Stories across Space

The Narration of Space in Contemporary Maghrebi-European Migration Literature

Jiska de Ligt

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Dr Birgit Kaiser

Contents

Introduction

Postcolonial Europe, Migrant Literature and the Significance of Space

This thesis points out the way space is employed in three contemporary European works of literature: Leïla Sebbar's and Nancy Huston's *Lettres parisiennes*, Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Montecore, en unik tiger* (translated into Dutch as *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen*), and Hafid Bouazza's *Paravion*. Throughout my studies, I have found that I am most interested in postcolonial theory – and more particularly, in studying how literature deals with (post)colonial issues, and how (post)colonial relations not only become manifest in literature, but also can be reformulated, reproduced, or deconstructed within a work of literature. Since the beginning of my studies, I have been fascinated by the idea that there is an interplay between literature and society: literature reflects on society, while society is shaped by and reacts to the cultural expressions (amongst which literature) it brings forth. This interaction can be traced back in literature, and I feel that it is in postcolonial theory that it is most profoundly emphasized.

Postcolonial theory, from the moment of its coming into existence several decades ago, has taught us to acknowledge that 'this place' is not the norm and not the center of our world (Esche 29 Jan. 2010). Most of the time, it has done so by taking Europe or the West as 'this place', analyzing exemplary 'situations' outside of Europe and showing how those have been shaped by the power structures of colonialism, in order to confront and/or deconstruct colonial discourse and allow for various 'norms' and 'centers' to exist simultaneously. Postcolonial theory aims to rethink the world as it attempts to allow alternative histories to claim their voice and asks disturbing questions about power. Recently, however, a new trend in postcolonial theory inspired critical theorists to redirect their gaze to Europe and its position in the world: Dipesh Chakrabarty published his book *Provincializing Europe*, for example, and in Utrecht, research projects that focus on postcoloniality in a European context – such as the 'Former West' project and the PCI (Postcolonial Studies Initiative) – were called into existence. The emphasis is put on the fact that coloniality 'was not *external* to the constitution of the modernity of European nations: rather, the identity of these nations became predicated on their relationship to the colonised others' (Sarah Ahmed 10). In 2004, neo-marxist philosopher Etienne Balibar published his book *We, the People of Europe?* , in which he engages in new and very political ways in Europe's position in the world. 'Above all', he writes,

> the connection among the construction of European nations. . . and the global history of
> imperialism resulted not only in the perpetuation of border conflicts but also in the
> demographic and cultural structure typical of European populations today, which are all
> *postcolonial* communities or, if you will, projections of global diversity within the European

sphere – as a result of immigration but for other causes as well, like the repatriation of

displaced peoples. (Balibar 8)

With my thesis, I would like to engage in this trend of studying Europe as a set of postcolonial communities by analyzing literature that is written and published in Europe by European writers, yet somehow engages with issues of postcoloniality. I therefore chose three works that could be categorized under the term 'migrant literature' – alternated in this thesis with the term 'migration literature'[1]: namely works that are written by authors with a migrant background and that moreover deal with the theme of migration on a narrative level. All three/both of my case studies are works by Maghrebi-European authors. This seemed the most obvious choice, both because I took a tutorial on literature of the Maghreb last year and because North African migration to Europe has been a particularly controversial issue in Western and Southern Europe in recent years. I will carefully state that when it comes to the postcolonial issues that are being addressed, the emphasis in many works that could be considered 'Magrebi-European' literature has stretched out from a mere problematization of the relation with former colonizer France to an engagement with various European countries, as a consequence of processes of (economic) globalization and migration. Therefore, I study these books as postcolonial European literature: literature that engages in issues of postcoloniality in Europe.

I do not, however, want to pay too much attention to the background of the authors of the works I study – at least not to the detriment of the more literary aspects to the book, such as narrative techniques. Migrant literature has often been studied primarily as just that: *migrant* literature, a literature which 'speaks for' *the* migrant community of Europe, or which should be valued for its contribution to a multicultural society. Dutch literary scholar Ton Anbeek has accused critics for being very uncritical and 'overly politically correct' about Dutch writing by writers with a migrant background (Minnaard 65, 66). This trend, of overemphasizing biography on the one hand and an uncritical reception of literariness on the other, has had two vile consequences: one, that the writers (especially those with a Muslim background) are more or less Orientalized, categorized into a fixed and stable group of exotic 'migrant writers' with no room for either individuality or difference among them (in terms of quality of writing, style, political/religious engagement or simply any

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[1] I find neither 'migrant literature' nor 'migration literature' to be a satisfying definition. Where the widely accepted term 'migrant literature' overly emphasizes the background of the author – literature of or by migrants – the more adequate term 'migration literature' makes clear that the narrative theme of migration is the key characteristic of this 'genre'. On the other hand, 'migration literature' seems to present the overlap between lived experience and theme as a coïncidence, which would be naïve or overly politically correct. The term 'migration literature' moreover seems to conceil the consistent tendency of critics and readers to automatically categorize any work of an author with a migrant background is as belonging to the genre. I will discuss this imposition, and issues related to it, further on in this thesis. Here, it suffices to say in lack of a better term, I will continue to use both.

varying circumstances); and two, that the literary value of the books is often overlooked in favor of their 'exotic' thematics and/or the background of the author. Literary theorist Liesbeth Minnaard explains how, in the case of migrant writers, 'Their (imposed) migrant status functions as a central factor in the discursive processes of national Othering to which both the writers themselves and their literature are subjected' (53). All three of the books implicitly or explicitly address this issue, which is captured adequately in the words uttered in frustration by one of the characters in *Montecore*: 'Waarom noemt iedereen me immigrant? Hoe lang moet ik nog migreren?' (Khemiri 264). Bouazza even published an essay about his struggle against his imposed status as a Moroccan migrant author in the Dutch literary canon, in which he explicitly asks his readers to read his stories as stories, not as mere political signifiers. Simply overlooking, on the other hand, the fact that these books are written by individuals who carry with them a history of migration is not an answer, to my opinion. Many of these works have migration as their main theme, and as a rule, the narratives engage migration somehow, sometimes even from an (almost) autobiographical angle. A better way of dealing with this dilemma still has to be found, even though various scholars already acknowledge it in their work and try to find their way around it. With this thesis I seek to make a contribution to this new way of dealing with migration literature by analyzing how these novels foreground, question and renegotiate migration.

This thesis attempts to point out what narrative techniques or elements are used to translate the experience of migration into written language, and what negotiation takes place in this 'translation'. It will explain how *Lettres parisiennes*, *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen* and *Paravion* employ space in various ways, in their attempts to express migration – and experiences and issues that accompany migration – into written language. In all three of these novels, the concept of space is somehow foregrounded – which only makes sense, as they are novels that tell stories about, mainly, the process of moving from one place to another and the consequences produced by that move. It seems that in these works, space is employed somehow to narrate the experience of migration. The narratives do not deal with migration in very direct or straightforward ways; they do not simply display it. On the contrary: they deal with space by narrating it in very literary, complex, nuanced and almost fluid ways – often breaking with the real-life space as we know it, and yet not completely leaving it behind but rather referring to it from other, perhaps imagined spaces. It is in the narrated spaces featured in these texts, as opposed to in their much debated engagement in socio-political issues, that the rethinking of migration takes place – or even in the narrative space that is the text *itself*. Considering all this, this thesis tries to provide an answer to the question of how is space employed in the narration of Maghreb-to-Europe migration in three contemporary European works of literature: *Lettres parisiennes, Montecore* and *Paravion*.

The first chapter sets forth the theoretical frame used to analyze the three novels of my choice. Before I started writing, I read a lot of theory on space – books and articles from the field of anthropology, philosophy and literary studies; theories from cultural memory studies as well as postcolonial studies. All of these areas, of course, overlap at a some point, and they all give significant attention to the concept of space. What all of these theories have in common is that they agree that space needs both a physically present place and a language in which the meaning attributed to the space is formulated and passed on. This observation has been the starting ground for well-known and influential works in the field of the humanities, such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which deals with the imagination necessary to build and maintain a nation – which is a space, after all – and the media used to produce and reproduce these imaginations. I was looking, however, for a some broader study of how space, imagination and narration interact. In a course on cultural memory I encountered Maurice Halbwachs and Michel De Certeau, so I reread some of their work and used it as a starting point for thinking about space. In the first chapter I explain Halbwachs statement that memory needs physical places in order to take form, and De Certeau's distinction between place and space, in which space is the form place acquires at the moment that a meaning is attributed to it by a person or a community of persons, small or large. De Certeau explains that stories have the capacity to literally act as metaphors, as means of transportation for all involved – readers, writers, listeners, and characters (De Certeau 115). As such, stories also help create, maintain and change the spaces involved by giving them a place within linguistic realities. Bachelard, in his *Poetique de l'espace,* also makes apparent that space, whether physical or narrated, acquires meaning through processes of imagination and narration, and thus exists partially by the grace of the narration of its imaginary or virtual, non-physical aspect. Together with Nigel Thrift and Mike Crang's work *Thinking Space*, these theories by Halbwachs, De Certeau and Bachelard together form the starting point from which this thesis aims to study space in the three works of literature. The first chapter then moves on to discuss Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia', which will be employed in my second chapter, and Leslie Adelson's notions of 'cultural labor' and 'Orte des Umdenkens', which will primarily come back in the third and fourth chapter.

The second chapter forms an analysis of *Lettres parisiennes*, an exchange of letters between writers Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar dating from the period between May 1983 and January 1985. The experience of migration has caused both Sebbar and Huston to think of themselves as outsiders wherever they find themselves. Literary theorist Azade Seyhan, whose observations on migrant writing and autobiography were particularly helpful for my reading of Sebbar's and Huston's rather autobiographically tinted book, writes: '[Immigrant] writing registers its distance from social and cultural norms by questioning the logic of the traditions it has inherited as well as those it is subjected to in the new world' (186). Sebbar writes about how she, as a consequence, has a hard

time perceiving the spaces she encounters as anything but empty 'deserts' (Sebbar) or mere 'places' (De Certeau). She feels literally 'out of place' anywhere she goes. Sebbar moreover writes about her time with the feminist journal *Histoire d'elles* in Paris in the late seventies. In my reading of *Lettres parisiennes*, Paris '77-'80 takes the form of what Foucault calls a 'heterotopia': a 'counter-site' in which the possibilities and limits of physical spaces are both made apparent and stretched, complicated, changed or inverted through the (imagined) formation of new relations between physical spaces, and of which the function in the narrative is to literally 'counter' the 'spacelessness', to use Seyhan's term, in this work of migrant literature (Seyhan 186).

In the third chapter of this thesis, I will present my reading of *Montecore, en unik tiger*. I read this book in Dutch translation, because I cannot read Swedish well enough to understand the text. I realize that this is unconventional and somewhat risky to feature a translated work as a key text in a Comparative Literature thesis. It is true that I wanted to go beyond national literary borders in this thesis and study books from various European countries that dealt with experiences of migration from various Maghrebi countries as their themes. But even if I did not want to study another Dutch or French work, I could have easily avoided this risk by choosing an English, German, or even Spanish work. The reason that I decided to remain loyal to this translated Swedish work instead is simply that it was the novel *Montecore* that originated this thesis: the idea to study space in migrant literature first came to me when I was reading this novel, which, I felt, contained an interesting employment of metafiction and the narrated and narrative space therein. The third chapter will explain how narrated space in *Montecore* not only takes the shape of landmarks around which the narrative is structured and which function, according to De Certeau, as 'means of transportation' (De Certeau 115), in the sense that the stories that write to each other are built up around places and the relations between them; the narrative also foregrounds its own textuality and presents the text as a virtual space in which there is room for several existing places and stories about those places to come together and interact and be rethought; the narrative presents itself as a textual 'site for rethinking' (Adelson 247).

The fourth chapter returns to the topic of the reception of migrant novels as cultural relics rather than works of literature, and briefly discusses the essay written about this topic by the Dutch writer Hafid Bouazza, *Een beer in bontjas*. In *Een beer in bontjas*, Bouazza distances himself from the position of Moroccan-Dutch migrant author that he feels is imposed on him, and celebrates the imaginative powers of literature. This attitude is used as a starting point for the analysis of the narrative uses of space in Bouazza's novel *Paravion* that takes up the rest of chapter 4. In this chapter, a lot of attention is paid to the textual practice of referencing to existing places and attempts to show how Bouazza in this text creates and then breaks off references to Amsterdam and Morocco, and how *Paravion*'s undeniable yet ambiguous use of references foreground the ways in

which the text employs space. In this chapter, I point out how the narrated spaces Paravion and

Morea refer to real spaces while they simultaneously foreground their own fictionality.

First Chapter

Introducing Theories of Space

In my introduction I paid attention to the fact that contemporary European migration literature has often been studied primarily as a case studies of migrant culture and multiculturalism. I have called attention to the consequences of this tendency as pointed out by Minnaard and other scholars: when one looks at migration literature in this way – namely by overly emphasizing the cultural background of the author – one easily runs the risk of both overlooking the literariness or literary value of the text that is studied, and of slipping into an attitude that is at best one of cultural essentialism . In the introduction of his *Experimental Nations, Or, The Invention of the Maghreb,* Réda Bensmaïa writes:

> What has long struck me was the nonchalance with which the work of these writers was analyzed. Whenever these novels were studied, they were almost invariably reduced to anthropological or cultural case studies. Their literariness was rarely taken seriously. And once they were finally integrated into the deconstructed canon of world literature, they were made to serve as tools for political and ideological agendas. This kind of reading resulted more often than not in their being reduced to mere signifiers of other signifiers, with a total disregard for what makes them literary works *in and of themselves*. (6)

 Simply refusing to mention the migrant background of the author and/or the theme of migration in a text is, however, hardly an option, as it is often through the narration of precisely this experience of migration (migration as a central theme in the narrative) that the works we consider 'migrant literature' establish their literary value. It therefore seems best to conclude with Rebecca Walkowitz: 'What has happened to the writer is less important . . . than what happens in the writing and in the reading, though the biography of the writer may influence the way that books are written and received' (Walkowitz 534).

