# Immigrants In/Em-Body Dis-Ease: Metaphors of Disease in French-Maghrebi Texts

*Madelaine Hron*

> *La maladie d'être arabe'es marqué par un fer rouge. Tu ressens une intense douleur. C'est un coup qu'on te porte à chaque fois que l'on prononce ton nom. (Je rêve d'une autre vie, 47)*

"Sick …branded by a hot red iron.. in acute pain" --this is how Youcef M.D. sums up the experience of being an Arab immigrant in France: it is a pathological condition, symptomatic of socio-cultural 'dis-ease'. Ironically, Youcef M.D. is not the *sans-papier* illegal immigrant he claimed to be, but purportedly author Claude Andrieux, an academic.[i] Yet Andrieux performed the stereotypical expectations of the French-Maghrebi minority identity so persuasively that his work was praised as a classic example of a thriving, resistant, French-Arab hybrid culture.[ii] One of the assumptions Andrieux adopted so adeptly is representing the immigrant as the 'dis-eased'/diseased victim.

What does it mean that the identity of French-Maghrebi immigrants is so easily reduced to a pain-filled performance of cultural 'dis-ease'? If social 'dis-ease' is a stereotypical attribute of the immigrant condition, what happens when immigrant writers themselves start to pathologize their condition? How can writers re-appropriate the metaphor of disease or a position of victimization as a means of resistance or self-identification?

These are some of the questions I will now explore, by considering cases in which Maghrebi immigrant writers purposefully take up metaphors of disease or pathological positions of 'dis-ease'. I argue that this 'self-infection' represents oppositional maneuvers, which, as Ross Chambers defines them, are survival tactics that make the system "livable" (7) and offer the individual subject "some sense of dignity and personhood" (7). I describe how in certain narratives, Maghrebi immigrant authors explicitly adopt a "sick status" to critique the social order and the pernicious stereotypes that alienate and exclude them, clamoring for recognition, inclusion and sympathy. However, I also show how these minority subjects construct and perform their identity as pathologically dis-eased, in order to define and maintain a certain otherness. Denis Vasse claims that suffering precipitates a condition of inner alterity, in the same way that exclusion or estrangement others the subject externally: << l'altération vient toujours – semble-t- il – de l'*étranger.* Soit qu'elle arrive du dehors […] Soit qu'elle arrive du *dedans,* comme dans la maladie. >> (25-26) I question why immigrant authors might advocate yet another alterity, an inner otherness – suffering and sickness – in their work. I then problematize these precarious pathological situations and the performance of pain they presume.

**Dis-eased discourse: Immigrants as Diseased**

First, I must briefly refer to the intimate socio-political connection between immigrants and disease, so as to identify why I find the metaphor of disease so perilous.

Finding examples of immigrants labeled as diseased is easy[iii] in France, the far-right National Front's original 1972 program stated that the party opposed immigration because "it imperils the health of France."[iv] Another reactionary leader wrote in 1985 of the "immigration plague," claiming that it could become "a mortal threat." Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the National Front, in 1984, claimed "some French regions were literally gangrenous because of the foreign invasion." This party, which continues to oppose the "brown plague"[v] is gaining increased popularity; their votes rose from 0.7% in 1972, to 14.7 % in 1997 to reach18% in 2002. With the spread of AIDS in the early 1980s, Le Pen wanted to confine all those who were HIV-positive into specially conceived "sidatoriums"; one might argue that, in a similar vein, many Beurs (second-generation Maghrebi immigrants) are now confined to low-cost housing slums, known as Cité HLMS.

Clearly, derogatory vocabulary associated with immigrants is not limited to disease. How often to we hear of "floods" of immigrants, "pollution" or "dirt," which, by nature unsanitary, breed disease[vi]. Most often however, the relationship between the citizen and the immigrant is portrayed as one of enmity or warfare, a metaphor also at the crux of medical disease discourse. Here Le Pen's most famous slogan is perhaps fitting: "We are being conquered, not by force of arms, but by immigration."[vii]

Representations of immigrants as diseased are acquired through collective memories constructed on a complex set of myths or history and instituted by social practices. In literature, disease has been associated with immigrants already in the Bible. In the Exodus, the Israelites, foreigners to the land of Egypt, brought plague onto the native population, causing "sores that break into pustules on man and beast."[viii] In resistance and vengeance, their God cursed the Egyptians with ten plagues, the most lethal of which was the visitation on the first-born sons. In Ancient Greece, the fall of the Athenian Empire, was attributed to a plague from migrants from Thebes, as recorded by Thucydides' *Histories*[ix].

Historically as well, disease was believed to proceed from a foreign origin. For example, when syphilis emerged in Europe at the end of the fifteenth century, it became known by a variety of names, each of which supposed the country of origin: "the Neapolitan", "the French" or "the Polish" disease. Later, in China it was termed the "Canton disease" and in Japan, "the Chinese disease". As Kraut shows in his fascinating book *Silent Travelers,* specific immigrant groups in the US were often associated with particular diseases: in the 1900s, immigrants from Eastern Europe were thought to be responsible for cholera, while Asians were believed to carry bubonic plague[x]; in 1916, Italian immigrants along the East Coast were blamed for the polio epidemic[xi] and in the mid 1920s, Jewish immigrants were associated with

tuberculosis or consumption, termed “the Jewish disease” or “the tailors’ disease”, as it was thought to be transmitted mainly by poor Jews working in the clothes industry[xii]. It is not surprising then, that when the AIDS epidemic broke out, undesired foreign immigrants – Haitians – were again pinpointed as the source of the disease (as well as homosexuals, another minority group). As a result, ordinary Haitians had difficulties finding jobs or even renting apartments, as landlords believed they would spread the disease to the entire building.[xiii] Later, when it was discovered that AIDS was a much more widespread heterosexual disease, it became perceived as endemic to the “dark continent” of Africa. Disease is thus always attributed to the other, the unwanted presence in society.

In social practice as well, immigrants have been seen as carriers of disease. The federal government, of course, has the right to quarantine immigrants or refuse those who might pose a serious health risk. In 1992 for example, 153 Haitian refugees, all HIV positive, were detained at Guantanamo Bay for more than a year and a half before a federal judge permanently enjoined the US government to release them, observing that their illness hardly warranted “the kind of indefinite detention usually reserved for spies and murderers.”[xiv]

In my opinion, however, institutionalized medical language proves to be the most lethal weapon of this ideological arsenal. In medicine, the fundamental rhetoric applied to disease is that of war: diseases and disease mechanisms are viewed as alien “others” which must be fought and resisted, enemies in a modern war. In the most overstated allegorical system, the human body or host is pictured as a fortress or castle, which must “defend itself” against “invasions” of a virus, or an “intruder army.” Visually, the minimalist icon so often associated with AIDS, the prickly spheroid, resembles a military weapon, a mace, of some sort (Rosello). In *Illness and Metaphor and AIDS as a Metaphor,* Susan Sontag lucidly posits that such military metaphors are also perhaps inevitable in our capitalist society, where all moral or ethical principles have been lost, and where every action is calculated according to profit and personal welfare; united action only effectively takes place when a crisis threatens the survival of human life itself (98).

