Interrogating the Metaphor of Madness and the Migratory Process in Said El Kadaoui's *Límites y Fronteras*

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Abstract

As postcolonial scholars signal, the similarities between the constructions of the racial Other and the mad are very similar and rely on a binary of the rational and irrational. Examining how the construction of madness serves as a metaphor for the migratory process and its ensuing trauma in Said El Kadaoui's *Límites y fronteras*, this paper's intent is to question how this affects the subjectivity of its protagonist. I find that the metaphor of madness serves to express the limiting aspects of identity and through the character development of its protagonist, the narration allows a more heterogeneous understanding of identity to emerge.

Keywords

madness, diaspora, identity, heterogeneity, intertextuality, Catalonia

Résumé

Comme le signalent les savantes et les savants postcoloniaux, les similitudes entre les constructions de l'Autre racial et du fou sont très similaires et se fient au binaire du rationnel et de l'irrationnel. En examinant comment la construction de la folie peut servir de métaphore pour le processus migratoire et le traumatisme qui en découle dans *Límites y fronteras* de Saïd El Kadaoui, cet article a pour bût d'interroger comment cela affecte la subjectivité de son protagoniste. Je souligne que la métaphore de la folie sert à exprimer les aspects limitatifs de l'identité et, grâce au développement du caractère de son protagoniste, la narration permet l'émergence d'une compréhension plus hétérogène de l'identité.

Mots-clés

folie, diaspora, identité, hétérogénéité, intertextualité, Catalogne

The idea of madness is a constant in literature, as Michel Foucault would point out, inaccurately representing the opposite of the perceived rationality of the sane. However, from a postcolonial position, insanity often intersects with colonialism to reveal the darker consequences of coloniality. Saïd El Kadaoui Moussaoui's novel *Límites y fronteras* (2009) situates madness in the context of the diaspora, specifically the Moroccan diaspora in Spain. How does the metaphor of madness help the reader understand the experience of migration and diaspora in this context? Through an analysis of how madness and Otherness are approached, we can draw similarities between the two, leading to the conclusion that the author appropriates the metaphor to give meaning to the experience of the marginalised migrant. The protagonist's institutionalization and recovery gradually reject the binary borders of insanity and Otherness, offering the protagonist a more heterogeneous and liminal sense of identity. In exploring the narrator's process of self-actualization, I will examine the character development through his confessions to a psychiatrist, his reading of intertexts, and his writing process. My reading of these features will reveal the author's proposal for a more flexible understanding of identity.

Límites y fronteras narrates the symbolic rebirth of its protagonist Ismaïl after his psychotic break. The plot follows Ismaïl's rupture from reality, institutionalisation, recovery, and eventual release. During the process of his treatment, the narrator confronts earlier memories, many of which relate to his experience of migration in childhood, cultural differences, and feelings of belonging. The narration is punctuated with intertextual references, failed romantic relationships, and the chaos of everyday life in the psychiatric clinic. Narrated from the first-person perspective of its protagonist, the text gives voice to two groups normally marginalized within literature: the mentally ill and the racial Other. Set in a psychiatric clinic in Barcelona, Spain, in the early years of the new millennium, the novel situates itself in the very real

experiences of discrimination and dislocation of non-European Union immigrants within Spain. Similar to the *Bildungsroman* in content, the novel ruptures the notion that the complex processes of identity creation end in adolescence (as more traditional definitions of the genre posit) but instead continues well into adulthood. Ultimately the story traces Ismaïl's process of reconciliation and self-realization, charting a new path in his life, one less constricted by constructed classifications of identity.

The trauma of the protagonist's childhood experience of migration is rooted in the very real experiences of many Maghrebi immigrants in Catalonia. In the 1980's Spain, and particularly Catalonia, saw a wave of migration from the North of Morocco. At the outset, these were primarily male economic migrants searching for employment as labourers. Subsequent family reunification would lead to the establishment of a large Amazigh Muslim community in Catalonia.[1] Both the author and the protagonist of the novel were a part of the wave of family reunification, leaving Africa as children. Due to a difficult historical relationship between Spain and Morocco, these migrants were subject to significant discrimination and alienation.[2] In the early 2000s, the Spanish literary scene saw the emergence of a generation of Catalan-Amazigh writers that included Saïd El Kadaoui, termed the Generation of '92. This generation of authors, all of whom had migrated from Morocco as children, was characterized by their autofictional tendencies and their centering of the migratory experience in their narratives.