In my analysis of the significance of space in three recent pieces of what I also, in lack of a better term, shall call European 'migrant literature', I expect to find that space is used in order to somehow 'translate' the experience of migration into written language. It is this precisely this – often underestimated – *literariness* of the works that plays a central role in my thesis, for it is in literary narration that space is constructed instead of mirrored. The books of my choice do not deal with migration in very direct or straightforward ways; they do not simply display it. On the contrary: they deal with migration by *narrating* it in very literary, complex, nuanced and almost fluid ways – often breaking with real-life experiences, and yet not completely leaving them behind but rather referring to them from less obvious, perhaps even fictional situation. These books, pre-eminently, show us that literature is not a mere reflection of physical reality.

I will analyze how these novels narrate migration. I will attempt to show what narrative techniques or elements are used to translate the experience of migration into written language, and

what negotiation takes place in this 'translation'. Literary theorist Leslie Adelson writes in her "Against Between":

> More than a mere repository of treasured or controversial works of art, a nation's culture is also an activity, a creative engagement with a rapidly changing present. It actively seeks to negotiate changing values and attitudes toward a changing world. (Adelson 245)

Culture, according to Adelson, is thus a practice of negotiation. This act of negotiation could thus also be pointed out in literature. In earlier attempt to study narrative strategies and places of 'negotiation' in literature for course papers, I have focused several times on the issue of language in postcolonial literature. Language functions as a medium for uttering questions and problems, but it is also already a locus of negotiation in itself. Postcolonial literature often reflects consciously and critically on language as a medium. It shows how the use of language is never self-evident, both because a writer's choice of idiom is always a choice with political implications and because postcolonial literatures often deal with experiences that are difficult to express in words – varying from traumatic experiences of imperialism to feelings of displacement, and from the inability of a bilingual author to write a story in multiple languages simultaneously to the same author's inability to express herself in only one language. When we read postcolonial literature which foregrounds language in this way, we are confronted with a situation in which a social issue is not only represented, but renegotiated: such books not only call the reader's attention to language issues, but they also attempt to rework the language on which they reflect *while* they reflect on it.

The works I chose do not reflect specifically on language – even though language is an important theme and issue in all three of them. What they foreground and negotiate, according to my hypothesis, is *space.* In these novels, the notion of space is dealt with in striking ways. Not only do these works use spaces for forming a frame that gives significance to the memories underlying stories of migration; they also create new spaces or put existing spaces to a different use, re-negotiating borders and re-interpreting space in a way that might be uniquely possible in literature. I will analyze in where and how space is employed in narratives of migration. All three of my case studies explore the possibilities of expressing space in language and foreground the idea that space is crucial to a narrative; yet that it is not a fixed, stable notion: it is a carrier of memories and stories that can be narrated – remembered, re-negotiated, re-evaluated, passed on. As a concept, 'space' for me signifies the set of meanings and values that is attributes to a particular 'place' – and this 'place' is the physical area the 'space' refers to. Spaces are thus produced : whenever a place is thought or talked about, meaning is attributed to it and it becomes a space.

Storytelling, in *Montecore*, *Paravion*, and *Lettres parisiennes,* is a way of reflecting on place. This narration, however, is always a *translation* of the 'real' space in the Maghreb or Western Europe into a virtual space that consists of written language – the narration can therefore never be a

'double', an identical copy, or even an adequate reflection of a 'real' space . It is thus obvious that space in literature does not necessarily obey the limits of space in real life. But simultaneously, as I pointed out in my introduction, literature does have the power to somehow actually establish small changes in how something – in this case: space – is thought about within the narrative *and* outside it. And in this paradox we find an example of the *negotiation* that can take place in literature. In this chapter, I will set out a framework of theory on (narrating) space. I will start out from the field of cultural memory studies, in which I first encountered theories on space and storytelling, and delve into the connection between space and memory. After that, I will set forth two concepts, one developed by Michel Foucault and the other by Leslie Adelson, that theorize the use of phantasmatic or imagined spaces.

<div align="center">Remembering, Practicing and Imagining Space</div>

Maurice Halbwachs, a renowned scholar in the field of memory studies, developed some rather abstract theories about space and remembering in the 1950s. Halbwachs first theorized the concept 'collective memory', around which the field of cultural memory studies came into existence. The area of cultural memory studies is important for my thesis as it provides several good starting points for analyzing literary texts which are centred around memory – which is the case with all three of the novels I study in this thesis. Moreover, his observations on the link between space and memory are interesting here. In the French *La Memoire Collective*, Halbwachs explains how material objects are important to us because they carry our (non-linguistic) marks. 'Pourquoi s'attache-t-on aux objets? Pourquoi désire-t-on qu'ils ne changent point, et continuent à nous tenir compagnie ? . . . Il reste que notre entourage matériel porte à la fois notre marque et celle des autres' (83). Ten pages onwards, he takes his argument further by claiming that it is through space that we even manage to remember:

> l'[E]space et une réalité qui dure : nos impressions se chassent l'une l'autre, rien ne demeure dans notre esprit, et l'on ne comprendrait pas que nous puissions ressaisir le passé s'il ne se conservait pas en effet par le milieu matériel qui nous entoure. C'est sur l'espace, sur notre espace – celui que nous occupons, où nous repassons souvent, où nous avons toujours accès, et qu'en tout cas notre imagination ou notre pensée est à chaque moment capable de reconstruire – qu'il faut tourner notre attention ; c'est sur lui que notre pensée doit se fixer, pour que reparaisse telle ou telle catégorie de souvenirs. (93)

Contrary to our spirit, contrary to the reality of our thoughts, the reality of space is a lasting one. Thus, states Halbwachs, we would not be able to remember if it were not for the materiality that surrounds us. Through space, our imagination can reconstruct past times.

Moreover, Halbwachs claims that space is one of the factors that determine the construction of our collective identity. The material/physical helps us to imagine ourselves as a collective, a

society: 'chaque objet rencontré, et la place qu'il occupe dans l'ensemble, nous rappellent une manière d'être commune à beaucoup d'hommes . . .' (84). People who do not have personal memories connected to a certain place, may on the other hand have so called 'cultural' or 'collective' memories, appropriated in the form of stories, linked to certain places. In the city where I was born, for example, there is a 'dijk'. Although I have no actual recollection whatsoever of my city ever being flooded over by water, I know that it must have happened in my city or a place comparable to my city, and that the *dijk* is there to prevent it from happening again. The cultural memory of a struggle against the water has been passed on for generations. 'Dijken' are physical reminders of this cultural memory, while they have moreover become a symbol of 'Dutchness': *dijken* are found everywhere in the Netherlands because they are necessary for protecting the land, and everywhere in the country people have the narrated cultural memories of a struggle against the sea which simultaneously connects them to the *dijk* (which triggers the narrated memory) and to each other (for they are all share this memory), and everywhere, the space of the *dijk* confirms this memory and the sense of community attached to it.

However, if we want to understand how it is precisely that a certain memory or story gets to determine the meaning of a space, we will have to look at the process of storytelling and its significance for the production and practice of space. A theorist who has greatly influenced the way in which contemporary scholars think about space is Michel de Certeau. De Certeau, in his complex and highly theoretical writing, goes beyond Halbwachs's observations about the significance of space for cultural/collective memory, as he establishes an explicit link to stories and storytelling, introducing stories as a means for transportation. In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau presents his readers with the etymology of the word 'metaphor': it derives from the Greek word for mass transportation. He writes: 'Stories could also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories' (115). This observation might prove a crucial one for the analyses that will follow in the chapters to come. Therefore, I will try to set forth how De Certeau arrives at it.

In his chapter "Walking in the City", De Certeau states: 'Travel (like walking) is a substitute for the legends that used to open up space to something different' (107). In my understanding, these 'legends' can be could be the 'collective memories' that according to Halbwachs help us to imagine ourselves, through space, to be part of a larger whole. De Certeau then continues to ask, rhetorically: 'What does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, 'an exploration of the deserted place of my memory', the return to nearby exoticism by way of a detour through distant places, and the 'discovery' of relics and legends. . .' (107)? Again thus, as we saw in Halbwachs, place prompts memory, and the 'detour through distant places' might be necessary for the creation of a separation

of the self from the self that is needed for one to be able to reflect on one's own memories. This separation, De Certeau explains a few pages later, is at the essence of practicing space. He calls on Freud (and, implicitly, his own teacher Lacan) as he explains that the child learns to experience 'space' simultaneously with its experience of separation from the mother: it learns that it is in fact not one with the mother when the mother goes *elsewhere.* Then it starts to play with this knowledge by throwing things away and pulling things near, realizing at once that *it is not these things* and that there is such a thing as 'here' and 'there'. De Certeau concludes that 'to practice space is to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, *to be the other and to move toward the other'* (110). Now to return to the earlier cited question. Whenever one travels, one is likely to encounter places that one experiences as other, and thus as not carrying (collective) memories. De Certeau:

> What this walking exile (past such places, JL) produces is precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one's own vicinity; it is a fiction, which moreover has the double characteristic . . . of being the effect of displacement and condensations. As a corollary, one can measure the importance of these signifying practices (to tell oneself legends) as practices that invent spaces. (107)

I think that this citation makes clear both the connection between story and space as De Certeau perceives it, as well as the distinction between space and place that is central in his work. *Spaces*, as 'places-with-meaning', are invented by people who, on an everyday basis, tell themselves and each other legends about the physical *places* in question. De Certeau's claim that 'stories about place are makeshift things' (107) therefore makes sense: of course, the narration of place is only a step in the process of inventing space, or, in other words, a step in the process of attaching meaning to place. At the exact moment that the narration is finished, a meaning is attached to the place and the space is invented. It is precisely this *narration* of space, this process of giving-meaning-to-place, that I want to study in this thesis, because it is here that any 'existing' meaning can be negotiated. For if space is meaningful place, then that means space is always (wo)manmade, produced. And if space is produced, that means that 1. The spaces we encounter every day are being reproduced by us and by others every day, and 2. Because these spaces are (re)producible, they must also be 'reworkable': because the meanings attributed to places are invented, they can also be reinvented. These two processes are foregrounded in my three case studies: through their narration of space, these works both put emphasis on the fact that space is produced and they try, in their distinct ways, to rethink certain existing spaces.

Now that I have explained how De Certeau arrived at what he perceives to be the relation between narration and space, I come back to the part of his argument that forms the basis of my own interest in the narration of space: his statement that stories are spatial trajectories and/or

means of transportation. He names these narrative means of transportation after the Greek means for mass transportation: *metaphorai.* De Certeau explains:

> [N]arrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes. By means of a whole panoply of codes, ordered ways of proceeding and constraints, they regulate changes in space (or moves from one place to another) made by stories in the form of places put in linear or interlaced series: from here (Paris), one goes there (Montargis); this place (a room) includes another (a dream or a memory); etc. (115)

De Certeau thus explains that stories, 'whether everyday or literary', have the capacity to literally act as 'metaphors', as means of transportation for all involved – readers, writers, listeners, and characters (115). As such, stories also help create and maintain the spaces involved by giving them a place within linguistic realities: 'sayings and stories . . . organize places through the displacements they "describe"'(116). In the three books I will analyze in the chapters to come, this process, that I would call 'narrative transportation', takes a central place in both form and narrative. Leïla Sebbar's *Lettres parisiennes* takes the reader from Paris to Algeria, back to Paris, then to Canada with Nancy Huston, to the French countryside, and back to Paris again, while on the level of the extradiegese we only shift from one Parisian neighbourhood to another. Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen* is also written in the form of letters – or rather e-mails, written between Sweden and, supposedly, Tunisia. On the level of the intradiegese, however, the stories also travel back and forth between Sweden and Tunisia. The different parts of Hafid Bouazza's *Paravion* take place in alternately a small village in the country Morea and the city Paravion. The reader follows the characters as they migrate from Morea to Paravion, yet is also taken back to the characters in Morea, those who stayed behind. The process of transport is more complex in this novel than in the other works, as the different spaces between which the reader travels slowly start to blur into one another until one cannot be sure anymore in which space the story takes place. The fact that Morea and Paravion are phantasmatic spaces makes this all even more complicated and interesting, especially because they make rather explicit references to real spaces – while simultaneously their inventedness and literariness is foregrounded. In all three of the works, however, the story, in the words of De Certeau, 'links places together' and makes 'itineraries' out of these places. The story can be considered a means of transportation, as well as a means for organizing space. Moreover, De Certeau confirms that stories can establish changes in the spaces they feature, simply through their narration of the places involved. Again: if it is through narration that place gains meaning, than the significance of place can also be adjusted by narration.