In recent years, diseases have evolved from viral infections to genetically-mutating disorders, where war metaphors of alien invader/pure self are no longer applicable. AIDS and auto-immune diseases (multiple sclerosis, lupus erythematosus) can be caused either by congenital defects in the genetic code, by defects produced by infectious agents, or by a combination of the two in which a pathogen activates a dormant gene – in short, by "errors" in DNA that turn the body against itself in a physiological death drive. Yet this recent shift from a vital, mechanistic model of life to the information-system model based on DNA has not produced any fundamental change in the political/military slant to medicine and biology; all that has changed is the conception of the attack/defense structures. Disease still remains a battle, now between information systems, those of the body and of the disease organism. According to Donna Haraway, immune system discourse is still structured around the concept of identity and individuality: the

primary task of the immune system is the differential identification of self vs. non-self and the defense of the individual against the foreign intruders. HIV almost always appears as an alien infiltrator that invades the body's most fundamental structure and perverts the code that produces and maintains its identity. Since HIV becomes a subversive foreign agent that recruits and produces traitors, auto-immune diseases are evidence of high treason within the body.

The relation between disease and immigrants, especially when they are likened to genetically different strands inserted into the nation body as "alien invaders," "traitors," or "spies and murderers," appears to be terrifyingly obvious: this foreign other is dangerous, and potentially lethal; thus s/he must be destroyed to ensure the survival of the species. This reminds me of what Rey Chow argues in her latest book about Foucault's notion of "biopower" and its implications in racist politics, and even ethnic genocide:

> *When life becomes the overarching imperative, his [Foucault's] argument implies, all social relations become subordinate to the discursive network that has been generated to keep it going, so much so that even it negative, discriminatory fact such as racism is legitimated in the name of the living. Rather than straightforwardly assuming the form of a callous willingness to kill, therefore, racist genocide partakes of the organization, calculation, control, and surveillance characteristic of power-in other words, of all the "civil" or "civilized" procedures that are in place primarily to ensure the continuance of life. Killing off certain groups of people en masse is now transformed (by the process of epistemic abstraction) into a productive, generative activity undertaken for the life of the entire human species. Massacres are, literally, vital events.* (11)

Labeling immigrants as "diseased" is therefore not a mere metaphoric othering, but, I would argue, intimates a vital imperative to kill and destroy these disease-bearing agents: a lethal metaphor indeed, which ought to be radically transformed and disarmed.

**Literally diseased: examples of textual 'dis-ease'**

Turning now to Maghrebi immigrant literature, how do immigrant writers respond to such stereotypes of sickness and contagion? In this section, I analyze Smail's *Vivre Me Tue* and Kacem's *Cancer*, works that define the immigrant's marginalized social position by appropriating metaphors of disease. I analyze how each author treats his/ her social "dis-ease," examining whether they are infected by

or resistant to their ascribed "sick status." More importantly perhaps, I diagnose how they operate within the dichotomies of self/other, inside/outside, healthy/sick that define both medical and social discourse.

**Curing Disease: Smail's Vivre me Tue**

My first example is *Vivre Me Tue* by Paul Smail, a novel about the healing of social dis-ease. The novel follows the reflections of a Beur whose homosexual brother, Daniel, is desperately attempting to cleanse himself of his socially dis-eased marginal identity by hyperbolic health. Both brothers learn to box in their youth to eliminate any fear, discrimination or violence they may face. "Virility is the only subject that they never tire of. Virility and religion" (40). (My translation from the French. All translations from the French are mine. In the case of longer citations (block quotes), I offer the French in the body text of the chapter, and provide English translations in the endnotes.) Daniel, pushes this machismo to the extreme; bulging with muscles, taking anabolic steroids to perfect himself further. Yet his attempts to cleanse himself of his identity by such purifying acts as dying his hair blond are in vain. As the narrator remarks, "The Maghrebians who tried to whiten themselves are like those German Jews who thought that they would escape, before the war, by remaining in the blur. But they blurred only themselves" (10). His attempts to perfect his body prove futile, inhuman and, in the end, lethal. Though a star at the Sexyshow porn club, Daniel is in no way human, aside from his fabulous shape. He whinnies like a horse and pisses orange. "His sweat was white thick fatty foamy like the froth in between horses' legs. Sticky, yes, like come. And the smell of a butcher shop, of decomposing fodder" (53). No longer able to have an erection because of the steroids, he performs ideal masculinity with a fake penis. Finally, the novel is framed with Daniel's death of stomach cancer in Germany. In ironic contrast to the foreign medical institution's final statement: "Er hat nicht geleiden" (He didn't suffer), Daniel's real last words are sobs: "I have hate, I have hate" (56). Smail hereby dismisses any physical healing for the marginal identity. However, his text does offer a remedy to the pain of such marginalization: narrative and art. The narrator confesses to being contaminated by a "virus" in his childhood: reading (97). He explains "that literature in this environment is a pleasure almost as risky as homosexuality" (32). Just as Daniel recreates himself physically, the narrator transforms himself narratively, identifying with adventure stories such *Moby Dick* or *Treasure Island* and appropriating and translating Shakespeare: "If you prick us do we not bleed? If you poison us shall we not die? If you wrong us shall we not revenge?" becomes << Un arabe n'a-t-il pas de yeux, un Arabe n'a-at-il pas de mains, des organes, des proportionsY. qu'un français de souche? >> Indeed, narrative and art grant him a redemptive cure, offering him the "truth." While working out, his brother would listen to a song by *The Cure*: "This isn't truth, this isn't right, this isn't love, this isn't life, this isn't right real, this is a lie." Unlike his brother, too focused on his physique to listen to

the lyrics, the narrator heeds the healing words of language to reclaim and define his identity.

Smail's text, then, reinforces that any resistance to the system of discrimination by means of the body is futile. The only way to oppose the system is by maneuvering from within, learning to read its language, and adopting it. Likewise, Smail's polyvocal style counters normative narrative expectations: it sparkles with intertextual references, Beur verlan, English, Arabic and snatches of song. Nevertheless, Smail's emphasis on education deviates little from the traditional immigrant narrative, which presumes a teleology of education and progress. Furthermore, his text continues to enforce the dichotomies that define both medical and social discourse – self/other, healthy/sick, insider/outsider. In the end, the cultivated citizen survives and the dangerous alien outsider dies, exterminated by his own internal disease.

**Infectious Disease: Kacem's Cancer**

While Smail offers a conventional cure, Mehdi Belhaj Kacem deliberately appropriates an effluvium of gruesome, diseased imagery to point to the social disease of the wretched main character in his rather sickeningly disturbing novel, Cancer. In stream of consciousness style, it ponders the life of Frank Stamin, alternative song-writer, an individual infected with a pernicious form of social cancer. According to the narrator: "It was an authentic cancer; a willed cancer, cultivated, but at the same time a cancer by birth in which everyone could take part in if one didn't fight against it; a cancer as intense contempt, acting despite it all and feeding off himself alone." (12) The cancer and "excessive putrefaction dressed this solitary and peevish kid into the diminutive of 'monstrous,'" a word belonging to the family patois and signifying "he-who-is-placed-on-the-margin-of those-whose-love-him-and-whom-he-loves-deep-down-and-thus-wishes-to-do-them-harm." (71) We are shown how this cancer manifests itself, how Stamin imagines killing off "his father in the first place, slice of his dick and make the mother eat it, voracious as she is", amputating his arm with a chainsaw and placing it up his ass so that he sodomize himself (53-54). Then, fictionally, he proceeds to massacre "the monumental error of human history" (57) – the rest of his family, to brutalize his friends, "this trisomy of alienation,"(57) and to imagine his girlfriend hemorrhaging, exploding to death, raped by a monstrous elephant. He fantasizes the destruction of all social institutions – education, work , leisure – and in the end of the book annihilates language itself, which he reduces to the titles of his musical songs TEARY CHRONICLE, MONSTROUS, and NEGLIGEABLE SILENCE; debasing language to "flatulent" monosyllapic sounds, such as "euh euh euh", "hi hi hi", "oh oh oh" and even "moimoimoi". Sick Stamin refuses any form of release, remission, or treatment; everything is diseased: nature nothing more than "the anemic sky" (229); art, "an act of posthumous vengeance and a painful empyrheumatic revival" (55), and laughter,

a placebo "so as not to discover the wound and attack it" (47). Stamin's sole purpose is to stop his own pain by ignoring and denying every one else's (58), and by imagining that he himself can inflict the most excruciating pain: "Nothing everywhere but a cancer of infection fetid, black and oozing… ovulating rachidian bulbs. Preventing me from living like I want to, that is the final word in this whole murderous affair. Not exorbitant. To live." (12)