This article is based on a combination of textual and narrative analysis of the novel *Límites y fronteras* [*Limits and Borders*] by Saïd El Kadaoui Moussaoui and uses further theoretical texts to support its argument. In order to conceptualize of the construction of mental

[1] *Amazigh* refers to the indigenous ethnic group from Morocco. They speak Tamazight and the plural is Imazighen. They are sometimes referred to as "Berbers" although many have noted that this is a somewhat derogatory term, given that it originates from "barbarian".
[2] See Daniela Fleslers' *Return of the Moor* for an in-depth understanding of the two countries' shared history.

health in the narrative, I will engage with the works of Michel Foucault, as well as with Frantz Fanon to understand how the associated inferiority complex is internalized. To relate the metaphor of madness to heterogeneous identity formation, I rely on Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La frontera* (1987) and Amin Maalouf's *Identidades Asesinas* [*Deadly Identities*] (1999). I also depend on the scholarly writings of other academics on the author and this work.

The narration draws parallels between the Foucauldian construction of madness and the construction of the racialized Other. Foucault claims that the binary of sanity and insanity has pathologized the insane as dangerous beings who must be confined for public safety reasons as well as for their own well-being. Shoshana Felman affirms that in literature the "mad" are presented as the antithesis of the rational sane, thus silencing their voice and objectifying them (2). Felman continues that the act of reclaiming the madman in literature underscores the relationship between literature, discourse, and power (2). The term pathology is important here because it indicates some type of primordial quality of insanity, something that is inherent to the biology of the insane. As many postcolonial scholars have pointed out, it is difficult to think of this construction without thinking of Eurocentric stereotypes of the colonized.[3] Understanding the metaphor of madness as a metaphor for the experience of the racial Other, we can conceive this position of marginality as being deviant or subversive in the eyes of the public, something that the protagonist has clearly internalized. As Fanon demonstrates in his psychoanalysis of Black patients, the colonial epistemology often leads to inferiority complexes in racialized patients (11). Anzaldúa and Maalouf counter this binary construction in their accounts of the multiplicities and complexities of identities. Anzaldúa's concept of the new *mestiza* (mixed heritage woman) allows us to conceptualize the instability of heterogeneous identity while Maalouf's concept of deadly identities demonstrates the dangers of enforcing binary thinking in

[3] See La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Paul Huebner, Seri Luangphinith.

relation to subjectivities. This shift from a binary perspective of identity to a more fluid conception, like Anzaldúa's and Maalouf's, functions to decolonize the constructed hierarchies attached to this binarism.

To date, the majority of scholarship on Saïd El Kadaoui has focused on his position as a heterogeneous diasporic writer. Pilar Arnau i Segarra contests that El Kadaoui is one of the integral members of the growing generation of Catalan-Amazigh authors, who are defined by their hybridity (257). The author Cristian H. Ricci dedicated a chapter of his book *Hay moros en la costa* [*There Are Moors on the Coast*] to discussing this generation of writers. In his brief analysis of El Kadaoui's novel, he states that through rejecting monolithic notions of identity, the author is able to articulate a border thinking that transcends homogenizing notions of identity (245). However, Carmen Sanjuán-Pastor claims that despite the author's attempts to renounce cultural hegemony and homogenization, *Límites y fronteras* tends to reproduce an Occidental model rather than a decolonial statement (53). Similar to Ricci, Miquel Pomar-Amer explains that the author's autofictional work *Cartes a meu fill: Un català de soca-rel, gairebé* [*Letters to my Son: A Born and Bred Catalan, Almost*] (2011), in comparison with Najat El Hachmi's *Jo també soc catalana* [*I, Too, Am Catalan*] (2004), emphasizes the physical and cultural borders encountered in the migration process. This serves as political message to the diaspora within Catalonia as well as the broader Catalan society of the discrimination faced by migrants and their children. As Pomar-Amer concludes, the message of *Cartes a meu fill* is one of interpersonal relationships as a template for bridging intercultural gaps (51). It is my intent to contribute to this dialogue through an examination of the role mental health plays in this narrative. In contributing to these conversations, I hope to increase an understanding of how discourses of madness are present in decolonial or diasporic works, especially within a Spanish/Catalan context.