Like De Certeau, phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard acknowledges that stories have the capacity of transporting the reader or listener through spaces, and that they somehow 'practice' space. Yet Bachelard takes the term 'metaphor' far more literary than De Certeau does, and he

proclaims his wish to demonstrate the 'radical difference' he perceives between metaphor and *image*, which works out in favor of the latter term[2]. Bachelard: 'La métaphore vient donner un corps cornet à une impression difficile à exprimer. La métaphore est relative à une être psychique différent d'elle. l'Image, œuvre de l'Imagination absolue, tient au contraire tout son être de l'imagination' (79). Whereas the metaphor is a fabricated image 'without roots' (79), linking two things together that are already there, already real, the image is a construct of the imagination and therefore a more genuine and more promising medium of expression, as it is capable of uttering originality and difference – and thus, literariness. Bachelard gives an example of the different ways image and metaphor manifest themselves, as he writes:

> Par exemple, quand l'ouvert et le fermé vont jouer métaphoriquement, devons-nous durcir ou adoucir la métaphore? Répéterons-nous, dans le style du logicien : il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée ? Et trouverons-nous dans cette sentence un instrument d'analyse vraiment efficace pour un passion humaine ? (199)

Obviously, his answer is 'no'. To Bachelard, the advantage of the image over the metaphor is the fact that contrary to the metaphor, which links 'already existing' or 'real life' places, the image is not obliged to obey the rules of the *logiciens.* The image is celebrated for its capacity to invoke *newness*, and to depict spaces that do not necessarily refer to existing spaces. The notion of image, that owes its whole existence to the practice of imagination, is thus a better term to describe that which a story gives its readers or listeners. However, I think that Bachelard's statements do not contradict De Certeau's playful reference to the 'metaphor' as a practice of transportation – but that, on the contrary, they form a useful intertextual addition to them as they emphasize the crucial role played by the *imagination* in the literary narration of space.

Imagination seems to receive a lot of attention in contemporary critical theory. Arjun Appadurai famously called imagination 'a key component of the new global order', and in her *New Germans, New Dutch*, Liesbeth Minnaard wonders whether literature could be considered an embodiment of this 'key component' (Minnaard 51). Azade Seyhan also refers to Appadurai when she explains the value of literature when it comes to thinking about culture. She writes:

> Arjun Appadurai convincingly argues that a cultural study of globalization and "new cosmopolitanisms" requires an understanding of how imagination functions as a major social

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[2] As I was struck by the fact that both De Certeau and Bachelard refer to the notion of 'metaphor' when they talk about the narration of space, I found it important to compare their uses of the term here. However, I take it that where Bachelard is talking about the use of the stylistic use of the metaphor in literature and its inadequacy when it comes to the expression (or *translation*) of space, De Certeau rather uses the original etymologic meaning of the word '*metaphorai*' to explain in which ways a narrative is capable of practicing space.

force in the contemporary world, creating alternative prescriptions for identity, agency, and

solidarity. (Seyhan 7)

How do we then detect this major social force? Where does it come to expression? Like Minnaard, Seyhan perceives literature as a concrete and assignable expression of the 'force' called imagination, and she believes in the capacity of literature to demonstrate and evoke or produce such alternative forms of 'identity, agency and solidarity'.

In other recent works, imagination is explicitly connected to (narrating) space – and these are the theories which are, of course, the most interesting for my thesis. In the impressive book *Thinking Space* , edited by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, some of the most important of these theories are discussed. In the introduction of this work, Crang and Thrift state: 'this collection asks us to engage with the role that the concept of space plays in structuring thought and language' (7). There is, for example, a chapter on Michel De Certeau, whom I have already introduced as a major influence on my own ways of thinking about space. Moreover, there is a chapter by Derek Gregory on Said's rather 'geographically' oriented cultural theory and his concept of 'imagined space': "Edward Said's Imaginative Geographies". In the beginning of this chapter, Gregory motivates his choice to study Said in this context: 'What I find myself doing,' [Said] once declared, is 'rethinking geography.' Now professors of comparative literature do not usually speak like this, and when Said goes on to suggest that '…we are perhaps now acceding to a new, invigorated sense of looking at the struggle over geography in interesting and imaginative ways', then it is, I think, time for us to consider what he has in mind (320)'. So Said, a comparative literature scholar, explicitly links studying literature to what he calls 'rethinking space'. It is precisely in *imagination* that he perceives a common ground for literature and geography. He shows how cultures are built up out of assumptions of 'we' and a limit to that we, beyond which we find 'they'. The concepts of 'we' and 'they' are imagined with the help of a sense of place. Gregory:

> What Lévi-Strauss called 'the science of the concrete'—what Said calls 'the economy of
>
> objects and identities'— depends on the ordered, systematic and differentiated assignment
>
> of *place*. This spatial metaphoric is a vehicle for the fabrication of identity, Said argues,
>
> through the 'universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours"
>
> and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs"'. (Crang 313)

Central here is thus an *imaginative* value attached to space, which determines the ways people think culture and practice culture. In my research I noticed that most theories concerning the 'imagination of space' derive from the work of Bachelard in some way or another, and Said is no exception to this rule. Directly after this quotation, a reference to Bachelard is made when Crang continues:

> Said means this in a literal sense. Following Bachelard, he describes the practice as a *poetics*
>
> *of space:* 'The objective space of a house—its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms—is far less

important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel: thus a house may be haunted or homelike, or prisonlike or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here'. (313)

This quotation from an English translation of Bachelard's *La poétique de l'espace* makes apparent that if we want to understand the formation of culture and if we want to start thinking about how to rethink the binary structure that seems to be a hegemonic feature of almost all cultural discourses, we need to go through the 'poetics' or 'grammar' of space and acknowledge the fact that space acquires meaning through processes of imagination. In my hypothesis, the three works of literature that I have chosen as case studies somehow rethink or rework these imaginative values endowed with particular spaces. For if these values are imaginative – which would make them no less real or effective – they are of course open to re-imagination, to re-thinking. In each of these European migrant novels, the 'poetic process' that undeniably takes place in literature entails the renegotiation of the meanings attached to particular spaces. It seems crucial, then, to think about the possible ways in which these meanings can be rethought and renegotiated. I will introduce a concept developed by Michel Foucault which to my opinion explains quite well how the renegotiation of meanings of space can take place, and therefore forms an interesting tool for my analysis of this practice of renegotiation.

Heterotopias

 In his article "Of Other Spaces" in *Diacritics* (1986), Foucault introduces the concept of 'heterotopia'. Heterotopias or counter-sites are spaces 'that have the curious property of being in a relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect' (24). Like Said (who was, of course, greatly indebted to Foucault), Foucault acknowledges that he builds on the phenomenological ideas about space and imagination introduced by Bachelard, whose work he calls 'monumental'. He states that Bachelard's work has taught us that 'we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well' (23). He adds: 'We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another '(23). The era we live in, proclaims Foucault, is not only first and foremost the epoch of space (23). He states that our epoch 'is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites'(23). This last argument is the crucial one from which Foucault moves on to the introduction of the concept of heterotopia. After claiming that space to us means 'the

relations among sites', he distinguishes two different types of spaces that are in relation to all the other sites and that through this relation change these other sites somehow: utopias and heterotopias. Utopias are imagined spaces that somehow build upon an existing space – as they are imagined, perfect versions of that space. Heterotopias, on the other hand, are

> a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it *may* be possible to indicate their location in reality [emphasis mine] (24).

A heterotopia is thus a space that is not quite physical and not quite imagined at the same time. It may be found in reality: Foucault for example considers the theater a heterotopia. One of the principles of heterotopia: 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault 25). The theater is a place that simultaneously exists in reality as a physical space, while it is on the other hand a place where many imagined/virtual sites can come together. In the theater, these imagined spaces are in dialogue with all kinds of existing spaces, and they not only represent, but also contest and invert these existing spaces. The theater can moreover be multiple spaces at the same time.

Another example of a heterotopia mentioned by Foucault is the mirror. He explains:

> starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. . . . [The mirror] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through the virtual point which is over there. (24)

In other words: like the theater, the mirror, which is in principle a physical space, acts as a virtual space whenever one looks at it and sees oneself connected to one's environment – but what one sees is in fact a reference to the reality of space and not *equal to* this reality. The mirror acts as a space that is half physical, half virtual: it can exist only *in relation to* physical/existing space, but never *as* it. In many stories, the mirror has been featured as a heterotopia. Even though there are no significant mirrors present in *Montecore, Lettres parisiennes* and *Paravion*, there are spaces in those narratives that function as heterotopias and that to my opinion can be best compared to the mirror in Foucault. The reason that I focus on the mirror in Foucault's article rather than on, for example, the colony as a heterotopia, is that it is a more obviously *virtual* space. As became clear in the earlier citation, Foucault is of the opinion that heterotopias do not necessarily have to be located in reality (although most of his examples are). The mirror is only a space in the broadest sense of the word – not like a library is a space, for example, but rather like a desk: usually, it would be defined as an

object, but under some particular circumstances we could also call it a 'space'. The mirror may thus often be an object rather than a space, yet *in* the mirror there is a *space,* and that space is moreover a virtual one, since it links up simultaneously the 'mirror' and 'other spaces', and since it changes whenever the space it reflects changes ánd whenever we change the position of the mirror. A heterotopia is not just an image or a metaphor that takes one from an existing to an imagined place, as is the case with a utopia. Like utopias, heterotopias exist only in relation to existing spaces. But where this relation in case of the utopia is one way (the existing space forms a basis on which the imagined space is constructed), the heterotopia rather seems to make several existing and/or imagined spaces meet and contest or invert them through their relation to each other; through their encounter. Heterotopias show us the possibilities and limits of physical spaces and stretch, complicate, change or invert those limits and possibilities through the (imagined) formation of new relations between physical spaces. They do not have to obey the rules of physical space, so that existing spaces can be found in 'strange' combinations and in 'new' relations to each other within the space of the heterotopia.

In my case studies, there are several narrative elements to be found that could be analyzed as heterotopias. Some of them resemble Foucault's 'colony' heterotopia, others are more like his 'mirror'. These elements are reflections of several actual spaces that come together in particular combinations in a heterotopic space that is part virtual, part physical. There are, for example, the memories of the feminist movement in Paris 1977-1980 in *Lettres parisiennes* that together constitute a heterotopia. But there are also the flying carpets and the 'paper' girl/Mamoerra in *Paravion* that I will study in the light of this concept. It seems useful to acknowledge the possibility that literature can be 'heterotopic'. Particular works of literature have since long been considered 'utopic literature', as they stage a utopia while referring back to the reality on which this utopia is based. To me, it seems particularly helpful to be able to seek the three works of 'European migrant literature' that I am about to analyze for heterotopias, as a heterotopias are relatively easy-to-recognize ways to rework space; the concept of heterotopia thus gives me the tools to analyze what it is that happens in the 'spaces in the narrative', in ways similar to Foucault's when he studies what happens in the 'space in the mirror'. I will be looking at those spaces in the books that, like Foucaults mirror, are 'at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived [they have] to pass through the virtual point which is over there'. The virtual point, in this case, is the narrative: a linguistic surface that seemingly reflects everything it encounters, like a mirror, but that in fact deforms, reforms, and transforms the physical spaces it refers to into a narrated spaces that together form a story.

Imagined Spaces of Cultural Labor

In "The Spaces of Transnational Literature", Birgit Kaiser paraphrases Leslie Adelson when she writes: 'Instead of explaining the writers' literary experiments and creative work by their affiliation to a nation or cultural collective, we should, Adelson pleads, rather take the imaginative labor of their texts serious and explore the "imagined spaces of cultural labor" they create' (2,3). In her book *New Germans, New Dutch*, Liesbeth Minnaard also refers to Adelson's perception of 'literary narratives of migration as particular "labor of imagination"'(52). In this groundbreaking chapter "Against Between: A Manifesto" from the book *Unpacking Europe*, Leslie Adelson explains that this cultural labor entails the critical and radical rethinking of cultural orientation (247). For according to Adelson, the way we think about culture has to change radically if we ever want to really go beyond repeating binary oppositions, cultural essentialism, etcetera: 'Instead of reifying different cultures as fundamentally foreign, we need to understand culture itself differently'(246). The imaginative sites where this 'labor' is carried out she calls *Orte des Umdenkens*: places for rethinking. Central to Adelson's 'manifesto' is the question: 'What can the cultural labor of reading and writing literary texts achieve that political debates can only obscure' (244)? The answer, I guess, can be found in the imaginative powers of literary texts – what I would call the 'literariness' of literature. For, as Adelson argues convincingly:

> Creative writing and critical thought certainly make reference to concrete places in the world, where people and nations have loved, lost, struggled, and died. These places haunt human imagination, but the imagined spaces of cultural labor cannot be mapped or measured with surveyor's tools. (247)

The three books which this thesis seeks to analyze cannot be seen apart from the concrete places in the world to which they refer, and to the migration between those places which they foreground; yet simultaneously, the references are never anything but references and the spaces in these works are always textual ones and can, therefore, only be studied as such – as *narrated* and *narrative spaces*.