In the last scene, "obsessed with an instant creation whose excess surpasses all limits: leaving no place for pain" (229), he fights a rabid rat, which tears at him mercilessly, but which, "in a neurological short circuit," he reduces to a "expectoration of bile and blood", by frying it in his amped electric guitar, taping the last musical specters that haunt the corpse. (230-1). The novel is framed by another story, in which a certain Frederic Rivoli, Fred Stamin's agent and rich bourgeois alter-ego, commits suicide at the beginning of the novel. As it turns out, the novel ends when we learn that his suicide is induced by listening to these haunted rat tapes. Just as the narrator dissects Stamin, like any other butchered pork (12), the narrator of this discursive and dialectic text wishes to eviscerate the reader, not sparing any gray cells: "the nostrils of the signatory (will) suck up the evaporations of their dilution… severing their synapses and suckling at the perspectives that hold them fast" (37) He wishes to contaminate the reader and "seriously harm [ his /her] mental health. Here one does not catch inconsequential colds, but rather intense coryzas, even pneumonias." (17) In reading this novel, it is impossible to escape being infected by this insane dis-ease, no way to take distance or maintain objectivity in such contaminated language, since the very act of reading of such sickening violence, one must accept, not desire, to be infected.

In Kacem's Cancer, narrator Stamin thus reclaims the role of an "infectious agent" assigned to him by normative discourse, and seemingly celebrates the contamination and abjection that this role entails. This character certainly embodies abjection, and his story, as Kristeva might argue, "cannot be assimilated" (PH 8) and draws us to a "place where meaning collapses" (PH 9). With his diseased style, it becomes clear that Kacem also attempts to pollute the novelistic genre. Is this text contagious, however? Does this repulsive writing compel readers enough to continue reading or disgust them so much as to give up? By thus reappropriating the metaphor of disease, does Kacem succeed in disrupting a discourse that he has chosen to inhabit? Or does this strategy, a form of role reversal, not merely end up re-inforcing the very norms it seeks to subvert?

In my opinion, much like Smail's text, Kacem's Cancer operates on a rigid binary, in which one is either diseased or immune, dead or alive. The crucial différand is survival itself, and one can only survive as Self or Other, in body or in spirit, in the present or in the past. Perhaps therein lies the paradox: can one embody or textually represent the abject? According to Kristeva, "The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I" (PH 1) in a "refusal but also defensive sublimation of the I /Other, inside/ outside boundary" (PH 7) As David Caron argues in his analysis of diseased AIDS texts:

> *Indeed, the abject is precisely that which cannot be represented without threatening to lift the system's constitutive boundary and, therefore, risking the collapse of the symbolic order. As a representation, the abject can only figure the ritualized repetition of the act of abjection, that is, the reinforcement of boundaries.* (79)

Is it possible, then, to embody and describe social disease without reinforcing and repeating its boundaries? How to portray the abject position – "the quality of the object – that of being opposed to I" (PH1) without seeking to infect or alienate the Other?

**A Self-Inflicted Pathology: Starving to Death**

Shifting away from metaphors of transmittable diseases, I now propose to examine self-inflicted pathologies. In my choice of texts – Fawzia Zouari's Ce pays dont je meurs and Ahmed Zitouni's Un difficile fin de moi – emotionally exiled second-generation immigrants choose not to integrate into a society that alienates them, but rather to starve themselves, showing symptoms of the anorexic pathology. Self-starvation might be read as internalized oppression, as is the case with Fanon or N'gugi, or be symptomatic of internalized abjection, as Butler suggests:

> *The subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation.* (BTM 3)

I believe, however, that the issue is more complex: self-imposed hunger is also a strategy of defiance against dominant discourse, with its philosophy of mass consumption and assimilation of otherness. As immigrants, their hunger-strike also works to resist the romanticized stereotype of immigrant satiety – the metaphor of plenty and First World abundance that epitomizes the culminating ideal of immigrant dream (breadbasket of Europe, land of milk and honey) Notably, the metaphor of hunger does not signal, as one might presume, the social deprivation of Maghrebi immigrants, nor any craving to enter into society. On the contrary, these fictional heroes espouse hunger as means of affirming their subjectivity through sacrifice and martyrdom. Furthermore, self-starvation represents not only a defense mechanism but also a survival tactic serving as a catalyst for the narrator's identity, simultaneously seeking selfknowledge and destruction. In Zouari's *Ce pays dont je meurs*, a young Beur immigrant starves herself to death in order to differentiate

herself from her first–generation parents, while in Zitouni's *Une difficile fin de moi,* the narrator's hunger-strike offers a *source of collective identity.*

**An Exceptional Hunger : Ce pays dont je meurs**

Fawzia Zouari's novel *Ce pays dont je meurs* could simply be a typical Maghrebi immigrant narrative if it were not for the fact that Amira, the youngest and only French-born member of the family, is anorexic, and ultimately dies from her self-inflicted condition. The novel, inspired by a "fait divers" news item about the death of a young woman by starvation, attempts to trace this fatal sequence of events, presenting it as a heroic act of free will rather than symptomatic of the immigrant condition. Amira, a socially dis-eased individual, is alienated from her family, her culture of origin, and French society; she takes up hunger as a means of setting herself apart from her family and opposing her French oppressors. She thus creates her identity out of threat to that identity-- out of starvation.

The story is framed as an elegiac lullaby for Amira by her sister, who narrates in second-person address[xv] and attempts to grasp the reasons for Amira's death. All that remains of Amira is her lifeless body B an impenetrable signifier. For the anorectic though, the body is the vehicle for self-expression; she "expresses with her body what she is unable to say in words" (Orbach 102). Reflecting Zouari herself, pondering this "fait divers," the sister attempts to grant signification to her incomprehensible death.

Turning to the reader, the sister, assuming the role of a third-person omniscient narrator, prosaically warns of the evils of immigration. The lullaby she sings for Amira, for example, is the refrain her mother sang when she left her village; a song in which the experience of immigration turned into "embarrassed laughter and renewed visits to (the shopping center) Tati"(13). Throughout the text, nostalgia for simple, maternal Algeria is contrasted with the commodity culture that is the family's actual downfall. Material objects especially highlight the shift from the fairy-tale-idealism where "Mother was a princess from the 1001 nights" (17) to the family's actual extinction in misery, when Mother's jingling bracelets were sold to pay for her funeral (19). Amira's subsequent anorexia can be read as a response to materialism.

The contrast between idealized storytelling and material culture also serves to draw attention to the difference in generations: while their mother is likened to fairy-tale Sheherzade "who had her reasons to live," by the end of the novel, her daughters only "have reasons to die" (101). Indeed, Amira's anorexia can also be interpreted, as Woodman and Heywood have argued in their studies on anorexia, as a movement to an autonomous identity that involves a rejection of the maternal figure, in favor of the cultural codes of the father.