Following the chronological order of the narration, the reader witnesses Ismaïl's changing perspective concerning his self-identification and self-esteem. In the protagonist's first therapy session with Don Jorge, he is asked to recount his psychotic episode and proclamation that he is "el príncipe de los bereberes" ("The prince of the Berbers"; El Kadaoui 27). Ismaïl feels a surge of intense shame at the memory, a feeling that is mirrored later in the chapter. Recovering from the humiliation of remembering his rupture from reality, he recounts how he adamantly defends the Moroccan football team in Spain, but when he crosses the Strait of Gibraltar, defends the Spanish national team. This is attributed to the fact that he is always "… construyendo grandes argumentos en [su] mente para defender que los marroquíes no [son] ciudadanos de segunda" ("constructing grand arguments in his head to defend that Moroccans are not second-class citizens"; 29) and equally defending Spain against his cousin's rebuttals that it is poor compared the rest of Europe. This sense of uprootedness is linked to his sense of inferiority claiming that "mis propios monstruos lo que me hacen sentirme inferior. E inferior en todas partes. Los que somos de familias venidas de otros lugares no tenemos país, no tenemos patria" ("my own monsters are what make me feel inferior. And inferior in all ways. Those of us who are from families from other places don't have a country, we don't have a homeland"; 30). This example associates the condition of Otherness with the humiliation of being perceived as mad. This demonstrates the narrator's initial binary perspective towards his own identity, characterized by a persistent feeling of inferiority.

The protagonist's feelings of isolation manifest in his obsessive infatuation with his nurse Candela, whom he views as eternally unattainable. Infused with jealousy and longing, he desires to be one of the other caregivers rather than a patient to be included in what he views as the more respected social strata. Describing his frustration with his current status, Ismaïl refers to his

companions as “vulgares, repugnantes y sucios” (“vulgar, repugnant and dirty”; 59) and wishes to “romper esa barrera que marcaba la diferencia entre cuidador y enfermo” (“break the barrier that marks the difference between caregiver and sick”; 59). Through an interview with Don Jorge, it is revealed that he feels jealousy towards the doctor as well as the other caregivers for the respect they are shown, which is juxtaposed with his own depreciative perspective of the other patients. Revealing that he desires to feel “… la sensación de haber cruzado esta frontera” (“the sensation of having crossed that border”; 64), he equates the metaphorical border between the patient and the medical staff with that of the distance between Spain and Morocco (64-65). The narration makes this metaphor clear when Don Jorge responds “usted ya sabe que no se vive mejor siendo europeo y olvidándose por completo de Marruecos” (“you know now that life is not better feeling European and forgetting Morocco altogether”; 65). The chapter finishes with the protagonist wondering if his grandfather would be disappointed in him for having ignored his Moroccan side. This conclusion outlines the clear similarities between the feelings of being a second-class citizen because of his national origin as well as his mentally ill status. The final moments demonstrate the beginning of Ismaïl’s desire to reconcile with his ethnic origin, despite his depreciative view of this part of his identity.

In his continuing obsession with Candela, Ismaïl reveals that this process feels repetitive, and reminiscent of earlier romantic relationships. He recounts his experience with his first adolescent love interest, Mónica, who ended the relationship after a month, because, as his best friend explained “Pero para el resto tú eres un moro, ¿y cómo va a salir un moro con Mónica?” (“But for the rest of them you are a Moor, and how could a Moor go out with Monica?”; 77). This rejection creates somewhat of an existential crisis in the adolescent protagonist who directs his frustration and hatred at his host country as well as his own ethnicity. He claims “… odiaba