De Certeau states that to him, 'Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice' (115). He explains how space, once it is being narrated, organizes reality into two categories:

> The opacity of the body in movement . . . is what indefinitely organizes a *here* in relation to an *abroad*, a "familiarity" in relation to a "foreignness". A spatial story is in its minimal degree a *spoken* language, that is, a linguistic system that distributes places insofar as it is *articulated* by an "enunciatory focalization", by an act of practicing it. (130)

A spatial story, according to De Certeau thus (re)produces divisions between familiarity and foreignness. This (re)production of binary thinking about what is 'same' and what is 'other' is of course also a typical heritage of colonial thought. Without going into a sort of chicken-and-egg question here (did the way we narrate space help to establish colonialism or did colonialism shape

the way we narrate space?), I will simply state that in my view, the three works I will analyze are interesting because they rethink the way the 'here' *normally* stands in relation to 'an abroad', and that they do so exactly by narrating space: through literary narration, they 'reorganize' places by articulating them in unconventional ways. In my thesis, then, the concept of 'spatial practice' (De Certeau) overlaps sometimes with the notion of 'heterotopia' (Foucault) and sometimes with that of 'cultural labor' and 'negotiation' (Adelson). Within these narratives, space is rearticulated and conventional meanings attached to spaces are being reworked and renegotiated; and cultural labor takes place as a process between reader and narrative: in order to rethink space, both the articulation of space (or its 'translation' into language) *and* the experience of reading and understanding that articulation are necessary, and they are entangled in a constant interaction. In all three of my case studies, there are phantasmatic or imagined spaces to be found, and some of the spaces in these 'European migrant stories' can moreover be considered 'heterotopic' spatial practices.

Now that I have tried to melt together several theories around what Bachelard tends to call the 'cancérisation géométrique du tissue linguistique', I will continue with an analysis of the literary texts of my choice (192). In 'Against Between', Adelson asks a difficult question: 'What can the cultural labor of reading and writing literary texts achieve that political debates can only obscure?' (244). In Bensmaïa's explanation of his book title I found something that might come close to an answer. He writes:

> My nations are experimental in that they are above all nations that writers have had to
> imagine or explore as if they were territories to rediscover and stake out, step by step,
> countries to invent and to draw while creating one's language. (8)

It is thus in language and in the process of creating one's own written language that one can 'experiment' with space in unique ways. In *Against Between,* Adelson tries to point out where and when this happens in works by Şenocak and Zaimoğlu. Before she starts her analysis, she asks: 'If critical attention shifts away from borderlands and national boundaries to imagined houses and other social spaces of Turco-German culture, what insights flash into view?' (249). What insights, indeed? The imagined houses Adelson discovers in contemporary German migrant literature seem comparable to Bensmaïa's experimental nations. Inspired by Adelson's questions, my own thesis will evolve around questions like: what literary strategies are used to evoke new insights about the spaces involved? And how do these narrations of space negotiate and rethink the cultural experience of Maghreb-to-Europe migration?

Second Chapter

Autobiographic Writing as a Spatial Practice in *Lettres parisiennes*

In each instance, a terrain must be constructed and a way out of the maze of languages must be found at all costs – a way of staking out one's territory, like an animal – of not leaving one's Umwelt. (Bensmaïa 14)

In this second chapter , I will analyze *Lettres parisiennes*, an exchange of letters between Nancy Huston and Leïla Sebbar dating from the period between May 1983 and January 1985. Huston, a Canadian writer who moved to France as a student, wrote several non-fiction works but is famous for her fiction writing. She has been awarded the Canadian Governor General's Award and the French Prix Goncourt des Lycéens and Prix Femina, amongst other prizes. One of the interesting things about her work is that she writes (primarily) in her second language, taking advantage of the distance she feels towards the French language. Tara Smithson, a fellow literature graduate student who published on Sebbar in the online journal *Virgule*, focuses in her article on the use of language as a creative tool in *Lettres parisiennes*. She explains how it seems to be Huston's goal to get creative inspiration out of the struggle that writing in a second language will most definitely be to her. Smithson then states:

> Sebbar echoes a similar belief that the tension between her linguistic upbringing and her culture is the reason she became a writer. What some perceive as a misalignment might prevent some forms of comfort, but it also staves off complacency. (no pg.nr.)

I agree with Smithson that this uncomfortable tension created by the constant reflection on language may also be one of the interesting aspects of Sebbar's work. But Sebbar's linguistic situation is definitely very different from Huston's; Sebbar was raised in French and speaks, writes and reads only that language. She was born in Algeria to a French mother and an Algerian father, and moved to France as a teenager. Not being able to speak Arabic prevented her from ever feeling integrated into Algerian culture, while in France she feels she belongs to neither the native French nor the Beur community. Sebbar has written several novels. She also writes non-fiction, such as her shocking survey *On tue les petites filles*, on domestic violence in France, and her numerous essays. Many of her publications – whether fictional, non-fictional, or something in between – are strongly autobiographic. Her writing always deals with both Algeria *and* France and she often directly juxtaposes the two, like for example in her *Mes Algéries en France*, *Journal de mes Algéries en France* and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre*, which were published in consecutive 'suites' from 2004 onwards.

Lettres parisiennes consists of a number of letters that Sebbar and Huston wrote to each other in the first half of the eighties. Both women live in Paris, and from their different

neighborhoods (and holiday getaways) they write each other letters about writing and living in 'voluntary exile'. They both claim that it is only in their writing that they truly feel 'at home', while anywhere else they feel like strangers. Of course, *Lettres parisiennes* is a correspondence and the content of the writing by the one writer thus responds to the writing by the other. Still I will focus primarily on the 'chapters' written by Sebbar – not only because, as a writer, she fits into my 'Maghreb-to-Europe-migrant' frame, but also because I feel that it is in her writing that the most interesting observations on (and phantasmatic play with) place can be found.

In *Lettres parisiennes,* Sebbar makes clear that she distances herself from the label 'migrant writer'. She calls her cultural (or national) position a 'position particulière':

> Je suis Française, écrivain français de mère française et de père algérien…, et les sujets de mes livres ne sont pas mon identité ; ils sont le signe, les signes de mon histoire de croisée, de métisse obsédée par sa route et les chemins de traverse, obsédée par la rencontre surréaliste de l'Autre en du Même, par le croisement contre nature et lyrique de la terre et de la ville, de la science et de la chair, de la tradition et de la modernité, de l'Orient et de l'Occident. (125)

Immediately after declaring that she is a French writer, Sebbar makes an effort to explain that although her experiences as a French-born 'migrant' from Algeria heavily shape her writing, the subjects in her books are not to be confused with her as a person or with her identity as a writer. It is not her background that makes her writing interesting; neither is the main goal of her writing to make her reader interested in her personal background. It is, rather, what her writing does to that background that makes her work interesting. In "Against Between", Adelson introduces the concept of 'imaginative' or 'cultural labor' as a guiding concept for reading contemporary European migrant literature:

> Instead of explaining the writers' literary experiments and creative work by their affiliation to a nation or cultural collective, we should, Adelson pleads, rather take the imaginative labor of their texts serious and explore the "imagined spaces of cultural labor" . . . they create. (Kaiser 2,3)

But what imaginative labor is performed by and in a piece of literature that foregrounds its own autobiographic value so strongly as *Lettres parisiennes* does? Out of my three case studies, *Lettres parisiennes* seems the book that is most obviously autobiographical in tone. Where the other works bring some autobiographic elements into a fictional story, Huston and Sebbar present their book as almost transparently autobiographical.

Although there are many theoretical works that deal with the genre of autobiography in general, it seems most useful in this context to call on literary theory scholar Azade Seyhan. Not only is she an expert on Maghrebi literature, but she also explains in her work that she sees a direct link

between the genre of autobiography and postcolonial literature and she explicitly theorizes the use of autobiographic writing in migrant literature. Both in her book *Writing Outside the Nation* and in her chapter in the book *Culture/Contexture* called "Ethnic Selves/Ethnic Signs: Invention of Self, Space, and Genealogy in Immigrant Writing", she writes about what she, after Françoise Lionnet, calls 'autobiographical voices' in migrant literature. Seyhan wrote an article on Assia Djebar's and Nazim Hikmet's work in which she analyzes their writing as an autobiography of 'witnessing': these writers present autobiographical elements through the voice of the narrator as a witness. This is a very different approach from Sebbar and Huston's in *Lettres parisiennes*. But Seyhan states: 'Modern immigrant writing is almost exclusively autobiographical in nature'(*Culture/Contexture* 180). This *does* also apply to *Lettres parisiennes,* and it is of course an interesting observation. If modern migration writing is almost by definition autobiographical, then it is not surprising that these books have been studied so often as anthropological case studies of multiculturalism rather than as literary works: after all, the narrative draws the attention of the reader directly to the author and her or his own migrant background. But Seyhan emphasizes that integrating autobiographical elements in a work of fiction is nothing new, nor anything that can only be found in works about displacement. 'Of course, autobiographical features in works of fiction have always been a part of literary convention and do not subvert our expectations of the genre of fiction' (181). So however easy it seems to completely buy in to autobiographic writing in migrant literature and view this literature as a multicultural case study, Seyhan is of the opinion that with its use of autobiography, migrant literature 'defies and redefines the boundaries of [that] genre' and that 'life stories of modern immigrants have radically transformed reader expectations of autobiography' (181). She explains that contemporary migrant literature freely mixes autobiography and fiction, as 'These writers do not see the presence of fictionalized experience in their accounts as a threat to the validity of autobiography' (181). I think this nuanced explanation by Seyhan is helpful when one reads *Lettres parisiennes*. Despite the fact that this text seems a straightforwardly non-fictional autobiographical exchange of letters, I will point out that there are in fact some 'fictionalized' or 'phantasmatic' elements in the narrative and that these are the elements that draw our attention to space. In an interview, Sebbar explains:

> Nous avons eu envie de prolonger un travail de réflexion, cette fois sur l'exil, la maternité, l'écriture et les relations entre ces trois concepts. Nous nous sommes engagées dans une correspondance réelle, nous habitions toutes les deux en Paris et nous nous sommes vraiment écrit des lettres, envoyées par la poste de 1983 à 1985, je crois, régulièrement. Nous avions le projet de les publier, si cela nous paraissait intéressant. Parfois nous écrivions des lettres où nous disions que cela était inutile (elles n'ont pas été

publiées), nous n'étions pas tout à fait d'accord sur la définition de l'exil, de nos exils. (Kian

    129)

This is not a fictional narrative into which some autobiographic elements might be woven. Instead, it is a composition of two autobiographical reflections on migration and 'exile'. Meanwhile, when one studies the text more closely one gets the impression that the setting of the various stories is in fact constructed and thought through; very much a literary texts, despite its seeming transparency. There is, for example, a tension play in the correspondence. Often, when one of the authors asks the other to tell her something, the reply is positive yet the answer is postponed to a later letter. Sebbar's answer to Huston's demand is: 'Je te reparlerai du retour au pays natal…, mais toi avant…' (21) In her next letter, however, she seems ready to write about returning to her birth country – and then suddenly changes the subject and writes about domestic violence. Then Huston writes in her reply: 'J'ai hâte que tu me parles de l'Algérie: de ton image de la France pendant que tu vivais là-bas, de tes amours et tes haines toutes faites à propos de ce pays' (37). Meanwhile, the reader's curiosity is raised letter after letter. Only after forty pages does Sebbar start to answer Huston's questions. This kind of tension rising or tension building is typical for *Lettres parisiennes*. The text plays a game of promise and delay with the implied reader, who knows nothing about Sebbar's life.

The writing is also very self-reflexive: both writers write about the processes of writing a lot, as if to remind their readers time and time again that they are reading something that was once being written. In this case, it is thus through the constructedness of the correspondence, through the composition of the reflections that imaginative labor is being performed. In the first letters, the subject of (voluntary) exile is set forth and appointed the 'theme' of the correspondence. 'Exile' stands for the outsidership Sebbar and Huston both feel they suffer in their lives in Paris. Then follow many letters in which the concept of exile is touched upon, circumscribed, torn apart and redefined. 'Exile' no longer describes a state in which an individual far from her or his native country finds her-/himself; instead, it becomes something personal, a characteristic or almost a 'body part' of both writers, to which they ascribe various personal qualities. To Sebbar, exile is first and foremost a political state, whereas to Huston it has to do with language a great deal. Both authors discover that exile is for them rather a source of creative inspiration than a state from which they suffer, and both express at a certain point their fears to 'lose' their exile. In the final letter of the correspondence, Huston concludes with emphasis: 'Sans doute, l'avais-tu compris avant moi: l' « exil » n'est que *le fantasme qui nous permet de fonctionner*, et notamment d'écrire' (193). Exile, thus, is no longer the restriction or suffering it seemed in the beginning of the book : thanks to their mutual discovery that it an illusion or phantasmatic state, the women find a way to put exile to their will. Thus, instead of a free-flowing conversation about topics that come up randomly, this is a work with one straightforward theme – exile – and that theme undergoes a certain 'building' throughout the

narration. It develops, gains meaning and eventually, after much re-considering of the concept, Huston and Sebbar find some sort of 'solution' for it: by labeling it a phantasmatic state, each can perhaps speak and write about it without fear and put it to their own use. That is what is gained by the cultural labor performed in this text, the labor that consists of a crucial concept in migrant terminology being consciously narrated, re-thought and re-negotiated in a way that is moreover very transparent: the reader can follow every step of the process.