The girls' parents are sketched out as the stereotypical first generation immigrants, and as such are fleshed out as broken bodies. The father, Ahmed, a beautiful and proud man in Algeria, loses all individuality when he becomes a factory worker in France, reduced to the anonymous assembly-like manufactured name of

Momo. His colonialized subjectivity and his loss of autonomy is described by his fading body, his shrunk silhouette, his myopic posture, his shrill and thin voice, and his eyes that "fled before his interlocutors to whom he addressed many unjustified thank -yous" (71). His only form of rebellion against this oppressive order is violent sex: "imprisoning a woman under him was also the means of taking possession of his country (53). The work accident that befalls him seems almost inevitable – "Il aura fallu l'accident" (55). Disabled, confined to wheelchair, he doesn't exist in the eyes of others (55) and loses all his authority; he "no longer dared to lift his voice at us, or command us. Unproductive, he was soon persuaded that his authority, in the image of the inferior part of a his body no longer had any effect."(56) Immobile, an abject object, he cannot be looked upon: "we dared not look at him too long, a dark tan, copper, impregnated his face, like those of a former sun, become ash… his pupils extinguished like those of the blind." (56)

The mother, on the other hand, is depicted as a pre-originary, eternally virginal figure – "we never knew her exact age or seen her naked… looking at her thing would render one blind" -- representative of traditional culture. For example, she has trouble climbing stairs, since her mothers and grandmother had always lived 'horizontally', but nonetheless attempts "to enter into our century without however renouncing to tattoo herself with henna" (20). And although the mother epitomizes the traditional values of the past, her ultimate downfall is the result of an excessive attachment to the materialism of modernity. She fell in love with Ahmed because of his car, a Renault (62), and threatened to commit suicide with Javex when he refused to take her to France. Ironically, once in France, she learns he is actually not the successful businessman he claimed to be, but works on Renault assembly-line (65); and ironically, it is Javex detergent that permanently scars her henna-tatooed hands. She attempts to live with her disillusionment by filling her house with used suitcases, cartons and plastic bags, and by going on mad shopping trips to Tati instead of pilgrimages to her ancestral tombs (70). It is ultimately the mother's mad squandering that starves her children to death.

It is Amira then, the French-born second-generation immigrant, who distinguishes herself from the rest of this traditional immigrant family with her alien ailment B anorexia. Physically different, with her green eyes and light brown hair (90), Amira represents the difference of being born French "born in this land, in its hospitals, with its fogs, with its tongue" (81). Her birth, we are told, already signals a "refusal to come into the world to heal her mother of the past." (21) She has no knowledge of the culture or religion, is "unable to read the Fatiha in Arabic, nor pray to God that he grant her His mercy. To the astonishment of all, on grandma's tomb, she went at it with 'Our mother who art in heaven': which amazed our cousins who thought they had just heard a French version of the Koran." (41) She revolts even more against her former culture and especially her mother by claiming to love Christ, Son of God. (88) While their yearly return to Algeria is supposed to be a "balm for their wounds" (122), Amira cannot return 'home'. In one of the few first-person

passages of the novel, Amira rhetorically questions how she should heal herself in Algeria, which she describes as a country full of handicapped people, who mistreat the mad and stone women; “I prefer the humiliation of people here [in France]. For at least here I can live in anonymity.”(123)

It is clear, though, that Amira belongs to neither culture, Arab or French. As her sister explains, she refuses to steal with other Arab children to fit in (44), and later remains a virgin so as not to conform to stereotype of the sexual depravity of orientals (44). Though she is so very good in school, she is accused of plagiarism (82), because clearly a little Arab girl could not be smart. To revolt against this educational discrimination, Amira does not work, unlike her mother, a housecleaner, or her sister, a secretary; she quits her job after hitting her employer. She spends most of her days sitting in the empty wheelchair of her father, caressing the wheels, and playing with her father's beret. When her mother is too sick from exhaustion to work, they both sit there, "assassinated hope lodged in their immobile bodies" (147); images of utter dejection and passivity.

However it is Amira’s anorexia that is the greatest “provocation” (86), to show her “difference” (87), her “decaying spirit” (86). Gradually, Amira becomes a condition, not a person – (98) "pas une personne, un ÉTAT "(98). For her mother, her anorexia is an “unknown disease, that only strikes those here because they have no faith, no heart… a disease of the romantics, the atheists, the suicidals. A French disease” (95) The narrator, Amira’s sister, is furious because not only does Amira want to live *like them,* she also arranges to have *the same diseases as they do* (95). Mother refuses to believe her daughter’s illness, and actually rejects her as her daughter because of her condition –“Tu n’est pas vraiment malade, tu est ma fille par erreur.” (131).

Slowly, the narrator comes to understand that her sister’s inarticulate suffering is “a way of finding her place, of fighting, to appear from this country….of treating evil with evil” (133):

> *C'était donc cela. Toute la rancune d'Amira contre un pays dont personne ne voulait attester qu'il était le sien, qui méprisait son père, contre 1'exil qui tatouait de détergents les mains de sa mère, elle les exprimait en refusant de manger.* (133)[xvi]

She comes to realize that by virtue of this revolt, Amira is more Algerian than all of them. While she and her parents merely attempted to find a tranquil place in their new home, Amira wanted to rebel against her adopted country:

> *Finalement, la plus algérienne de nous tous, c'était elle. Quel était ce paradoxe ? Ni nos parents, ni moi-même, nous ne voulions nous rebeller contre ce pays d'adoption. Nous nous efforcions*

> *seulement d'y trouver une place. D'y passer des jours tranquilles. Mais Amira, c'était différent. Parce qu'elle est née ici.(123)*[xvii]

When her death approaches, Amira delivers an agonized death speech. However her last words seem to contradict her mission – anonymity – and suggest that the only way to effectuate change is through active militancy, not passive resistance:

> *Si au moins nous avions des motifs clairs pour militer, ou revendiquer des droits surtout… N'importe lequels. Nous n'avons même pas un frère tombé sous les balles des flics par erreur. Poussé dams la Seine par mépris. Nous aurions bénéficié d'une solidarité, même chez les Français… Personne ne s'inquièete pour ceux qui ne demandent rien… Le vrai mal est là. Et ils nous tuera.*[xviii] (144)

In the end, Amira explains, the real evil lies in indifference to those silently suffering, in society's lack of concern for the oppressed, be they dead or alive. This social apathy is clearly shown in the opening and closing sequences, when authorities unconcernedly wheel Amira's corpse away. Dismissed as having died of overdose, the policemen "with uniforms bulging with their weapon" take her away with "mechanical gestures, with steps clicking with metal"(11). As the narrator comments, "sirens can screech all they want in the streets of Paris, no one turns around. The retired placidly continue watching their dogs piss." (11) As the narrator implies, such indifference is justified by creating facile or even diseased assumptions such as Amira supposedly overdosed on drugs. Even when Amira was alive, her condition did not warrant sympathy; on the contrary it was a threat: the sisters returned from the hospital to find "Warning AIDS!"(171) plastered on their door. Finally, even the family's tragic story provokes no pity; as the author succinctly sums up it is a stereotypical immigrant narrative: "a father disappeared in a banal accident. A mother sick missing her country. A life without joy. The anorexic crises of Amira. Money lacking like with all the poor. Nothing that will allow us to hope." (144) Of course, the reason they have no hope, is because, despite their terrible conditions, no one cares to offer them any.

The book concludes with the narrators promise to die too, with the words[xix]:

> *<< Mais toi et moi nous savons la vérité. Celle que les policiers chercheront en vain. Nous savons que de ce pays nous mourrons. De son indifférence, de sa cruauté, de l'impossibilité d'y pénétrer. De l'Algérie nous mourrons aussi. De son éloignement, de sa cruauté, comme de l'impossible espoir d'y retourner. De cette vie de nos parents édifiée sur une illusion, "un mirage de bonheur qui*

> *s'appelle la France. Petite soeur, c'est de cette France que tu meurs, comme ma mère est morte de son Algérie. Moi, de l'impossibilité ou je fus d'inventer un autre pays. >>* (185)

In this eloquent epitaph, the narrator sums up the impossibility of living in the past or in the present, in France or in Algeria B or even, through her re-membered words, in the country of fiction. In its dismal conclusion, this story offers us a new and unexpected disease. It is not the immigrant's illness, but rather the reverse, as the title suggests – *This Country I'm Dying Of.* We are led to realize that in fact it is the nation that is afflicted by a terminal disease, a pernicious one at that.