aquel país que se suponía que era el mío, odiaba España que me pedía integración, pero hasta un límite. Un límite que yo me había atrevido a franquear enamorándome de una catalana" ("I hated that country that was supposed to be mine, I hated Spain, which was asking me to integrate, but to a limit. A limit that I had dared to cross by falling in love with a Catalan woman"; 76). This quote reveals the expectations projected onto the racial Other in terms of integration into the host society; despite the pressure to assimilate, there are certain privileges unattainable to those who do not fit neatly into the category of the host country's idealized citizen. As Maalouf argues, migrants are constantly subjected to primordial visions of identity, often being forced to choose between the home and host country, which he claims are the ideal conditions for the creation of legions of disenfranchised citizens and "locos sanguinarios" ("bloodthirsty lunatics"; 22). Within the microcosm of the therapeutic clinic, this is replicated in his infatuation with Candela who represents not only the sane but also the unattainable Spanish woman. As the narrator describes, this adolescent rejection by Mónica initiated a series of romantic conquests that he describes as a "venganza" ("vengance"; El Kadaoui 78). Despite this problematic view of women, the narrator admits this only serves to feed his internal conflict, rather than alleviate it, demonstrating a self-awareness that continues to develop as he confronts further memories of his childhood as well as of romantic relationships.

Confronting several negative childhood memories, Ismaïl is able to reconcile these with his feelings of alienation in both countries. He begins his session demonstrating the more liminal identity he has come to accept, jokingly referring to himself as "un amazig que se siente europeo, que quiere tanto como odia a Marruecos" ("an Amazigh that feels European but who loves Morocco as much as he hates it"; 159). In recounting two stories of different relatives' weddings that demonstrate his maternal grandmother's internalized misogyny, the protagonist makes it

clear that there are certain traditions and norms of his natal country he opposes. The grandmother finishes one of her stories by claiming that he has been Europeanised and lacks traditional notions of respect. This is juxtaposed with the following scene in which Ismaïl recounts a shame-filled experience in primary school where his morally questionable teacher referred to Islam as a religion that was impregnated with "machismo, poligamia y otras barbaries" ("machismo, polygamy and other barbarities"), holding the young protagonist responsible for explaining and justifying his religion to his peers (165). This demonstrates the double isolation Ismaïl feels from both societies. Rejecting the cosmopolitan label of "citizen of the world" (162), he instead claims that he is a citizen of neither country. The narrator, however, accepts this more calmly than previously, stating that "No se puede ser de dos lugares" ("You can't be from two places"; 162). Don Jorge responds to this with "No se puede estar en dos lugares" ("You can't be in two places"), implying that Ismaïl wishes to exist both in Morocco and Spain, while also recognizing that he is reluctant to leave the safety of the clinic (162). In this allusion, the familiar space of the psychiatric clinic is equated with Morocco; it is portrayed in a warm, nostalgic way, subverting the negative and uninviting imagery associated with both the colonized world and madness. Ismaïl concludes by accepting this duality, while agreeing that he desires to know more about the Morocco he has shunned in his formative years, displaying an open-mindedness to both facets of his identity.

In the narrator's last therapy sessions with Don Jorge, he expresses a transformative perspective, breaking from his previous patterns of thought that were characterized by their repetitiveness and motivated by jealousy and shame. He recounts how his childhood experiences lead him to look down condescendingly on those who studied hard as well as those who did not do well academically, while he achieved success with very little effort. As he explains, this was

motivated by a feeling of triumph (181). Upon learning that a former classmate who did poorly in secondary school is now working a decent job and going to be married, the protagonist reflects that he now only feels happiness for his former friend, rather than jealousy (182). This revelation represents a rupture in Ismaïl's character arc, whereby he recognizes that his internalized shame has dictated his actions, trapping him in a cycle of failed relationships and unhappy work experiences. This is best articulated in his words: "… ya había aprendido a valerme por mí mismo" ("I have learned how to stand on my own two feet"; 183). This line expresses how the protagonist's sense of self has shifted from being defined by external validation and his need to surpass the arbitrary borders imposed on his subjectivity, to one that centres on his interests and desires for the future. The section finishes with Don Jorge reminding the character that "La cordura no permite coger atajos" ("Sanity does not allow shortcuts"; 183), making clear that the work of rejecting the binaries of identity that are externally imposed is a long process of reflection and reconciliation.

The final moments of the novel, including his final interview with Don Jorge, present a version of the main character that is optimistic about the future and distinct from the Ismaïl who was institutionalized. Instead of hyper-focusing on shameful memories of the past, the protagonist is able to reflect and distance himself from them, looking towards a future in which he views his past memories not as a source of shame, but as a constructive part of his subjectivity. This transformation is especially visible through his dialogue with Don Jorge. The setting of the private office along with the assumed confidentiality of their relationship presents these interviews as a type of confessional, allowing the reader access to the protagonist's intimate thoughts. The character of Don Jorge helps articulate Ismaïl's sentiments to the reader, acting as a sort of mediator or translator. It is his psychoanalytical knowledge that explicitly

makes the connection between the discourse of madness and the position of the Other, thus strengthening the metaphor. This dialogue allows the reader to recognize its more subtle manifestations in other dialogues, such as those with intertexts.