Even though we learn from the interview citation that actual letters were being sent[3], these two examples suggest that *Lettres parisiennes* is in fact a fairly constructed piece of literature. Azade Seyhan also recognized the significance of this foregrounded constructedness in contemporary migrant literature:

> By remembering, reappropriating, and allegorizing in language, the ethnic immigrant subject invents a new cultural space for her personal and communal self. . . . [T]he autobiographical act duplicates the gestures of all metafictional texts that reflect on their own construction to suggest that our experience of reality is similarly constructed. (Seyhan 184)

Lettres parisiennes is indeed, a *metafictional* text, in the sense that it reflects on its own constructedness. Linda Hutcheon, the renowned narratologist responsible for the wide use if the term metafiction in the contemporary field of literary theory, writes that 'metafiction in general calls attention, overtly or covertly, to the fact that it is text first and foremost, that it is a human construct made up of and by words' (Hutcheon 2). Disguised as autobiography, *Lettres parisiennes* would seem transparent and reliable to a reader; but as I have shown above, the text is in fact self-reflexive about its own constructedness, about the fact that it, in Hutcheon's words, is 'first and foremost' 'a human construct'. I will point out that it is through its creative, at least partly phantasmatic narration of space that the text manages to give shape to autobiographic and metafictional musings about exile, and at the same time makes us see that 'our own experience' of *space* is, to use Seyhan's words, 'similarly constructed' (184).

<div align="center">Divisions, Spacelessness and Phantasmatic Space</div>

Lettres parisiennes is mainly filled with rich, descriptive narrations of personal experiences and memories. At a first glance, space may not even be an important issue in this book. According to my hypothesis it is, however, precisely through these memories of migration and the way they are narrated that space becomes an issue. First of all, I agree with Seyhan's claim that the

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[3] This is one of those problematic instances when lived experiences of the author as a person, her own reflections on her work and the infamous 'author's intention' start to blur. I will thus try not to base my impression of the text on Sebbar's explanation of her and Huston's intentions writing it, but instead focus on the fact that this correspondence has finally been bundled together into an actual piece of literary writing, whether this was the intention of the author's or not. This is only to say that following my interpretation of Rebecca Walkowitz's advice, I will keep going back and forth between close-reading my case studies and 'reading' the reality they refer to in order not to neglect or overemphasize the one or the other.

autobiographical 'voice' in migrant literature is somehow split, fragmented. This then seems to lead to narratives of displacement and even 'spacelessness'. In an attempt to intercept this spacelessness, new, phantasmatic spaces are created – spaces which could for example take the form of heterotopias. I will take you through this theory step by step.

In *Lettres parisiennes*, there are several instances where Sebbar mentions perceiving a sort of division within herself. She writes for example: 'Je m'aperçois que cette *division* dont j'ai pu souffrir, aujourd'hui j'y tiens et je veux la préserver' (29). This division she first perceived as a torment, she has now come to recognize as a trade of her*self*, and one, moreover, that she wishes to preserve. 'C'est ma conscience de l'exil qui m'a fait comprendre et vivre la division', she writes (31). And as I explained earlier, it is from that 'conscience de l'exil' that both Huston and Sebbar take their inspiration to write, especially to write fiction. Exile and division are the basis from which they depart every day, their 'earth' in the words of Sebbar: 'mon terriroire, ma terre, l'exil…' (185). But because of the experience of exile, that 'terre' is double (two countries), and that 'basis' is also double – or divided into two. In her article in *Culture/Contexture*, Azade Seyhan observes: 'The autobiographical self in immigrant writing is not a unified subject. The possibility of self-representation is intricately linked to a collective memory and represents explicitly or implicitly conflicts with past and present contexts' (*Culture/Contexture* 187,88). And if the autobiographical self is not a unified subject, this will also mean that her or his narrative 'voice' is not a unified one: 'Contemporary memoirs written in exile and migrancy are rarely expressions of a unified voice' (*Writing Outside the Nation* 66). I have mentioned earlier the term she therefore uses to describe autobiography in (exile and) migrant literature: 'autobiographical *voices'*, plural, precisely because there is no unity to be found in the narration. Moreover, if the collective memories to which the autobiographical subject is indebted are memories of division and displacement – as is pre-eminently the case when the place of origin and the place migrated to are connected by colonial relations – then this will, without a doubt, have an effect on the (narrative) identity that subject creates for itself. The autobiographical subject will claim, time after time, to belong partly to (or in) one place and partly to (or in) the other, and has thus no place where she can wholly belong, where she can exist as a whole, a unity. Sebbar illustrates this quite aptly when, writing about this division, she asks: 'Tu sais que la France dit «outre-mer » pour ses territoires ?' (31). The sea is used here to make the separation between France and its colonies concrete and explicit. The division within the autobiographical subject, even though largely psychological, is again talked about in spatial terms: it is a division between the one place, Algeria, and the one on the other side of the sea, France. The sea becomes a metaphor for exile: between the two nations or two 'halves' of a whole, there is a space that is both a border designed to keep the two apart and an empty space that links the two together. In their letters to each other, Sebbar and Huston express the same sentiment. Huston:

> Quand, après un an ou deux d'absence, je descends d'avion à Montréal, à Boston ou à New
>
> York, il y a toujours une mince épaisseur d'étrangeté au tout début : je perçois mon propre
>
> pays comme un pays en même temps légèrement « déplacé ». (Huston 25)

On whatever side of the water they find themselves, somehow they always feel displaced (or, they feel as though their countries are 'displaced'). It is only the habit of crossing that water that is truly theirs. And they like to keep it that way, for when Sebbar reflects on perceiving herself as 'divided', she writes about '[c]ette division en danger permanent d'unité, d'unification, je ne sais quel serait le mot juste' (29).

Cultural theorist Jane Hiddleston devoted a chapter to Sebbar in one of her books. She, also, puts emphasis on the strong sense of displacement in Sebbar's work, and on the sense of a loss of belonging, a loss of community:

> Sebbar associates exile with rupture. Exile is an experience of displacement and transition
>
> that is accompanied by a sense of loss. The exiled individual is marginal, dislocated from
>
> conventional communal structures, which themselves seem demarcated and contrastive
>
> (Hiddleston 157).

Exile, and the (negative) feelings that are attached to it, are in Sebbar's work internalized as a feature of the autobiographical self that is accepted and even clung to. In *Lettres parisiennes,* Nancy Huston is even more clear about clinging to a sense of displacement. She even celebrates her displacement, as to her, it is what makes her literature valuable. But she also searches for ways to protect herself against it. In the final letter of the book, she explains to Sebbar:

> Vivre en France, pour moi, c'était choisir d' « étrangéïser » toutes mes habitudes : ma vie
>
> sociale, ma vie intime, et même, plus tard, ma relation à ma propre fille ; c'était faire de
>
> toutes ces choses une source d'étonnement perpétuellement renouvelée. Écrire en
>
> français, c'était donc un *double* éloignement : d'abord écrire, ensuite en français (ou plutôt
>
> l'inverse : d'abord en français, ensuite écrire). En d'autres termes, j'avais besoin de
>
> rendre mes pensées *deux fois* étranges, pour être sûre de ne pas retomber dans
>
> l'immédiateté, dans l'expérience brute sure laquelle je n'avais aucune prise. (Huston 196)

Like Sebbar, Huston perceives this displacement as a characteristic of exile and as a characteristic of her own person. However, she experiences it as painful to such an extent that she writes in French in order to protect herself against the possibility of an all too direct reflection upon it: she uses the distance the French language lends her to her own emotional benefit as she enlarges the distance between the autobiographical elements in her writing and herself as a writer.

Interestingly enough, Sebbar, who has only one language to her disposition, is not capable of doing this. In her work, these feelings of dividedness and displacement seem to lead to what Azade Seyhan calls an experience of 'spacelessness': the feeling of not 'having' a space at all

(*Culture/Contexture* 186). This is where the 'elsewhere' of exile becomes 'nowhere'. We can find traces of spacelessness in the letters: 'Je n' ai pas de lieu dans Paris', writes Sebbar (28). And a little further on in the book, the authors start to compare themselves to *nomads* rather than migrants: people who have no particular 'place' to belong to (61). In her chapter on Sebbar, Hiddleston asks: 'Can any community be formed out of the dispersal and deterritorialization of migrant experience? Must immigrant literature be deconstructive, or can it also be reconstructive?' (151). I understand her questions very well: especially the first few *lettres* connect migrancy/exile mainly to spacelessness. This seems a rather negative understanding of migration; one that deconstructs the conventional spatial practice of 'belonging' rather than constructs an alternative. But in *Culture/Contexture*, Azade Seyhan provides what I consider a counterargument to that reading. She states:

> . . . finding words for spacelessness becomes an invention of a different space or the creation of a different concept of space. This is an internal rather than external space, a space that does not mimic that of the native but one that re-presents a reflected sense of being – a being that incorporates having been. In this sense, "ethnic discourse is finally free to become a sober instrument of cultural construction without regrets over a lost world of mimetic reproduction. . . . In fact, ethnocultural construction is itself a possible world among others, a different strategy for creating a world of referents" (185, 86).

Even though this quotation seems rather abstract in this context, I still think it is very useful for my reading of *Lettres parisiennes*. Seyhan starts off by suggesting that in their attempt to express spacelessness in written language, the authors of migrant literature create in their writing either an alternative space or an alternative concept of space; their narratives somehow manage to practice space in a different way. This space is 'internal rather than external' and it is not mimetic, but rather reflective: it is not a realistic 'copy' or 'depiction', but a space which is open to discussion and which is only called into existence by the felt nostalgia, critique and the need to somehow 're-claim' or 're-possess' both of the spaces that make a migrant into a migrant. It is, perhaps, a space *within language* – either the language of the place of origin or the current European setting – rather than a space outside of language that is referred to in language. It may therefore be called a 'phantasmatic' space rather than the – more traditional – 'referential' space (Adelson 252). Sebbar's reflective and 'autobiographic' musings about her experiences of migration may thus not be as deconstructive as presumed earlier. Maybe there is more to them; maybe they are creative in nature after all. If we are willing to read the spaces in the letters as phantasmatic rather than strictly mnemonic – i.e. as memories of real space transparently put down into writing – we will perhaps have a better understanding of the significant 'cultural labor' that is being executed by contemporary migrant literature (Adelson 244 and onwards).

With Adelson, Seyhan and, eventually, Hiddleston, I believe that we should read contemporary migrant literature as creative rather than reflective. When it comes to the role of space in *Lettres parisiennes*, this starting point makes my reading a lot easier. For if this book should only consist of two women's reflections on their own sense of 'division' and their own experience of displacement, this would make a very short and uninteresting chapter. If, however, what happens in this text would be, to use Hiddleston's words once again, something reconstructive rather than a deconstructive, then this would mean that *Lettres parisiennes* evolves around not so much an autobiographical reflection on space but around *rethinking* space. To Sebbar, her own writing becomes her 'terre'. She writes to Huston :

> Sans enfant, j'aurais été sans terre et presque… sans corps… Je veux dire qu'ils m'ont été nécessaires pour marquer un territoire même hypothétique et mythique ; l'acte d'écrire m'est vital et constitue aussi un territoire… l'école de mon enfance dont je t'ai déjà parlé. C'est vrai aussi que comme tu le dis pour toi, l'exil est ma terre d'inspiration, de lyrisme, d'émotion, d'écriture. (135)

Apparently like the presence of her children, Sebbar's own writing constitutes a space for her that is hypothetical and mythical, a space that is meaningful because of a meaning she herself has attributed to it through her own narrations. Her exile is the experience that forms her inspiration for the creation of these narrations.

As Seyhan explains, the autobiographical mode of narration is explicitly suitable for showing, as a first step, *that* all space is produced and *how* this happens. Seyhan:

> The dialogic and self-reflexive tone of immigrant writing marks a space of intervention in the cultural contexts in which it moves. This writing registers its distance from social and cultural norms by questioning the logic of the traditions it has inherited as well as those it is subjected to in the new world. As a representation of a pastiche of conversations, of parable and allegory, it further defies any form of controlled narrative. (*Culture/Contexture* 186)

In *Lettres parisiennes*, Sebbar quite clearly intervenes in the process of (re)producing space by making it visible. With that she creates, exactly as Seyhan writes, a distance from the norms and the logic of this production as she re-examines the spaces she knows. She writes:

> C'est tellement long, lent, difficile de faire exister un paysage, le faire advenir à son monde, pour l'émotion. . . . Longtemps je n'ai rien senti pour Paris ; j'étais sans regard, indifférente. . . . Ces lieux ont été pour moi des déserts avant de devenir peu à peu des paysages, puis des pays, villes ou villages avec de la vie, des couleurs, un ciel, des collines, des arbres et des champs ou des bois aves des bêtes. Ils étaient sans histoires, la parole familiale ne leur avait pas donné corps et mythe. Ce silence de l'exil….

