imposition of our fantasies and desires as it is constructed by a *presence*. The awareness that one's text is never simply the product of one's subjectivity disconnected from other presences is an important part of my project. Therefore, I sense that literary, photographic and cinematic productions are as much products of our own senses of selves, as they are produced by *other presences*.

In the same vein, such attempts at retrieval of voice/subjectivity can be considered both exercises in negotiating local and global, particular and universal, and continuations of past processes where local discourses are co-opted into hegemonic narratives (capitalist/imperialist/colonialist). They can be seen as the former since such attempts can be seen as examples of the ways in which knowledges with pretensions of universality come to interact with other knowledges within the 'sticky materiality' of daily encounters, thereby becoming contested, accepted, negotiates, metamorphosised. At the same time, I would argue that such attempts re-inscribe the limits of hegemonic narratives in so far as such narratives tend be implicitly taken as the main systems of reference. These attempts produce subjectivities that seem to be mere reflections or products of such narratives, whether understood in terms of acceptance, resistance or complicity. However, I would argue that voices and subjectivities are never simply written over or imposed from above: the presence of the *other* inevitably inflects such aesthetic productions. This does not suggest that there is a space where or a moment when the presence of the *other* can be stripped of our gaze and revealed in all its naked authenticity. As the 'native's sense of identification constructs us to a certain extent (again unequal perhaps to the ways in which we construct her), it would be perhaps impossible to separate her gaze from our presence.

Obviously, there are a lot of 'perhapses' in my project, but my aim is <u>not</u> to attain some sort of certainty. Fatema Mernissi claims we would live better lives if we aimed for uncertainty rather than certainty. I believe that as well. I do hope, however, to open spaces for re-thinking our projects in terms of projections, for going beyond mere articulations of local/global, universal/particular, Western/non-Western, and discern the webs of translocal relationships in which we are located. Such webs should not be perceived in terms of equal distances, and equal access to power/empowering positions. On the contrary. Many voices are lost, some are muffled, some are silenced, some are simply not listened to. Can we retrieve such voices? And how can we retrieve them in ways that do not portray them as mere negations of master narratives?

Why do I think that these particular answers would be relevant to the study of IR? I suppose that my contribution aims as much at critical accounts within IR as it does at the field of postcolonial studies in general. More and more inroads have been made into IR from fields such as postcolonial studies, cultural studies and critical theory in general. The general goals of such inroads were to introduce into the study of IR concepts such as colonialism, culture, identity, voice, subjectivity, and margins. Also, such inroads permit the interrogation of the choices performed by mainstream IR as regards its subjects/objects of focus. In addition, they indicate the implications that such limited and stubbornly disciplinary selections have had on the construction and production of the field.

With this background in mind, while I subscribe to and endorse such critical explorations and interrogations, I feel that the ways in which such endeavours bring into focus the 'margins' serve to re-inscribe the <u>disciplinary</u> boundaries of IR. By implicitly

and explicitly portraying voices written out by the mainstream as 'silenced', 'subjugated', 'others', 'natives', such voices are relegated (yet again!) to the realm of silence and oppression. Even when a sense of agency is being conveyed, it is usually a negative perception of agency: the voice/subjectivity portrayed is viewed and put forth as nothing more than the returned gaze of imperialism: their subjectivity is re-created as 'resistance against the image' (Chow 1993: 51). Perhaps such voices would become more clearly audible, and silences would indicate more forcefully the sense of displacement if we could conceive of ways in which the 'colonizer feels looked at by the native's gaze' and in which such voices/subjectivities are rendered in ways that transcend the 'moment of colonization' (ibid.).

What I learned from Rey Chow and Fatima Mernissi, from Orhan Pamuk and Arundhati Roy is that fantasies, desires and emotions can tell us as much about politics as political treatises and essays. In my opinion, they tell us more and they do it more compellingly. As Phillip Darby (1998) aptly demonstrated, literary productions are vividly implicated in the construction of our social, cultural and political realities, as much as they can be considered products/constructs of such realities. As stated earlier, I believe that IR is a set of stories we tell about the world (Weber 2001). Therefore, I feel that these particular stories, which are richly infused with our codes of fantasies, desires and emotions, have a lot to tell about the ways in which certain sets of desires and emotions are political and politicized. They also are capable of politicizing the particular environments, events, actions and ideas they penetrate. Although critical accounts of IR discuss such concepts, I feel that they tend to over-simplify and objectify them.[9] As such,

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[9] I must note that there are exceptions to this criticism. I am thinking of scholars such as Cynthia Weber, Phillip Darby, Vivienne Jabri, Roxanne Doty, Richard Ashley, who provide insightful and exciting

I think that the ways in which literary productions are political are largely under-explored. Such productions speak in meaningful ways about encounters between what we comfortably denounce as 'East' and 'West', about 'translocal' relations (I do not particularly favour the term 'international'), about relations between universals and particulars, and between immediate and distant locales. Therefore, the question that arises is: how is this *not* IR?

5. <u>Tentative schedule of my upcoming research project</u>

May – August 2006 = engaging with and deepening my theoretical premises and the authors that inspire them

September 2006 = travel to Tunisia?

October – December 2006 = internship at IMA in Paris?

January – April 2007 = write several chapters of my thesis

May – August 2007 = further travels to Tunisia & Morocco?

September – December 2007 = write the remaining chapters of the dissertation

January 2008 = submit first draft of the dissertation

Summer 2008 = defense of dissertation

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possibilities of conceiving of links between fantasies and politics. I owe Marshall Beier a great debt of gratitude for including such authors in his courses, and thus for making it possible for me to engage with them in a meaningful way.

6. If I had a crystal ball, this is what I would see… or why I do not and cannot have a preliminary outline of the chapters of my dissertation

I do not and cannot provide a preliminary outline of the chapters that would constitute my dissertation, as I feel that there is going to be a lot of re-thinking, re-visiting, and altering in regards to my research questions, but also to the key concepts that drive my research. As such, I prefer to allow such re-thinking and transformation to happen without a pre-established frame. I think it would be interesting if such changes in thoughts, questions, and ideas will dictate the structure of my thesis, instead of vice versa.

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