Ismaïl's inclusion of intertextual references in the narrative add an additional layer of dialogue that allows the protagonist to relate to the experiences of other characters as well as reflect on his own identity through a critique of their actions. The first texts to which we are introduced through his perspective are those of a Lebanese female writer he claims is named Hanan. The first story describes an Arab woman who views the colonizer, the English, as inherently superior, to the point that she donates money to a begging English man to feel superior to them for once. The narrator describes the connection he feels with this female character, claiming "La lectura de este cuento que le he comentado fue algo muy importante para mí porque me ayudó a entender que son mis propios monstruos lo que me hacen sentirme inferior" ("Reading this story was very important for me because it helped me understand that it is my own monsters that make me feel inferior"; 30). The second story is that of a woman who returns to her birth country from Europe, despite her contempt for it, and recuperates a portion of her identity (31). Ismaïl explains that this story sent him into a spiral of depression that produced hatred within him, directed not only at himself but at the society that exploits his difference. This reflects what Maalouf states, that when the condition of belonging feels threatened or humiliated, it produces the ideal conditions for violence: "Hay un Mr. Hyde en cada uno de nosotros; lo importante es impedir que se den las condiciones que ese monstruo necesita para salir a la superficie" ("There is a Mr. Hyde in each of us; the important thing is to prevent the conditions that this monster needs to rise to the surface"; 18). It is this cumulation of frustration in the protagonist that leads to his psychotic break, which Don Jorge recognizes, saying "Y supongo

que la única salida que consiguió encontrar este odio que iba creciendo cada día fue la que se produjo" ("And I guess the only way out of this hatred that was growing every day was the one that came about"; 32). In this example, we see that the experiences of fictional characters provide a framework for Ismaïl's feelings of inadequacy, in fact allowing them to further develop.

Ismaïl's reading of Fatima Mernissi, the famous Moroccan feminist, helps the protagonist develop a more nuanced vision of Morocco that departs from his limited conception where it exists as a source of nostalgia or hatred. The inclusion of Mernissi brings a feminine voice into the dialogue that, like the Lebanese author Hanan, is able to expose the realities of their intersectional experiences as racialized women, transcending Ismaïl's own understanding. It is through Mernissi's *El sueño del umbral* [*Dream of the Threshold*] that he is reminded that his nostalgic memories of the female-dominated home life are symptoms of an oppressive patriarchal system. He refers to this as "un mundo de tradicionalismos que coartan la libertad" ("a world of traditionalisms that curtail freedom"; 124). Not only does this help the narrator reconcile the feelings of nostalgia with the realities of the space, but also develops his personal beliefs regarding tradition and liberty. He expresses his belief that liberty should not be constrained by cultural differences but something inherent to all societies. This is significant because we see a character development that moves away from the binary of Morocco versus Spain to encapsulate a more cosmopolitan outlook based in ideals. This is reminiscent of Gloria Anzaldua's statement that outlines an identity formed by principles of change and social justice:

> I am cultureless because as a feminist I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs … yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to one another. (102-103)

This is significant in the example of Ismaïl, who comes to realize at the close of the chapter that while his hatred of these social norms is articulated through rancour for his native country and its customs, it is in fact gender inequality that is the true source of his anger.