> . . . Il me faut de conditions si particulières, des détours si compliqués que parfois je
>
> désespère. Ce que je vois, là où je vis, est terre vierge même si l'histoire en est visible, jusqu'à
>
> ce que le paysage acquière de l'être. Si je crois lui avoir donné une âme…, alors il prend de
>
> l'histoire la charge émotionelle… et enfin je peux m'émouvoir…, enfin je ne perds plus la
>
> mémoire comme je l'ai fait pendant tant d'annéés. Alors je thésaurise en transportant cette
>
> mémoire-là, à ne pas perdre, dans de la fiction. (93)

In this passage – which I could not force myself to abbreviate – Sebbar manages to casually foreground the idea that space comes into existence once (hi)stories and myths attribute meaning to it, and that all of this happens in a rather laborious fashion. And she also shows that this can happen on a very personal level. At first, Sebbar writes, she felt nothing at all for Paris. It takes a while before a place becomes a space – before one has filled it with memories and stories so that it becomes meaningful. Even though the places in question might have a history that is widely known and commonly shared, like the *dijk* in my example in the first chapter, they still, according to Sebbar, need to be charged with some personal, emotional dimension before they are countries, landscapes, cities and villages in the sense of *spaces* to an individual, rather than merely places – or 'deserts', to borrow Sebbar's term. In order to attribute meaning to the places she encounters in France, Sebbar needs to see them from the linguistic and, above all, *phantasmatic* dimension of her own writing. Thus, the emphasis is once again on the fact that space is produced and that it is therefore open to reworking, and that that reworking could happen whenever a story about a place is being told by a person to another person who then understands the story and remembers its meaning. To me, this passage seems both a very direct reflection on thinking about space and a metatextual reflection on writing. Sebbar ponders about how, with her writing, she can give a place a soul, and how fiction allows her to 'preserve' the spaces she remembers. Bachelard already remarked: 'Le mot ne suffit pas, l'idée ne suffit pas, il faut que l'écrivain nous aide à renverser l'espace, à nous écarter de ce qu'on voudrait *décrire* . . .' (Bachelard 205). With the narration, the writer guides us, *makes* us a space by writing or rewriting for us the significance of a place. The text, however, depends on the reader as much as the writer, for it is only in a cooperation between the two that a text can practice space: the reader still has to read the space, which is created in and as text.

Sebbar's Counter-Spaces

In *Lettres parisiennes*, Huston and Sebbar recount how they feel and felt, on various instances, in their native countries, their holiday getaways, and their Parisian neighborhoods. In their narration of these spaces, their point of departure is the experience of migration and the feeling of what I would call 'disbelonging' and displacement that, for both of them, accompany this experience. If we accept De Certeau's idea that space is invented by the 'signifying practice' of telling ourselves and each

other 'legends' about place and that it is through these legends that we acquire certain spaces as familiar and label others foreign or unfamiliar, then Sebbar and Huston try their best to invert this practice by telling their readers new legends: stories of exile, stories about how they did and do not feel at home in this or that place – or how this or that space has no particular meaning to them. These stories are new or different in the sense that instead of attributing a story (and thus a meaning) to a place and turn it into a meaningful space, they attribute stories of exile and division and structure their narratives around places that are left behind and no longer exist in the same way. By structuring their reflections on exile around particular places, they rather attribute a lack of meaning to those places or turn them into phantasmatic spaces that can only be found in fiction, as 'exile' is eventually a phantasmatic state built up out of phantasmatic spaces. Both writers emphasize that, in their familiar, 'real', everyday environment, there is no space in which they feel at home, except for the virtual space of their own writing.

There is, however, one exception to that overall feeling of disbelonging. At several instances, Sebbar's letters evolve around her memories of her life in Paris in the years 1977 to 1980: there and then, she experienced for the first time a feeling of belonging that she can now only reach through the practice of writing fiction. She writes: 'Depuis quelques années, ce qui pouvait constituer, hors institution, hors convention, hors conformisme, notre terre, le lieu où nous avons pu nous rencontrer, nous retrouver, cette terre-là nous manque' (122). But once, that 'terre' was there : a 'Terre symbolique des femmes en rupture, terre nourricière d'élans, de désirs, de projets' (122). As becomes clear throughout the text, Sebbar refers here to the feminist movement she was part of in the late seventies in Paris. In the final part of this second chapter, I will point out how in Sebbar's text, Paris '77-'80 functions as a heterotopia.

At first, I thought Sebbar's references to her time at *Histoire d'elles* – the Paris based feminist journal she co-founded in 1977 – formed an almost utopic element in her letters. But it was a utopia that had actually been enacted, and that is being reproduced in the text. The memories about this place and period come to the reader as fragmented, nostalgic narrations of a space for new possibilities, for rupture, for imagination and breaking with tradition. Sebbar describes how it is in Paris in the years 1977 to 1980 that she found something – this rupture that creates new possibilities – that she afterwards only recovered in (her) literary fiction. She writes :

> À *Histoire d'elles* j'ai aimé (et je recherche désespérément cela, sachant aussi que c'est fini)
> ce lieu privilégie où se sont mêlés pendant plusieurs années, entre plusieurs femmes, le privé
> et le politique, dans une pratique autonome de travail et de jeu. J'aimais le mélange des
> genres dans l'équipe et dans le journal. C'est ce métissage des pays, des cultures, des corps,
> des vêtements, des accents, des voix, des gestes qui m'a attachée et je ne l'ai pas retrouvé

> ailleurs, **sauf dans une imaginaire relié de loin au réel**, dans des textes de fiction où je mets
>
> ce qui secrètement m'importe le plus. (90, 91)

Remarkable about Sebbar's writing about her time with *Histoire d'elles* in the years '77-'80 in Paris is the obviously geographic vocabulary used to narrate these memories. She refers to these experience as a 'lieu', and writes that she never encountered a situation like that 'ailleurs' (90, 91). The only 'place' where she has found something that approaches it is in her fictional writing, in a phantasmatic place that is only 'remotely' (another geographic term) related to reality. At a certain point, Sebbar herself compares her 'Paris '77-'80' to a utopia. She writes:

> Il n'y avait pas de modèle à quoi se conformer. Nous avons vécu un temps, un lieu, une
>
> pratique utopique et réels dans la faille où nous avons réussi à nous inscrire… Mais c'était
>
> une faille provisoire et peut-être que la gauche au pouvoir a fait le plein… La faille, nous
>
> n'avons plus l'énergie de la découvrir ou elle n'existe plus en marge, et nous ne voulons
>
> toujours pas entrer en institution, alors que ce serait possible… (91)

I would argue that this space and time, this 'pratique utopique' is a heterotopia rather than a utopia. Like utopias, heterotopias exist only in relation to existing spaces. But where this relation in case of the utopia is one way (the existing space forms a basis on which the imagined space is constructed), the heterotopia rather seems to make several existing and/or imagined spaces meet and contest or invert them through their relation to each other; through their encounter. The heterotopias, in Foucaults words, is 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality' (24). In *Lettres parisiennes*, what we learn about the author's life in Paris between '77 and '80 seems to fit this description by Foucault. This is an 'effectively enacted utopia', and it was called into existence as a counter-space for the discourse the author grew up in. Furthermore, *Lettres parisiennes* narrates a place and time that have existed 'physically', but in which virtual spaces come together (in order to constitute, together, what I have called a counter-space). Paris '77-'80 – or '*Histoire d'elles'*, with which Sebbar makes a reference to her life this period rather than to the actual magazine – refers simultaneously to a memory of a real life place and time, a community of women, a feminist leftist political movement, a magazine, a group of academics and a group of friends. Moreover, it functions as a metaphor for transnationalism, and it also forms the only place (and only time) where the narrator ever felt at home. And that is the reason, she writes, that 'je n'ai pas participé au travail sur l'exil avec Carmen, Simone, Barbara, Maria…' (91). For in this movement she was less in exile than others were:

> Elles s'appelaient les « Migrantes »et de fait elles l'étaient, plus que toi et moi puisque
>
> Simone est retournée au Brésil, Barbara en Allemagne et Maria au Cameroun; dès qu'elle le

pourra, Carmen retournera au Chili si elle ne l'a déjà fait. Et Rosi? Quel est son pays?

L'Australie ou l'Italie? Elle n'était peut-être pas encore au journal au moment des

« Migrantes ». Je sais qu'elle s'occupe d'un numéro des *Cahiers du GRIF* sur l'exil… (92)

In such a transnational company of migrants, forced exiles and cosmopolitans, Sebbar could no longer feel like a foreigner.

This cosmopolitan group of feminist intellectuals in Paris '77-'80 as it is featured in Sebbar's *Lettres* is a construction that consists of a physical place and a series of virtual ones: a community, an imagined home, a space for change and for opening up new ways of thinking – all of these narrated in very spatial terms. 'J'étais dedans. . . Je réussissais à faire, à produire, à parler avec d'autres, des femmes, moi qui me sentais si misogyne, souvent'. . . (91). Sebbar felt she was *inside* this community, inside this movement in a city that before and after those years had no meaning to her. To her, this was a space, and it was moreover a space in which she felt she belonged. And in order not to lose it, she re-constructs this space in her writing: '[J]e thésaurise en transportant cette mémoire-là, à ne pas perdre, dans de la fiction. . . . La fiction devient paysage sans ke secours de l'histoire…' (93)

Heterotopias, as Foucault explains, show us the possibilities and limits of physical spaces and stretch, complicate, change or invert those limits and possibilities through the (imagined) formation of new relations between physical spaces. They do not have to obey the rules of physical space, so that existing spaces can be found in 'strange' combinations and in 'new' relations to each other within the space of the heterotopia. The narrated 'space' of Paris '77-'80 in *Lettres parisiennes* is moreover marked (and instigated) by a clear break with the protagonist's traditional time. This break with tradition, according to Foucault, is one of the main characteristics (the fourth principle) of the *heterotopia*. Foucault: 'heterotopias are most often linked to slices of time . . . The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time' (26). The Paris Sebbar speaks about is definitely linked to a slice of time; the time slice 1977-1980 even crucial for the narration and understanding of the meaning of the particular place the text refers to. In this case, moreover, traditional time is post second-wave patriarchy this group of feminist intellectuals tries to establish a break with. While 'tearing down' their traditional time, this group of people encounters a space and time in the rupture they created in which their differences can continue to exist but stop to determine their positions in life. Although Sebbar was still able to look at herself as a French woman with an Algerian background, this did no longer make her feel like an outsider. If we consider all of this, it becomes clear that Paris '77-'80 can be considered a heterotopia or counter-space rather than a utopia or ideal space. Foucault: 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves

incompatible' (25). This seems to be precisely what is narrated here. But why is this heterotopia so important for the subject Sebbar in the letters? In one of her later letters to Huston, she writes:

> Je suis là, à la croisée, enfin sereine, à ma place, en somme, puisque je suis une croisée qui cherche une filiation et qui écris dans une lignée, toujours la même, reliée à l'histoire, à la mémoire, à l'identité, à la tradition et à la transmission . . . C'est dans la fiction que je me sens sujet libre (de père, de mère, de clan, de dogmes…) et forte de la charge de l'exil. (138)

In this first sentence she describes a feeling that exactly resembles the feeling the heterotopia Paris '77-'80 gives her. But when we continue to read we realize that she is in fact talking about literary fiction. Now that the particular heterotopia that she writes about so nostalgically is out of reach to her, she can only, through her fiction, narrate phantasmatic spaces that echo the feeling she had in Paris '77-'80. To Sebbar this space, the lived one as well as its textual recreation, counters the negative sentiments that accompany her exile:

> Ces trois années de 77 à 80, ou deux et demie, sont je crois les seules où je n'aie pas eu à souffrir de l'exil, parce que *Histoire d'elles* est le seul lieu où j'aie trouvé une place où je ne me sois pas sentie à côté, en marge, à l'écart comme je le suis depuis toujours et aujourd'hui.
>
> J'étais dedans, au cœur, et cela ne m'est plus arrivé. J'étais moins divisé, moins seule. (91)

In my reading of *Lettres parisiennes*, Paris '77-'80 takes the form of a 'counter-site' in which the possibilities and limits of physical spaces are both made apparent and stretched, complicated, changed or inverted through the (imagined) formation of new relations between physical spaces, and of which the function in the narrative is to literally 'counter' the 'spacelessness', to use Seyhan's term, in this work of migrant literature (Seyhan 186).

Third Chapter

Space and Metafiction in *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen*

Is het niet bizar hoe de woorden van de fantasie een zekere troost tevoorschijn kunnen donderen? (Khemiri 25)

In my second chapter, I have made an effort to show how *Lettres parisiennes* explores, recreates, and reflects on spaces. Jane Hiddleston wrote about this text by Huston and Sebbar: 'Texts such as *Lettres parisiennes* intermittently embrace exile not as a source of alienation but as a site for the creation of new combinations (Hiddleston 157).' In this third chapter I will show how Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novel *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen* is in fact a text 'such as *Lettres parisiennes*' – at least in the sense that Hiddleston seems to have in mind: it is a text that embraces and uses migration as a site or source for the creation of 'new combinations', even more so, perpahs, than the book by Sebbar and Huston.