**Hunger Strikes Back : Une difficile fin de moi**

*Une difficile fin de moi* (1998) by Ahmed Zitouni contrasts markedly from Zouari's description of anorexia since it is a first-person account of the deliberate death by starvation of an unnamed Algerian immigrant. Instead of objectively attempting to grant signification to a mute and lifeless body, Zitouni's stream-of-consciousness writing incarnates bodily suffering and even enables the text to parallel the bodily experience by bulimically purging stereotypes or ellipses of visceral intensity. Although some of the same themes that characterized Zouari's novel emerge – the loss and recovery of the maternal past and protest against oppression – the novel translates the act of starvation on a much more universally abstract level: a hunger-strike advocating human rights. (Just as Zouari's was inspired by realia, Zeituni's novel was influenced by a conference he attended on the topic of hunger-strikes: "Colloque Grève de la faim dans ou le dérèglement du sacré" held in Aix en Provence in 1983.)

From the outset, much like in Zouari's novel, the narrator's fast is a personal quest – an attempt to heal the wounds of his childhood, characterized as Aa badly scarred incision, unreal and always present" (23). One such memory which fills him with both pride and disgust, is that of his father, the 'terrorist' fighter, who exemplifies the fanaticism in Algeria and the oppressive patriarchal order (72). Much like Amira, the narrator also purges himself of the maternal figure, which reflects a society of consumption and traditional passivity. Whenever he experiences difficulty, his mother instructs him to eat, she herself not having the strength to swallow anything: << *Mange mon fils. Mange, moi je n'ai plus le cœur à avaler grand chose* >> (68). Finally, in his death wish, he also battles the influence of his cynical lover, Matilde, who epitomizes the indifference and incomprehension of the French majority.

In a most revolting passage, the narrator grossly overeats only to then force himself to purge all the negative influences in his life, to "vomit until the last crumb of infancy:"[xx]

> *Moi, je vais bouffer jusqu'à 1'extase. Avaler jusqu'à 1'écoeurement. Me gaver à en exploser. Me bourrer jusqu'à la luette. Écouter la peau distendue de mon ventre pleurer grâce. Puis me traîner jusqu'aux chiottes […]Provoquer le hoquet salvateur. Trois doigts pour farfouiller jusqu'aux contreforts de l'oesophage. Étendre la délivrance tisser ses spasmes, se soulever en gerbe d'amour. Rendre gorge, tripes et boyaux. Souvenirs et angoisses. Vomir. Vomir jusqu à' la dernière miette d'enfance. Cracher jusqu'au premier lait.* (15)

In this rather nauseating description, the author's own style seems to mimic the action of vomiting. Indeed, the narrator expresses a desire to make the vomit move, gain agency and spread everywhere: "God is it beautiful when it streams everywhere, when it flows, spews, explodes and stretches out in dry furrows" (21). Furthermore, he communicates in elaborate euphemisms, a "song like the masturbation of his soul" (22). In this "birth of the tongue"(22), the author seems to advocate an organic, anti-logical self, which is temporal and nonrepresentational, and so "to kill the doctor and think like a human" (28).The novel's hallucinatory and baroque writing counters expected stylistic norms, especially those found in traditional immigrant narratives. Indeed, the narrator seems to display the language of manic activity, as Kristeva defines it: "Aesthetic exultance, rising by means of ideal and artifice above ordinary constructions" (BS 50), or even what she describes as "the 'work of art:' one that succeeds in integrating the artificial language it puts forward (new style, new composition, surprising imagination) […] that ordinary social and linguistic usage always leave somewhat orphaned or plunged into mourning." (BS 51) Unlike Zouari, Zitouni does not dwell melancholically over the missing maternal object but rather incorporates a new order, a new language arising out of mourning.

Zitouni also proposes new ideals in the re-appropriation of other models. In his delirium, the narrator recalls watching Fatiha, a "virgin martyr" (27), starve herself in a courtyard in his hometown, in an act of protest against the treatment of widows in their country. Her act is one of ultimate freedom, as it counters everything that society encourages – avid consumption and exploitation of the oppressed which is embodied in the image of the female figure. The book opens with the evocation of Fatiha's eyes, (interestingly, the word "fatiha" means "to open or reveal" and refers to the first sura of the Qu'ran, the establishment of a new order) << des cernes de chagrin, >> the first image of emaciation, the trademark of all the oppressed: << Un sceau distinctif. Une marque de fabrique >> (13). It ends, when, having expunged any possible body part, the narrator also marches united with Fatiha (123) and all the oppressed, with this same forward-looking gaze.

The narrator's fast is thus transformed into a cathartic, transcendental union with all the hungry, the oppressed. However, before it is achieved, the narrator has to understand Fatiha's trademark gaze (13), and must learn to appropriate the many other stereotypes used to label the exploited and subjugated. First, the hungry are described as "Accidents of history. Accidents of work. Accidents of life." (36) These "accidents" soon become migrants, "All labeled with the inevitable symptoms of exile. The wounds of immigration. Affective and material misery carried as stigmata" (36). They are then categorized as all the bodily disorders, discomforts and pains known to the human body: "My brothers. My obsession. Undulations, peristaltic… burns... ballooning... Spasms... ulcers in cascade... diarrheas… constipations… and other gastrointestinal joys". (37) In a final section, they are relegated to – "Nothing but tools of the trade of flesh and blood… Broken bodies…. Deteriorated bodies…. Destroyed bodies"(41). In a final epiphany, however, the narrator realizes that the ills of the hungry are not symptoms of a sickness that must be healed but rather signs of "open conflict," and "permanent rebellion" (41):[xxi]

> *Garagiste d'entretien de corps machines. Corps en rébellion. Corps en grève. Corps en protestation. Rien que des outils de travail, de chair et de sang. Violentés. Corps abîmés. Corps détériorés. Corps détruits. Mais toujours revendicatifs. En conflit ouvert. En rébellion permanente. Mes frères d'âme alignés. Galériens de la carte de séjour et du contrat de travail. Sans voix. Sans droits. Parfois sans papiers… Je vous croyais malades. Mais vous ne 1'étiez pas. Maintenant que c'est ma chair même que je brûle pour vous rejoindre en dignité, je commence è entrevoir 1'étrangeté de vos pathologies, la réalité de vos troublesYpromis des douleurs, vous n'étiez pas malades, mais en lutte.* (41)

In many ways, this passage succinctly summarizes the agonistic discourse and the politics of victimization that describe the novels presented in this chapter, as it emphatically claims that the body in pain is the most basic form of resistance against the system: "you weren't in pain but in rebellion." Only when the narrator achieves this *prise de conscience* is he able to move beyond his body to a more abstract form of body protest B collective action. He finds himself in a "moving ossuary" with "all the sexes all the religions, all the fanaticisms confused. They are there. Brothers of estrangement and courage"(103). Recognizing embodied pain as the fundamental means of resistance, as agonistic discourse, thus allows him to be joined in an all-embracing community engaged in a struggle of universal human rights.