When describing his previous relationships with women, the protagonist relies on fictional characters and narratives to understand his situation. Outlining the various romantic partnerships that have failed because of Ismaïl's reluctance to commit, he attributes these defeats to the recurrent sentiment of "no es mi media naranja" ("She's not my other half"; 131). After an incident in the clinic provokes him to reflect on the failures of his past relationships, he re-reads *Madame Bovary* by Gustav Flaubert to gain clarity on the situation, only to discover that the Emma Bovary that he previously admired for her relentless pursuit of true love now appears to him as overly nostalgic. It is through this critique of *Madame Bovary* that Ismaïl is able to see that his own nostalgic pursuit is naïve. Likewise, it is through a reading of the Jorge Luis Borges poem "Poseer o sonar" ["Own or Dream"] that he realizes that his tendency for jealousy is debilitating his ability to continue long term romantic relationships. This jealousy he blames on his Moroccan genes and upbringing, making the connection between the irrational and uncontrollable emotion and his position as the Other. Reflecting on Edward Said's description of the way "Oriental" masculinity is constructed, as well as the rhetoric surrounding madness, we see that equating strong emotions like jealousy to one group, either the insane or the racialized male body, only serves to construct the binary opposite to the rational (311). However, through dialogue with Don Jorge, Ismaïl is made to understand this difference, as his doctor says "sus celos son suyos y los tiene aquí en España y, como ya habrá visto, los celos no son patrimonio de los marroquíes" ("your jealousy is yours and you have it here in Spain, and as you've seen, jealousy is not the patrimony of Moroccans"; El Kadaoui 145). Through his own analysis of the

intertexts present in the work, Ismaïl is able to initiate a dialogue about his failed romantic partnerships that leads him to a greater understanding of the ways in which his upbringing influenced his adult relationships and the recognition of a need to move past his simplistic conception of his flaws.

Our protagonist repeatedly declares his admiration for different literature, at one point even stating that it is a form of therapy for him. The novel finishes with his ultimate self-actualization through his decision to study his true passion, French literature, in university. The narrative demonstrates how Ismaïl's dialogues with fictional characters, such as Emma Bovary or the protagonists of Mernissi's tales, allow him to further understand himself. This analysis of his connection with literary protagonists, with the help of Don Jorge, changes his outlook on many of his core values. Ismaïl's perspective begins to question his assumed anger towards both Moroccan and Catalan society for the trauma they have installed in him, allowing a more nuanced critique of the conditions that have made him feel this way, such as the way he internalized an inferiority complex and patriarchal gender norms. What is interesting is that the majority of the books to which he relates have female protagonists. This reinforces the similarities that exist between the constructions of the racial Other and the insane, as well as the feminine. These constructions of Otherness are further explored in Ismaïl's writing endeavours.

It is through the protagonist's creative writing that we see how he dialogues with not only his own memories but also with the outside world. As these writings are often part of the creative writing workshop in the clinic, there is the assumption that they will be read by others, meaning that while they reflect private sentiments, they are also a public presentation of the protagonist's self, whether explicitly or in more coded language. Ismaïl's first piece is a first-person story detailing the admittance of a pharmaceutical representative into a psychiatric clinic after he

attempts to sell the clinic his products. While constantly trying to explain that he has been mistakenly admitted, he is met with the phrase “la primera semana es la más difícil” (“the first week is the most difficult”; 43). The first-person narration allows us insight into the perspective of the institutionalized, presenting him as completely rational, both subverting the stereotype of the insane and questioning the reliability of the narrator. The story describes his unwilling institutionalization, constructing the space of the psychiatric clinic as a type of imprisonment he cannot escape, which he describes as leaving his person completely “sin credibilidad” (“without credibility”; 43). Then, the assumption that he is insane demonstrates the ways in which this discourse of Otherness is projected onto those who are assumed to fit into that category, rather than as the result of critical investigation. This short story allows the reader access to the ways in which the protagonist feels that Otherness is defined by the limits or borders he cannot evade. Ismaïl’s obsession with rupturing the limits of the imposed social order becomes present in the protagonist’s personal writing and search for meaning.

The protagonist’s obsession with limits is revealed in his personal writing, where he explains the ways in which he finds himself in repetitive cycles that only serve to increase his frustration with his situation. Reflecting on the strong feelings he has for Candela, he deduces, in his writing, that this must be obsession and must represent something subconscious, perhaps the desire to be considered normal rather than insane. He relates this experience to that of his adolescence when he would spend every weekend cycling in the hills of Catalonia to come home exhausted and immediately fall asleep. The protagonist reflects on how this constant motion of pedaling until exhaustion, weekend after weekend, was a form of escapism, saying “Todas estas opciones me parecían una forma de hacer más pasajero el tiempo, como si la vida fuera eso, buscar la manera de despistarla” (“All these options seemed to me to be a way to make time

more fleeting, as if life were just that, looking for a way to mislead it"; 93). He reckons that he is trying to escape the feeling of not belonging. It is clear that a feeling of double exclusion from both his home and host cultures has been the cause of his escapism and obsessions, as he then describes the symbolic rupture from his parents' culture as the consumption of a Frankfurt sausage (which contains pork and is prohibited under Islamic law) while recognizing his feelings of apathy regarding the independence movement in Catalonia, viewing it as something on which he is not allowed to have opinions.[4] The narrator's recognition of this fact will be vital in his recovery.