Jonas Hassen Khemiri is a young Stockholm born playwright and novelist who has a Tunisian father and a Danish-Swedish mother. His works, which engage in debates around the position of North-African migrants in Europe, have received a lot of attention in Scandinavia. His second novel, *Montecore,* tells the story of a young Swedish author, Jonas, who receives an unexpected e-mail from Kadir, the childhood friend of his disappeared Tunisian father Abbas. In his early twenties, Abbas had migrated to Sweden after falling in love with Jonas's Swedish mother. Kadir encourages Jonas to write a book about his father's life, and the reader gets to read Abbas' letters to Kadir, Kadir's e-mails to Jonas – to which he attaches pieces of text that tell stories about Abbas – and Jonas' memories of Abbas alternated with Kadir's critical remarks and reproof. Or, as Swedish literary theorist Elisabeth Karlsson summarizes in her dissertation on Khemiri in a slightly clearer way: 'the memories of Jonas and Kadir take turns recreating the story of Jonas' father Abbas' (Karlsson 126). While Jonas writes from Sweden and Kadir from Tunisia, their stories travel back and forth between the two countries on the level of the extra- *and* the intradiegese. In the mean time, it becomes more and more clear to the reader that the experience of migration of Abbas and the inherited experience (or memory) of migration for Jonas do not at all coincide. Moreover, the reader finds out that the narrators Kadir and Jonas are both equally unreliable when it comes to writing down a true account of what they remember about Abbas. In the end, the reader discovers that Abbas' friend Kadir, who writes Jonas e-mails from Tunesia, might in fact be Abbas himself: perhaps Abbas pretends to be Kadir because he cannot face a confrontation with Jonas as himself. However, there is also a possibility that both Abbas and Kadir are products of Jonas's imagination, characters which he made up in order to be able to write a second novel; a novel, allegedly, about his father. And in the end this is of course true, because it is the author Jonas Hassen Khemiri who comes up with the characters Abbas, Kadir and

Jonas and writes a novel about them. The text plays with the notion of autobiography by having the fictional Jonas refer explicitly to the empirical Jonas, the author – yet *Montecore* is without a doubt a fictional text. It does, however, also play with the notion of fiction, because both Jonas, the character of the young writer obviously inspired on the author Khemiri, and Kadir/Abbas provide each other (and the reader) with heavily fictionalized accounts of what happened to Abbas – and then reprimand each other for it. We never actually get to read the e-mails from Jonas to Kadir, but from Kadir's responses to Jonas' e-mails we can conclude that Jonas asks Kadir critical questions about what the latter tells him about his father: he does not believe everything Kadir writes. Kadir, in turn, gets angry at Jonas and accuses him of making things up instead of telling the truth. These accusations and suspicions uttered by the characters direct the attention of the reader towards the fictionality of the stories and with that form yet another level of metafiction. *Montecore* falls under a category studied by Azade Seyhan as one of those

> . . . autobiographical texts [that] explore in their themes, tropes, and representations and reconfigurations of experience the conceptual dimension of the act of writing itself as a political, emancipatory practice and investigate the tensions and conflicts traversing literary discourse in marginalized societies. (Seyhan 185)

Even though I would not call *Montecore* an autobiographical text, it does at least evoke the illusion that it contains autobiographical elements. And it explores both in its themes and in its (obvious) reconfigurations of the experience(s) of migration precisely what can be done in literature. This happens at several levels in the novel.

Elisabeth Karlsson's reading, for example, 'explores Khemiri's texts as a critique of a narrowly defined Swedish identity'(Karlsson 126). She reads *Montecore* as a direct response to the ongoing debates around the presence of (especially North-African muslim) migrants in Northern and Western Europe. She wonders if *Montecore* could possibly suggest that 'the social contexts of ethnic outsidership in Sweden could potentially fuel backlash rebellion just as it has done in France and England'(148) and she concludes that what she calls 'Abbas' eventual "escape" from Sweden' halfway through the text could signify that 'Swedish society fails to accommodate even those immigrants who are most eager to belong' (161, 62). In her reading of Khemiri's work, she focuses very much on the construction of cultural identity of the characters and the political implications of those constructed identities. She writes:

> Especially in his second text, where the son's and Kadir's different reconstructions of the father's identity grow into an increasingly difficult and ambiguous endeavor, Khemiri emphasizes the fictional aspects of identity. (127,28)

I agree with Karlsson that Khemiri's text shows how identity formation is always partially dependent on fiction. This is made clear not only through the different 'identities' that Jonas and Kadir attribute

to Abbas, but also through fragments in the narrative that give the reader insight in how Jonas perceives and forms his own sense of self. Together with his friends, for example, he creates a migrant identity for himself that is based on hybridity and deviation from the norm rather than descent. The teenagers seem to 'swear off' their paternal roots in favor of a self designed 'symbiosis' of outsiders. 'Niets doet ertoe behalve dat jullie een symbiose bouwen en in plaats van strijdvaardige vaders hebben jullie elkaar' (262). Jonas tries to escape his difficult relation with his father by spending as much time as possible on the basketball court with his friends:

> Papa's blijft stil en het is jij, Melinda, Imran en Patrik tegen de rest van de wereld, jullie tegen hun, of fuck JULLIE, WIJ zijn het, WIJ die samen als uitzonderingen door het leven trekken. WIJ die samen hun regels weigeren en hun hokjes dissen, WIJ die hun categorieën exploderen omdat we geen Zwedo's zijn en geen buitenlanders, we zijn de eeuwig onplaatsbaren. (261)

These identities who apparently 'make 'their' categories explode' and call themselves 'the eternally inplacables' display a remarkable resemblance to 'the processes of hybridization championed by Bhabha as characteristic of the 'postcolonial condition'' (Hiddleston 15). Jane Hiddleston gives her interpretation of these processes of hybridization:

> Bhabha's deconstructed subjects are disjoined from discourse, they linger in a no-man's land in the interstices between signifier and signified, and in this sense they are singular and changing beings residing outside the national framework. Although national discourses work to position them definitively within a circumscribed category, the hybrid postcolonial subjects discussed by Bhabha become indeterminate shadows hovering in the 'in-between'. (Hiddleston 15)

Like Adelson[4], Hiddleston writes critically about the 'in-between' situation she feels Bhabha attributes to postcolonial subjects in his theory about hybridity and Third Space in his famous work *The Location of Culture*. Hiddleston feels that Bhabha's concepts of hybridity (mixture of two cultures/nations/etc) and Third Space (apparently next to/between First and Second Space) still helps to reproduce what she calls 'postcolonial subjects' as people in between two fixed categories. In her work, she tries to think beyond this binary structure, and in a way, this is what we see Jonas do as he says that he and his friends 'make their categories explode' (Khemiri 201). The symbiosis Jonas proclaims to be building with his friends in lieu of fatherly protection and national belonging resembles Bensmaïa's '*global ethnoscape* as third space that rises from the ruins of the community world of old and identitarian nationalism' (Bensmaïa 134). Bensmaïa, also, takes Bhabha's Third Space as his point of departure, but rather than interpreting it as a space in between two fixed

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[4] Adelson reacts against this categorization of migrants as subjects 'in between cultures' in her "Against Between: A Manifesto".

spaces, he claims that Third Spaxe can be a 'global ethnoscape' a completely new, transnational

trans-category, a new 'scape' or space in which nations no longer determine identities.

In what seems a direct response to the fragment from *Montecore* cited above, Elisabeth

Karlsson writes however:

> One self-evident contradiction inherent to Khemiri's global identities, however, is that they
>
> are firmly located within the nation as well. Regardless of what Khemiri's fictional character
>
> say, they do have a history and they do have boundaries. Besides, they live in Stockholm and
>
> they all communicate in Swedish. (Karlsson 169)

The character Abbas, without a doubt, would fully agree with this remark by Karlsson: he keeps

telling Jonas that he lives in Sweden, talks in Swedish and therefore is Swedish. Abbas perceives the

basketball court as a bad place, a threat to his son's happiness. He tries to persuade Jonas to play

hockey with autochntonous Swedish children, because he is afraid Jonas will be unhappy if he keeps

cultivating the outsidership that his father, Abbas, has suffered from so much.

Even though I consider Karlsson's reading a valid one, and I agree with her that a lot of

foregrounded and innovative identity construction is going on in the narrative, I still think there are

more interesting and more significant issues to study when it comes to this text. Rather than looking

at which cultural identity these characters represent and to what extent their 'outsider' or 'hybrid'

identity is fictional and/or produced[5], I would like to look at what it could be, in a narrative about one

particular family in one particular European country, that could possibly make the reader think just a

little differently about the experience of migration. Later in this chapter I will point out which

narrative techniques are used in order to create a text that is very open-to-debate, so to say a 'poly-

vocal' text: one in which multiple sides of the story are directly presented to the reader, who is

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[5] The field of postcolonial literary theory is of course greatly indebted to those pioneers – Foucault, Hall, Jameson – who first made us realize that identities (national, cultural, racial and gendered) are produced. When we are studying a text, however, I think we should sometimes go beyond that and, while keeping what we have learned about identity in mind, focus on something else; an aspect of a text which is not only a representation of the social/political. In his *Experimental Nations*, Réda Bensmaïa makes a distinction between political and poetic allegories. He quotes Jameson, who states that 'Third World texts. . . necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is *always* an allegory to the embattles situation of the public third-world culture and society' (Bensmaïa 68). Bensmaïa, however, shows in his book that postcolonial literary texts 'can be reduced neither to an allegory nor to a simple fictionalized history' (76). Analyzing a text by Djaout, he asks:

> Are we back in the allegorical? Undoubtebly; now, however, it seems clear that what opens up to a
> given regime or register of metaphor and leads to one place of thought or representation or another
> has become essentially undecidable. The meaning has now been disseminated in the trails and
> footpaths of a written crossing that knows no more frontiers. And in this sense, what characterizes the
> work of third-world writers is not so much the political-allegorical dimension of what they write. (79)

Rather, it seems that to Bensmaïa, it is the inventiveness / inventive power of this literature, which seems to serve a poetic as well as a political goal, but cannot be read as simple allegory since it is based on difference and a thinking or imagining away or apart from the known, the conventional, the social and political *real* to which allegory must always somehow refer. In a written crossing that knows no more frontiers, it seems unnecessary to study outsidership and hybrid identities.

moreover invited to participate in the practice of fiction (I will explain this later). To my opinion, there are two narrative techniques used in *Montecore* that are especially inventive. One is its use of language, the other its use of space.

The most obvious political dimension in *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen* is to be found in its use of language and its own reflection upon that. First of all, there is the use of slang and 'accented' language. At a certain point in the text Kadir cites from a review of Khemiri's first book: 'Je blijkt het leven geschonken te hebben aan 'het verhaal van de immigrant' in een taal die klinkt alsof er 'een microfoon is opgehangen' in een willekeurige immigrantenwijk' (Khemiri 37). From this remark we can conclude that Jonas, the protagonist of this book, writes books about migrant life in a language that sounds 'migrant-like' to his audience: the use of slang apparently makes his texts more convincing in their claim to be migrant stories. Yet Kadir continues: 'Schreef je me niet dat je boek ging over een in Zweden geboren man die intentioneel krompraat? Wat is er gebeurd met je beweerde exploratie van het 'authenticiteitsthema'?' (37). So apparently, Jonas, the protagonist of *Montecore*, is a writer who writes books about migrants who talk what their environment considers 'migrant-like' or 'accented' Swedish *intentionally*. But what is most interesting is that these remarks (The first one about how the papers write that Khemiri's characters talk stereotypical migrant talk; the second one explaining how in fact, Khemiri writes about migrants who talk like this on purpose, respond to a real life review of Khemiri's first book that is however integrated in his second, fictional book and are uttered by a fictional character. To make things more complicated, this character, of course designed by the author Khemiri, talks in a strangely formal, almost multilingual, accented voice as well, while the language Jonas, the protagonist, uses, is also accented: popular and slang-like. Khemiri thus uses accented language in his books about migration, and has his characters reflect on their own, each other's and the author's language use. That is to say, Khemiri's texts use the postmodern strategy of metafiction in order to actively rework imagery around 'migrants', 'bilinguals' and 'migrant neighborhoods', in the tried and tested way that I have already used as an example in the first chapter: through its use of language.

But there is something else happening in *Montecore* that, in slightly less obvious ways, could qualify this text as political, and as a possible site for 'cultural labor'. In this chapter, I will attempt to analyze where and how migration and displacement are rethought in *Montecore* through particular narrative uses of space. The use of language as a tool to rethink social relations has often been theorized within the fields of comparative literature and postcolonial studies. But the use of space, as well, has generated interest in various areas of critical theory these past years. In their introduction to *Thinking Space*, Thrift and Crang state:

> At one level, then, this collection asks us to engage with the role that the concept of space
>
> plays in structuring thought and language. . . . [I]t is important to think what spaces are

deployed and with what effects. This is never more important than when considering spaces
of self and other, and the way that the spatial categories of interior and exterior have
structured socio-spatial thought. (7)

When one agrees with Thrift and Crang that the concept of space to a certain extent 'structures' thought and language, and that it is especially interesting to study the spaces of self and other present in that thought and language, then one is only a small step away from acknowledging that it is interesting to study how space is deployed in 'migrant literature' – especially in works that, in my hypothesis, attempt to open up the ways space structures thought and language. The rest of this chapter will first set forth how *Montecore* uses space as a signifying framework for the memories and stories of migration told by Abbas, Kadir and Jonas. Then it will show how *Montecore* creates new, phantasmatic spaces and puts existing spaces to a different use in order to re-negotiate the existing meanings attached to certain spaces and to re-interpret space in a way that, as I already stated in my first chapter, might be uniquely possible in literature – because in literature the fictional and real can come together into one virtual (practice of) space.