Finally, in this death-quest, the narrator unites with all the oppressed engaged in hunger-strikes for political aims. The novel abounds in intertextual references. In his delirium, the narrator includes excerpts from books by Ben Okri

(81), Kafka (23), newspaper clippings of immigrants who died of starvation (123-125), statements of hunger-strikers condemned to prison(62), political prisoners such as Gerry Adams (99), members of the Sinn Fein (114-116), and even medical statistics (49). The narrator increasingly finds himself face to face B in his mind's eye – with the hunger-strikers, conducting imaginary dialogues with them (37-38) or empathizing with their plight, such as in the case of political prisoner Mary Leigh (89) who was force fed, an act which he claims to be an act of torture (90). In fact, the book contains an appendix-index listing all sorts of people who conducted passive resistance by starvation to point to social ills. The intertextuality and link to political figures not only makes the message universal but also understandable, as a plea for justice of universal dimensions. The book concludes remarking on the case of the African sans-papiers to whom the novel is dedicated (7), "The Africans of St. Bernard… All with a pedigree of exile. They fasted. For honor. For something that resembled dignity"(121). In this as well, he joins in the plight of the sans-papier Africans in the church of St. Bernard in Paris who are hunger-striking to protest their illegal status.

This novel thus becomes a hungry plea for a proletarian struggle: "La protestation des ventres n'est que le prolongement de la lutte des classes".(The protest of stomachs is nothing more than a continuation of class struggle) (106). This places the plight of immigrants in France on the level of universal human rights and grants it all-encompassing humanist dimensions. Indeed, the plot culminates with the problem of immigration: just before expiring in silence and in starvation, the narrator confesses that the novel is but a "vapid excuse for those whom we crudely refer to as 'the problem of immigration', though owe them so much. Absent from their preoccupations. Of their story being written…"(131). As a personal protest against one's past, a cry of the oppressed, a rebellion against material culture and a fight of solidarity against the discrimination of the social order, Zitouni's novel offers an exhaustive exploration into the complexities of self-starvation, but unfortunately suggests that the only effective story that immigrants can write, is the story of their death, by suicide.

Zouari and Zitouni's novels leave me perturbed: both present us with hunger as a political-tool, whose only resolution is the annihilation of the subject in a final act of resistance. It is a deeply solitary act, which cannot impact society in any way. Furthermore, *Ce pays dont je meurs* uses anorexia and self-inflicted starvation, to offer a new and exceptional tragedy in the face of those all too often described in immigrant texts. The handicap of the father or the death of the mother by exhaustion is apparently not interesting enough; to offer a different twist, the author finds it necessary to sensationalize a tragic death by malnutrition in order to create a story of utter suffering and sacrifice. Zitouni, on the other hand, finds it necessary to strip away any cultural or political elements that define individuals and to force them to a shared humanity and plead a case for human rights. All traumas, afflictions and

oppressions are condensed into the image of suffering body, the only vehicle oppressed individuals have to resist the social order. In this humanist ideal though, "every difference counts as no difference" as Wendy Brown might argue[xxii]; every variety of subjugation B be it labor exploitation, political oppression, racial discrimination – is neutralized to appeal to Athe universal ideal of juridical liberalism."(66)

Indeed, these novels illustrate some of the perils of pain-filled discourse or "wounded attachments," as formulated by Wendy Brown with respect to the US identity politics of recognition. In these works, the experience of pain, hurt and oppression becomes the basis of epistemological knowledge and moral authority, with the result that every author must assume an abject victim position in order to confirm and legitimate an identity. In Zouari's case, the shock of the sensational sacrificial hunger of anorexia eclipses more latent forms of social suffering. As feminist critics have argued, such is often the case in the politics of pain; this "currency of distress has led to displacement whereby awareness of everyday structural adversity on a daily basis is eclipsed by the accounts of exceptional, personal, traumatic pain" (Skeggs 29). Zitouni's text creates the opposite problem, that of relativizing the pain this victim politics engenders in reducing it to a common denominator, where all personal stories, be they work accidents or imprisonment and torture, are equated into one cohesive, reified narrative of victimization. Ultimately however, both stories' struggle against oppression is lost -- since liberation comes at the price of self-annihilation.

Self-induced victimization is perhaps the most disquieting element in these suffering stories. The protagonists' subjectivity is seemingly not defined by their ability to act or work or think; rather their subjectivity becomes defined with the fact they endure violence, as passive victims. This inaccessible locus of personal pain grants them power and authority to speak as subjects. Since this violence is not perpetrated on them directly by others, as physical injury, but rather structurally by their environment, as poverty or discrimination, they feel it necessary to harm themselves in order to become visible and legitimately in pain. A troubling dis-ease indeed.

**Faking Pain, Claiming a Name**

By now it becomes clear how Beur authors embody illness somatically and textually to translate some of the social dis-ease that describes their marginalized position. What is perhaps more important is that such a dis-eased discourse effectively allows these writers to resist their alienation – by contaminating their hosts with a similarly infectious textual dis-ease (Kacem), by startling them from indifference with a heroic act of self-sacrifice (Zouari), or by translating immigrant pain as a claim for universal human rights (Zitouni).

However, these works also point to the many problems in these explicit rhetorics of pain: 1) Is agency possible in the abject victim? 2) Is the dichotomy of the dis-eased self/other only replicated in exploiting abjection? 3) Must "ordinary" suffering be replaced with sensational pain in order to be shocking? 4) Can wounds really be universal and relative? Reaching even further, I would like to interrogate the role of pain in Maghrebi minority discourse and its value in terms of truth and authenticity by proposing a final analysis: pain as staged performance.

What happens when the author in fact assumes marginalized pain not to be marginalized at all? What if performing pain means faking a claim to fame? What becomes of the abject – "the immoral, sinister, shady," "that does not respect borders positions rules" (Kristeva 6)? What if there is an "alien invader," a "traitor" who is merely mimicking pain and perverting it?

The case I am referring to, (as those versed in Francophone studies have surely guessed) is the case of Paul Smail, who, in *Vivre me Tue,* so smoothly replicated the conventional narrative of the healthy and hip immigrant. Paul Smail is not the Beur immigrant he pretended to be. According to official bibliography, he is the 30-year-old son of Moroccan immigrants, with a degree in comparative literature, writing under a pseudonym because of serious political problems and often confused by critics as the narrator of *Vivre me Tue.*[xxiii] Upon the publication of his latest novel, *Ali le Magnifique* however, it was revealed that Paul Smail was a fraud: none other than Jacques-Alain Léger; a prolific, white, middle-aged novelist[xxiv] and former pop-star, underground figure of the 1970s.

How to analyze Paul Smail's work in light of this disclosure? Unfortunately, Smail's fictionalized portrait of Beur culture has been taken to represent authentic Beur culture; some of his 'verlan' was even officially institutionalized by dictionaries.[xxv] As for *Vivre Me Tue* it was hailed by critics as a work of literary style and of personal and political engagement: "Is he afraid of a French *fatwa*? Certainly, this novel is a knife in the gut of contemporary French civilization… What is particularly strong is the way personal and political themes intertwine." [xxvi] The English translation of Smail's/Léger's *Vivre Me Tue* as *Smile* was shortlisted for Britain's Independent Foreign Fiction Prize but failed to make the final cut when Smail's fraud was revealed. As the jury explained:

> *Smile by Paul Smail (Serpent's Tail), a bitterly funny monologue… is a striking, angry book with one slight problem: "Paul Smail" does not actually exist in the form that we (and most readers) assumed. This salty slice of street life comes from the keyboard of an anonymous, white, middle-aged intellectual - the latest addition to a dodgy mini-tradition of impersonation in modern French fiction. Should we simply have ignored this fact? On balance, we didn't think we could."*[xxvii]

Similarly, reviews for Smail's latest work *Ali Le Magnifique* (*Ali le Magnifique* recounts the sordid life and gruesome murders committed by a captivating young Beur, Sid Ali Benengel -- a thinly disguised version of the true life-story Sid Ahmed Rezala, who murdered three women on trains in 1999 before committing suicide in a Lisbon prison cell while awaiting extradition to France) were highly polemical. Some commentators condemned the novel's plot, its style and even its use of violent crime stories with such headlines as 'Une déception quasi générale' *(L'Evenement*) ou ' C'est grave nul ! ' (*Le Journal du dimanche* '), while others raved, extolling its heteroglossia: "its pot-pourri of verlant, Arab, English, ads, song lyrics," as well as its forceful voice for the Beurs: "a redoubtable sociological complaint of a Beur speaking for all of his people."[xxviii] Others yet granted it vast universal humanist dimensions claiming that "it launches a enormous cry of pain and a gesture of empathy towards the humiliated" and that above all it serves as "a manifesto against the spectacle consumer society, and above all against the literature of liberal American imperialists"[xxix].