As he explains, the focus of many of the articles that Ismaïl writes is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as the deaths of migrants that cross the Mediterranean from the Maghreb. As his recovery progresses, his views of these two issues shift from unilateral support for the Palestinian and Maghrebi migrants, violently condemning the Occident for having created these conditions, to a more nuanced view of the conflicts. He justifies this feeling of closeness with Palestine, claiming that the shared experience of living without a "Tierra" ("Land") forces him to empathize deeply with their cause (119). Just as we witness his perception of Morocco transform from one of mixed hatred and nostalgia to a more informed critique, his perspective on the conflict in Palestine-Israel shifts to a more humanistic view. In what he claims is his final article on the subject, he recognizes that it was wrong for him to think of the conflict as a tension of clashing identities, when what is most important is the lives of those affected. He finishes the article by stating that since the biased press reviews anger him, he has decided to focus more on reading novels instead (120). While this may initially appear to be

[4] The Catalan independence movement is a nationalist movement in the province of Catalonia, Spain, with the objective of greater social, political, and linguistic independence for Catalans within the region. For some supporters, this means total independence as a nation-state. This cleavage has caused considerable tension within the region, as well as in Spain, as Catalan nationalist sentiments clash with Spanish nationalism.

wilful ignorance, it demonstrates Ismaïl's desire to move beyond reading the media sources that are responsible for constructing the discourse surrounding the issue and identity, instead choosing to empathize on the individual level with authors and characters to build a more heterogeneous understanding that does not revolve around identity politics. This reflects Maalouf's statement that the recognition of our similarities and common humanity is much more effective in the achievement of various projects, in contrast to a focus on differences (59). He concludes with "Me daba perfecta cuenta de que había recuperado mis ganas de vivir y tenía proyectos que hoy estoy realizando. Ya no me sentía un loco" ("I realized that I had regained my will to live and I had projects that today I am carrying out. I no longer felt crazy"; El Kadaoui 120). In this respect, he recognizes that the experience of being mentally ill and recovering have been essential in leading to his less binary ways of thinking about identity.

It is through writing that the protagonist is finally able to overcome his deep infatuation with Candela. This revelation comes to Ismaïl after a conversation with Don Jorge in which he states "Candela viene a cubrir este vacío que siempre necesita llenar … llevarlo al papel, construir una historia literaria que nazca de esta necesidad y conseguir sacarle algo bueno en vez de tanto sufrimiento" ("Candela came to fill this void that always needs to be filled ... to put it on paper, to build a literary story born from this need and to get something good out of it instead of so much suffering"; 175). It is this comment that allows Ismaïl the liberty to imagine his possible life as a writer. In the short diary entry based on a dream he had, he imagines himself in conversation with a literary critic named Steiner, in which he discusses his recently published novel and some of his literary influences including Flaubert and Leo Tolstoy. This imagined conversation finishes with his affirmation that the novel is the product of dedication and certain sacrifices in his life, but that it was worth it (179). In this way, Ismaïl expresses his aspirations

for the future as being connected to literary success. Directly after this moment, he dreams of a vivid sexual encounter with Candela. This moment serves as a type of closure in his ongoing obsession. As he describes the next morning, "Ya no me importaba tanto verla como una cuidadora con la que jamás tendría otro tipo de relación. Aún hoy sigue siendo un misterio para mí aquello que precipitó el cambio" ("I no longer cared so much about seeing her as a caregiver with whom I would never have any other kind of relationship. What precipitated the change remains a mystery to me to this day"; 180). The narration leaves it clear that his fantasies involving Candela, which revolved around a need for acceptance, have been replaced with his goals and projections for a literary career that will provide him a type of self-validation. This transformation demonstrates the ways in which the writing process allows the protagonist to dialogue with himself and achieve a clarity in terms of personal objectives.