Moreover, when the scandal erupted, Léger himself was often placed in the marginalized position of the eponymous Smail by certain critics. Characterized as "embittered and alienated", he was portrayed as representing the alienated and abused rebel: << Ce dernier est depuis des années l'objet d'un rejet du milieu, qui tourne à l'hallali. Il est ignoré, mitraillé. On le menace, chez lui, de lui faire la peau s'il continue à écrire. >>[xxx] In an interview before the disclosure though, Léger completely refuted any such authorial suffering, scoffing at the presumed pain of the writer: << Lorsqu'on me parle de la douleur d'écrire, je suis pris de fou rireYJe ne souffre pas d'écrire. Écrire, c'est le plaisir. >>[xxxi]

Cleary, the controversy surrounding Smail/Léger's work results from the fact that it seemed personalized and was taken as authentic experience. When defending his secret identity as Smail, Léger clearly pointed to the bias to misread fiction as autobiography, or of ethnicity as authenticity:

> *<< Je ne comprends pas l'obstination de la critique a toujours examiner la littérature, qui est un art, sous un angle extra-littéraire… Je revendique le droit a l'incognito, qui est la seule liberté en ces temps de panoptique totalitaire, médiatique et sociale - visibilité, tracabilité, transparence...>>* [xxxii]

What perturbs me more though, is that in all of these critiques the Beur ethnic minority is associated with suffering. I am not arguing here that Smail/Léger texts gained popularity because they were particularly infected with metaphors of disease. However, it is fair to say that *Vivre me tue* operates as a normative immigrant narrative, employing the conventional healthy/diseased and

surviving/suffering dichotomy: the 'healthy' Beur gains admission into majority discourse by education and literacy and thus survives; the abjected minority figure, the homosexual male, does not want to assimilate by following the proscribed path of progress, and so is portrayed as diseased, suffers and dies. Similar is the case of Léger the writer – he chooses not to conform to the proscribed roles of French identity politics, and thus causes much dis-ease in literary critique. Instead of viewing him as a clever trickster adeptly performing a role, there is also a clear tendency to place him, as the Beur writer, in the position of the victim, the "suffering writer" or "the rebel" when in fact he denies any such assumptions.

In conclusion, Léger's impersonation leads me to reevaluate many of the questions raised by this chapter. I have observed immigrant writers take up metaphors of disease and pathological positions to describe their social dis-ease, in an attempt to resist the social order and create their identity. Yet I have also noticed that this pain-full position, in a groove of self-repetition and habituated resentment, grants writers *more* power and authority to speak. Suddenly it becomes very difficult to distinguish 'real' from fictionalized immigrant pain – which is the 'authentic' authority and which is a performing fake? Must Beur writers continue to claim pains, injuries, and suffering, always more explicit, always 'different,' to maintain their authority and position? What is to become of a literature that increasingly defines itself by its position of victimization – the politics of pain?

## Endnotes

[i] The publishing house Au Diable Vauvert let on that Youcef's book Je rêve d'une autre vie was autobiography of a sans-papiers, an illegal, who could not write except under pseudonym. In fact, the novel was authored by relatively unknown Claude Andrieux, who already penned two other works. Though a French-born Moroccan, Andrieux does not speak verlan and has never lived in a Cité, but rather teaches French and Arabic in Strasbourg. However, even this claim is suspect according to Libération , who profoundly apologized to its readership for recommending the book (Libération April 1, 2002, p. 28).

[ii] Positive reviews of the book attempted to brush the question of identity aside and praised the author's Avibrant poly-vocal style which shuffles rap songs, learned French, verlan and slang, snatches of Arabic or English; in all a music that takes up all in its path and will not disappear." (*Le Monde*, April 12, 2002, Le Monde des Livres ).

[iii] In the U.S., diseased metaphors were applied to immigrants, for example, by the proponents of Proposition 187 in California, a successful 1994 ballot initiative to cut of social services to illegal aliens. In the *L.A. Times* we read: AIf illegal immigration was a disease, Prop . 187 was the wrong medicine." (Los Angeles Times, 26 October 1994; A-3); AWe see it as our responsibility to weed out illegal aliens." (*Los Angeles Times,* 16 May 1992): A-30;AThe report- which recommended a three- year moratorium on immigration nationwide and linked illegal immigration to a host of society's ills - has been branded by Latino and Asian leaders as insensitive and one sided" (*Los Angeles Times,* 29 June 1993 : B-1).

[iv] "Alien Expressions: Wretched refuse is just the start", by Timothy Christenfeld, *New York Times* Mar 10 1996, Section 4, p.4, col 1.

[v] Hakimi, << Les terroirs de l'extrême droite >> *Le monde diplomatique,* May 1998, p.15.

[vi] In California's Proposition 187, animal metaphors were very common in the debate, emphasizing that actions that are natural and human prove animal when connected with immigrants: "The woman said she was upset about something else: why the offspring of women who Acome across the border and drop their babies" are granted American citizenship." (*LA Times,* 10 June 1993; J-1.) During the controversy, a racial incident caused headlines: a LA soccer fan at a Rose Bowl game was beaten by police, who dragged him down the stairs, uttering racial slurs, kicked him and knocked him out. The man, Aguilar, later summarized his feelings to the press in this way: "Like an animal was I treated. It was racist." (*LA Times,* 3 May 1993; B-5.)

[vii] *France's political paralysis*; Paul Klebnikov; Forbes, New York; May 5, 1997; Vol. 159, Iss. 9; pg. 138.

[viii] Exodus, 9:9

[ix] Thucydides, *Histories,* 2.47.3 et sequitur.

[x]<< Status of Work >>*Proceedings of the American Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble Minded Persons, June 1988*, Philidephia: Lippincott, 1889, p. 77.

[xi] Alan M. Kraut, "Plagues and Prejudice: Nativism's Construction of Disease in 19th and 20th Century New York City." in *Hives Of Sickness: Public Health and Epidemics in New York City,* Ed. David Rosner, New Jersey : Rutgers, 1995, p.65.

[xii] Howard Markel *Quarantine: East European Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892,*Baltimore *:* John Hopkins University Press, 1997

[xiii] For example, 29-year old social worker Marcelle Fortune from Haiti was denied a place to live in Miami, because a landlord refused to rent her out an apartment. She did not even have AIDS. (*Miami Herald,* April 11, 1985.)

[xiv] June 8 1993 ruling in *Haitian Centers Council vs. McNary, (*cited in Kraus p. 277. Footnote 2)

**[xv]** This " tu" harkens back to Zouari's previous text, *Pour En Finir avec Sheherezade* a treatise on Maghrebi woman's literature, where she writes that one of the tasks of Arab woman writers is to Acleanse the relation to the Other, by creating a certain tolerance … it is an I in dialogue with a you": << La littérature maghrébine féminine d'expression française fait découvrir en l'occurrence une écriture qui n'est pas du ressort du Je seulement ou du Il singulier ou communautaire, mais du Je en face du Tu : une écriture du vécu et du présent qui, sans complaisance, avec une rare sincérité,

interpelle l'époque moderne et s'y inscrit d'emblée >> (*Pour En Finir avec Sheherezade* 8).

[xvi] "It was finally that. All the resentment that Amira bore against this country no one wanted to certify as belonging to her, a country that despised her father, against this exile that tattooed her mothers hands with detergent, she expressed by refusing to eat." (133)

[xvii] "Finally, the most Algerian of all of us was she. What is this paradox? Neither our parents, nor I, wanted to rebel against this country of adoption. Of who we only strived to find a place for there. To spend quiet days there. But for Amira, it was different. Because she was born here."(123)

[xviii] "if only we would have clear motives for militancy, above all some action to claim certain rights… it doesn't matter which ones. We don't even have brother fallen because of the cops' bullets, accidentally. Pushed into the Seine because of hatred. We would've have benefited other certain solidarity even from the French… No one worries for goals will ask for nothing... The real evil is there. And it will kill us." (144)

[xix] "But you and I know the truth. The truth that the police will search in vain. We know that it's because of this country that we die. Because of its indifference, its cruelty, because of the impossibility of penetrating it. We also die because of Algeria. Because of its distance, its cruelty, and because of the impossible hope of returning there. Because of this life built up by our parents on the illusion, "of this mirage of happiness called France." Little sister, it's because of this France that you die, just like mother died of her Algeria. I, because of the impossibility of inventing another country" (185)

[xx] "I will gorge until ecstasy. Swallow until sickening. Stuff myself until explosion…Listen to my skin of my stomach stretching pleading mercy. Then I will drag myself to the can… Invoke the hiccup of salvation. Three fingers to fumble deep within the confines of the esophagus. Prolong deliverance, weave spasms, and arise as a sheaf of love. Give up throat, tripes and entrails. Memories and fears. Vomit. Vomit until the last crumb of infancy. " (15).

[xxi] "Mechanic in charge of body machines. Bodies in rebellion. Bodies in strike. Bodies and protests. Nothing but tools of the trade of flesh and blood. Violated. Broken bodies. Deteriorated bodies. Destroyed bodies. But always demanding. In open conflict. In permanent rebellion. My soul brothers aligned. Galley slaves of the residency card and the work contract. Without voice. Without rights. Sometimes without papers[…] I thought you are sick. But you weren't. Now it's my flesh itself that I burned to rejoin human dignity and I start to see to strangeness of your pathology, the reality of your troubles…promised pain, you weren't sick but in rebellion. "

[xxii] As Wendy Brown might describe it, this is Aa perfect instance of where the language of recognition becomes the language of unfreedom… subordination through individualization, normalization and regulation… in which "differences" that are the effects of social power are neutralized." (66)

[xxiii] As here in *The Herald* (Glasgow) May 10, 2000, Culture Pg.1: "Smail is a North African Muslim living in Paris. He has a degree in Comparative Literature. He works as a security guard in a seedy hotel. He has been boxing since an incident at school when new training shoes were stolen from him in the playground."; see also Le Monde,
January 12, 2001, (Le Monde des livres) AQui est Paul Smail? C'est une question non résolue depuis la parution de son premier roman, en 1997,
*Vivre me tue*, dans lequel l'auteur se présentait comme un jeune beur, petit-fils d'un bicot mort pour la France a Ulm, fils d'un harki employé à la SNCF, neveu d'un Arabe retrouve suicide dans la Seine en octobre 1961 a la suite d'une ratonnade."

[xxiv] Before the scandal, Léger, who wrote under various pseudonyms, was perhaps best known for Monsignore, made into a Hollywood film starring Christopher Reeve in 1982.

[xxv] << Duel d'écrivains polymorphes >> *Le Monde,* April 12, 2002, (Le Monde des Livres).

[xxvi] *Independent* (London) January 29, 2000; Pg. 11. See also Figaro, October 3, 1997: "Exit Chimo. Un autre jeune beur fait son entrée sur la scène littéraire. Il s'appelle
Paul Smail. C'est un pseudonyme. L'auteur refuse de dévoiler son identité pour ne pas ' jouer le beur de service ' et pour protéger ses proches."

[xxvii] *Independent* (London) March 3, 2001, p.11.

[xxviii] See for example << Vous avez dit Zarbi? >> Libération January 11, 2001, p.4: "Tout Smail est là: dans ce mélange de Stendhal et de techno, de superstition littéraire et de mouvement populaire, de

rase-bitume et de plume d'oie. Le vocabulaire de sin Sid Ali est un pot-pourri de verlan, d'arabe, de langue verte, d'anglais, de slogans publicitaires, d'éclats de chanson, de bouts de chandelle griffes Helli Hansen et de fins de mois tricotées dans la haine. Il a ses mots-clés, qui battent la cadence comme des jingle publicitaires: 'Tu l'as dit tu l'as/', 'Que tchi/', 'Nahan/', 'L'euh autre/', 'Putain/', 'Ah ouais', 'Maximum respect', 'Xlas/', 'Parce que je le vaux bien'. Mais il a aussi ses gimmicks Rimbaud. Il devient alors la prophétique marionnette de Smail, qui n'évite ni les ruptures de ton, ni l'effet de ventriloquie. On dirait même qu'il les cherche pour échapper à tout classement, et avant tout a la redoutable plainte sociologique du beur parlant au nom de tous les siens…"

[xxix]See Douin's defense of Smail in *Le Monde* March 2, 2001, (Le Monde des Livres): "[Ali Le Magnifique] outre un immense cri de douleur et un geste d'empathie envers les humiliés, un pamphlet a ricochets (engendre dans un dédale de miroirs déformants) contre les SS de la société du spectacle, une imprécation contre ce qu'est devenue la télévision, un coup de colère contre les critiques hargneux et les disciples d'une littérature a la remorque des hussards libéraux américains, ces otages de la consommation."

[xxx] << La cabale contre Paul Smail" *Le Monde,* March 2, 2001

[xxxi] << Profil : Comme une plume; Jack-Alain Léger, 53 ans >> *Libération*, September 23, 2000.

[xxxii] << L'énigmatique Paul Smail répond au ' Figaro ' >> *Figaro* January 5, 2001.

**Works cited**


Brown, Wendy. "Wounded Attachments." *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. 53-76.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Caron, David. *AIDS in French Culture: Social Ills, Literary Cures.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.

Chambers, Ross. *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Chow, Rey. *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Kacem, Mehdi Belhaj. *Cancer.* Mayenne, France: Tristram, 1994.

Kraut, Alan M. *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Orbach, Susie. *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age*. New York: Norton, 1986.

Skeggs, Beverley. "The Rhetorical Affects of Feminism: Introduction." *Transformations: Thinking through Feminism.* Ed. Sara Ahmed. London, New York: Routledge 2000. 25-33.

Smaïl, Paul. *Vivre me tue.* Paris: Editions Balland, 1997.

Vasse, Denis. *Le Poids du réel, la souffrance.* Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983.

Youcef, M.D. *Je rêve d'une autre vie: (Moi, le clandestin de l'écriture).* Vauvert France: Au Diable Vauvert, 2002.

Zitouni, Ahmed. *Une Difficile fin de moi*. Paris: Cherche Midi, 1998.

Zouari, Fawzia. *Ce Pays dont je meurs.* Paris: Ramsay, 1999.