Ismaïl's final written piece in the novel is a meditation on his experiences in Morocco after he is released from the clinic and travels back to his hometown to reconcile some of the conflicting feelings he has towards the country. Before introducing his written reflections, the protagonist prefaces them, claiming that he intends to critically contemplate Morocco without feeling the guilt of being unfaithful to his origins. He announces that "La línea que separa la idealización del desprecio es extremadamente delgada" ("The line between idealization and contempt is extremely thin"; 185). His written work outlines conversations with two different cousins that share different opinions on the role of traditionalism in Morocco. The first conversation he records demonstrates how his cousin Jamal, while he complains about the state of poverty and corruption in Morocco, continues to live a more traditional life without making any radical changes. The narrator is initially critical of this approach but later realizes that this was his position before his institutionalization. He says:

> Vivíamos en una cárcel de palabras, de creencias, de ideas y de automatismos difíciles de mover. Ahora tengo la sensación de que he conseguido desenredarme de toda aquella telaraña que me atrapaba de forma violenta. Poco a poco he ido encontrando una puerta más a mi medida. La cárcel en la que he vivido ha sido la de creer que mi cultura era aquello, que criticarlo era criticar mis raíces y poner en peligro todo lo que yo era.[5] (191)

This citation exhibits the metaphor of the prison to describe Ismaïl's anterior mentality, demonstrating how he has been liberated from this way of thinking through a more liminal critique of his birthplace that does not entirely condemn it without a more critical understanding of the reasons why. He also expresses anger with the Occident, in particular Spain, for its trivial critique of Morocco that reduces it to a space of folkloric and backwards cultural representations (191). This is complimented by the following conversation with his cousin Farid, who looks to Europe as an example. While Ismaïl states that this is an illusion, and that Spain has no shortage of exploitation or gender violence, his cousin replies that the fundamental difference is democracy and the existence of a social security system (192-193). The protagonist concludes the writing with the recognition that corrupt governments and historical conditions are to blame for the drastic differences between the two. This last piece of literature solidifies and reconciles many of the protagonist's previous frustrations. Here we see a version of him that equally recognizes his Moroccan origin, and offers criticism of it, unclouded by nostalgia. He is able to recognize the conditions that have created this inequality between the two countries, leading to his constant feelings of inferiority. As Anzaldúa states, this double consciousness is what breaks

[5] "We lived in a prison of words, beliefs, ideas, and automatisms that were difficult to move. Now I have the feeling that I have managed to untangle myself from all that spider web that trapped me violently. Little by little I have been finding a door that fits me better. The prison in which I have lived has been that of believing that my culture was that, that to criticize it was to criticize my roots and put in danger all that I was."

binary thought patterns, and leads to ruptures from oppressive systems (102-104). He embraces the experience of his psychotic break and subsequent institutionalization as being an essential experience in the formation of his new subjectivity and new consciousness.

To conclude, Saïd El Kadaoui's narrative explores the similarities between the discourses surrounding mental illness as well those surrounding the migrant as a racial Other, revealing a striking similarity between the two. It is through an examination of this metaphor that we see significant character development of the novel's protagonist Ismaïl as he transforms from an uncomfortable subject shrouded in an inferiority complex and motivated by jealousy, nostalgia, and frustration, to one who actively pursues his own self-actualization, no longer motivated or hindered by external perceptions and expectations of himself. Presenting a series of dialogues with supporting character and psychiatrist Don Jorge, the narrative expresses how conveniently the metaphor of madness functions to express the hardships of the migratory experience. Intertextual insertions allow Ismaïl to dialogue with fictional characters and demonstrate a greater reflection, while also allowing for a comparison to the ways in which femininity is constructed and treated as Otherness. The protagonist's personal articles and diary entries allow the reader to view the cognitive process of his reflection and reveal the ways in which the migratory experience, as well as that of institutionalization, have shaped his subjectivity. El Kadaoui's skilled narration reveals a detailed examination of many of the daily challenges faced by the Maghrebi diaspora in Europe and particularly Spain and Catalonia. His narrative reveals the psychological trauma of migration, while exposing many of the reasons migrants choose to leave. He presents a more nuanced view of the critiques of both societies. Ismaïl's story presents a roadmap for comprehending identity in a world that is increasingly heterogeneous and diasporic, allowing us to conceive of these subjects as individuals.

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