Space as a Framework for Stories of Migration

The narrative of *Montecore* is structured around the journeys of Abbas. Abbas is a migrant: just like Sebbar and Huston, he is in voluntary exile. But this exile in *Montecore* is depicted in a rather playful way that is very different from the painful descriptions of exile in *Lettres parisiennes*. Abbas explains to young Jonas how being a 'cosmopolitan' (to Abbas a more favorable word than 'migrant') will promote his photographic career: 'Papa's heeft het voortdurend over nieuwe plannen om in de voetsporen van grote fotografen te treden. Net als de Roberts Capa, Frank en Philippe Halsman en Yousuf Karsh is papa's namelijk van thuisland veranderd om zijn fotografische talent in vreemde landen te verspreiden' (96).The memories that both Kadir and Jonas have of Abbas all depend on *when* Abbas went *where* – his arrivals and departures on and from certain places. Space is used in their stories for making sense of memory, structuring it somehow. The narrative thus forms an illustration to Maurice Halbwachs' idea that it is through space that our imagination can reconstruct past times. Here, we are immediately confronted with that second element that plays a role in both the formation of memory and the attribution of meaning to place: imagination. Even though I will discuss the role of phantasmatic space in *Montecore* only later in this chapter, it seems useful to underscore once again that space, particularly remembered and narrated space, is always to a certain extent imagined: the meaning a certain place possesses for someone and the connections one places between certain places are all products of the human mind, whether they are communal or personal. *Lettres parisiennes* made it seem as if the attribution of certain meanings to certain places happened as some sort of natural and transparent autobiographical transcription of the

experience of the authors – it seems that the way they described a place was equal to their experience of that place – and possibly it is only because one notices the literary style and feels the shape and weight of the book in one's hands that one can know that these memories are 'directed', put in a certain order and made into a text; that these spaces are in fact narrations. In *Montecore*, things are very different. Khemiri constantly foregrounds the process of writing. Sebbar and Huston *also* write about writing, but they do so in a very general sense: they write about how writing makes them feel, and how they can express certain sentiments only in their writing. Khemiri, on the other hand, constantly foregrounds the process of writing precisely *this book*: he constantly reflects upon how this story was, is, and should be written. Therefore, any place that is featured in the book is explicitly there as a setting for a story – rather than as a lived or experienced space that seens to stands on its own and needs to be reflected upon, so to say, as seemed to be the case in *Lettres parisiennes*.

In *Montecore*, the process of turning place into story is made very transparent. The book is full of explicit connections between space and storytelling. Arguably, every memory related in the text is a short 'spatial story' in the sense given to that term by Michel De Certeau: '[a] spatial story is . . . a linguistic system that distributes places insofar as it is *articulated* by an "enunciatory focalization", by an act of practicing it' (De Certeau 130). Places are, indeed, 'distributed' over the text by the various small stories the protagonists tell each other and the readers. These stories *practice* space as they determine the order and context in which the places occur in the book, as well as which meaning is attributed to these places. Sometimes, the context for a space is the text itself: 'Je idee om ons boek in Zweden te laten starten is interessant. Maar niet correct', writes Kadir in an e-mail to Jonas (Khemiri 50). The space 'Sweden' is discussed here as a component of the narrative rather than as something that refers to a real life place. At an earlier point in the text Kadir asks: 'Memoreer je je iets van Jendouba?' (20). The focalization switches to the character of Jonas, who writes down his memories in second person (as if he were talking to himself): 'Maar natuurlijk herinner je je Jendouba…' (20). From here on, the reader is confronted with two very different and moreover competing accounts of various spaces, as Kadir invites Jonas to write his memories down amidst his own (Kadir's) own memories and opens the space 'Jendouba' up to debate.

Other times, space is rather used as a metaphor or metonym. It becomes clear that to Abbas, Sweden initially forms a metaphor or metonym – totum pro parte, we could say – for his beloved Pernilla.

> Zweden. . . Ach Zweden. Een land van stille metrowagens, delicieuze vrouwen en massale
> mogelijkheden. Zweden is luchtige reinheid, waterige hemelsheid en duizelingwekkende
> visies vanaf centraal gelegen bruggen. Alles in Zweden is odeurloos en couleurloos, proper

geruit, wit en roze en soepel zacht overeenkomstig de huid van Pernilla's onderarm. Ach,

Pernilla's huid. (77)

Abbas leaves Tunesia to go to Pernilla, and to go to Sweden. At first, these two coincide: Pernilla/Sweden form Abbas's new, light-skinned, beautiful life in which the possibilities are endless. Later, as Pernilla becomes the mother of Abbas' children and Sweden becomes the land in which Abbas is confronted with racism, class difference and strict rules time and time again, the two no longer share the same significance in Abbas' life and the metonym is resolved.

Space is also presented as a factor that determines Abbas' succes in life as well as the way he sees himself. It is clearly a factor that determines his identity: who he is, depends on where he is. Only after leaving Sweden, Kadir explains, Abbas became succesful: 'Sinds zijn translocatie uit Zweden is zijn fotografische carrière doorgeblonken tot een verguld succes' (13). In her dissertation, Karlsson also recognizes the connection between space and the changes in Abbas's mood and lifestyle:

After having first lost his idealism in Sweden and then given into opportunism in Algeria, in the last chapter, Khemiri has Abbas suddenly realize the connection between his cosmopolitan vision and global social justice. Abbas leaves his pornographic engagements in Algeria to become a photographer of the victims of globalization. Away from his old selves (in Tunisia, the pleasure seeker; in Sweden, the downtrodden immigrant; in Algeria, the pornography photographer), he starts to document asylum seekers in Holland, victims of American war crimes in Afghanistan, children of Palestine, prisoners in Hong Kong, and illegal immigrants at the Mexican border. (Karlsson 168)

In each country, Abbas seems to leave an 'old selve'; while each new country he visits brings him a 'new self', a new role in life. Sweden made him into an eternal outsider and thus estranged him not only from society, but also from his family; Algerian made him into an opportunist who uses money to silence his own conscience; while back in Tunesia he was an eager young man who unthinkingly embraced every chance of something new and different. However, one of the aspects of Abbas' character that not one space was able to change about him is his lively imagination – and this is why we cannot know whether it were the actual spaces that drove Abbas to change and grow and shed 'his old selves', or the virtual spaces of his imagination.

So far, I have set forth how in *Montecore,* space acts as a narrative function, as a metonym and as a component of identity. In all three, the significance of the space in question in attributed to it only after migration; the place is, in other words, looked at from the point of view of the migrant. This goes for 'Sweden' as well as 'Jendouba', for 'Algeria' as well as 'Pernilla' (who functions in the beginning of the story not only as Abbas' reason for migration, but also literally as his place of

arrival). These spaces gain their significance through the stories Abbas tells himself about migration. De Certeau wrote:

> What this walking exile produces is precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one's own vicinity; it is a fiction, which moreover has the double characteristic . . . of being the effect of displacement and condensations. (De Certeau 107)

When for Abbas, leaving his roots causes the temporal lack of legends in one's own vicinity De Certeau speaks about, he solves this quickly by using his 'walking exile' as an inspiration for the creation of stories that are necessary for him (and his son) to make sense of the places he encounters again. The character Abbas forms an illustration for Michel Foucault's statement in *Of Other Spaces* that reads: 'our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. . . Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites' (22, 23). The stories that Jonas and Kadir tell about Abbas' life are built up around places and the relations between them.

Two of the uses of space I have discussed, namely the metaphoric use of space and space as a component of identity, are quite classical and straightforward examples of the use of space both in society and in literature, as critical theorists have shown us in the past decades. Crang and Thrift explain how Edward Said even argues that these two ways of practicing space are linked together:

> [The]spatial metaphoric is a vehicle for the fabrication of identity, Said argues, through the 'universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs"'. (Crang & Thrift 37)

Space used in a metaphoric sense can function as a component of – or a tool for composing – identity. Moreover, Said apparently believes that one of the processes that attach meaning to a place – or that, in other words, turn a place into a space – is the installation of a division between spaces that are familiar or 'ours' and spaces that are 'theirs'. The first chapter of this thesis featured a comparable argument by De Certeau, who uses Freud's divided ego and Lacan's mirror stage to come to underpin his argument that '[t]he opacity of the body in movement . . . is what indefinitely organizes a *here* in relation to an *abroad*, a "familiarity´ in relation to a "foreignness". (De Certeau 130)

Towards the end of the book, Kadir and Jonas recount Abbas' feverish attempts to capture and appropriate Sweden – to finally truly inhabit Sweden. In order to make the space 'Sweden' his own, to finally make it familiar instead of foreign to him, Abbas tries to get a grip on the country by documenting it. He has two different strategies for doing so. First, he has Jonas write down as many Swedish words as possible in order to get a hold on the space by getting a hold on the language.

> Alles wat Zweeds is moet gedocumenteerd worden, papa's maakt lange lijsten en mompelt:
>
> 'Nu moeten we keihard werken om geld te sparen voor onze eigen familiestudio. Is dat
>
> begrepen, soldaat?' (127)

Here, Abbas uses the Swedish language as a sort of metaphor for the country: as soon as the language will be 'familiar' to him, the country will no longer be unfamiliar either. As soon as the language will be his, the country will no longer be merely 'theirs'; here, the spatial metaphoric is indeed used as a vehicle for not so much the fabrication, as rather the adjustment or reworking of identity (Crang & Thrift 37). Moreover, Kadir reminds Jonas of Abbas' attempts to capture and appropriate the city of Stockholm by taking pictures of it:

> Stockholm, ach Stockholm! KLIK! . . . De kraakpanden van Mullvaden. KLIK! En daar heb je de
>
> straat waar de politie een vriend van haar broer een keer heeft geattaqueerd met bijtende
>
> honden, KLIK! KLIK! . . . Op een zondag wandelen we grindpaden naar het Moderne Museum
>
> op de Skeppsholmen. KLIK! Je vader die zijn camera aan een stuk door klikt terwijl jij in een
>
> stijve oranje overall bladeren verzamelt en oorlogje wilt beginnen met je 'lievelingfoom
>
> Kadiej'. KLIK! (155)

On the level of the story of Abbas' migration, space is thus used in a metaphorical sense (Abbas' initially perceives Sweden as a metaphor for Pernilla, and imputes to the space all the characteristics he praises in his beloved) and in the sense of identity (re)construction (again by Abbas, who tries to capture and appropriate some sort of 'essence' of Sweden).

<center>(Meta-)fiction and the Text as Space</center>

In the introductory paragraph of this chapter, I pointed out the extensive use of metafiction in Khemiri's book. I will use these last paragraphs to explain the connection between metafiction and phantasmatic space in *Montecore*, explaining how the narrative puts the text itself forward as a (virtual) space. On the very first page of the book, emphasis is immediately put on the constructedness of the text. The narration directly addresses the reader with the first sentence of the prologue: 'Hallo, lieve lezer, bladerend in de boekenboetiek. . .' (9). Before the story has even started, the reader is prevented from losing her- or himself in it. Immediatly afterwards, the text makes an appeal to the reader's imagination and suggests:

> Laat ons samen visualiseren hoe de beste papa ter wereld en superheld van dit boek
>
> witgekostumeerd rondwandelt over het dakterras van zijn luxueuze loft in New York. . . .
>
> Voor de avond voorbij is, komt een in leer gedrapeerde Bono zijn vijftigste verjaardag een
>
> saluut geven met een akoestische versie van "Even Better Than The Real Thing". (9)

Here, several interesting things are happening. First of all, the reader is immediately and irrevocably confronted with the fact that this is a fictional story, mainly through the use of the words 'visualiseren' and 'superhero': the first, in this context, emphasizes the process of imagination that is

at the basis of fiction writing, while the other is a word that we normally use for the protagonist of a comic book or a children's television series. Moreover, the clothes ('witgekostumeerd') and the setting ('luxueuze loft in New York') express a decadence that the Western European audience knows only from North-American soap series and advertisement for lottery tickets. Then a world renown rock star makes a quick appearance, and in case the reader still does not understand where this is going, the song played by this rock star is entitled 'Even Better Than The Real Thing'. This whole citation breaths fantasy. It screams: this is not real! The song title moreover suggest that this first section may even be *a lot* better than the real thing; it seems to warn the reader against what is coming, against the unpretty glances of reality that might be shining through the fiction. Secondly, not only is the reader confronted with the fantastic element in the story before that story has even begun; the reader is also invited to participate in the process of imagining. The New York loft, the very first space that makes an appearance in this alleged 'autobiographical migrant novel', is an obviously phantasmatic space. By emphasizing its own fictionality, for example by this over-the-top foreword which seems to embody the very message in the U2 song title it stages, the text makes clear from the beginning that it is *constructed*, made up. This means that it is also open to *reconstruction*. The prologue is not the only metafictional element in *Montecore.* Through the whole book, the text keeps referring back to itself ánd foregrounding its own fictionality, such as in the fragment in which Kadir invites Jonas to take over the story:

> 'Om de successieve leeswil van onze lezers te voeden, proponeer ik het volgende: Laat ons het boek cyclisch tot nieuwe literaire vormen transformeren! Laat ons nu de secundaire sectie van het boek initiëren waarin we de lezer eerst de authentieke briefteksten van je vader serveren en vervolgens jou inviteren je eerste herinneringen aan je vader te presenteren'(74).

Here, we see how the text refers to its own textuality by discussing narrative techniques and focalization. This enlarges the distance between reader and narrative.

> In her analysis of the novel, Karlsson writes about this:
>
> Khemiri's irony and self-reflexivity add an interesting dimension to his texts and to the identities he constructs in these texts, warning the reader to interpret Khemiri's texts as social realism. (Karlsson 131)

As I would like to point out, this ironic 'self-reflexivity', or metafiction as I call it, also adds an interesting dimension to the spaces constructed in this text. In his chapter on the works of De Certeau, Mike Crang states that there is 'a role for stories that is not about emplacing things but rather creating a theatre of frontiers and interactions, about the deformation rather than topical definition of places' (Crang 146). He continues:

> Narrative is a relationship between structure and events comprising a topography and its
> alteration by otherness. Otherness introduces temporality so that '[e]very play or story is the
> progressive transformation of a spatial order into a temporal series. (147)

Montecore stages those 'frontiers and interactions' that seem to usually accompany experiences of migration. The borders that separate one nation from the other – and seem to separate one culture form the other – will irrevocably play a role in each story of migration, and the interactions between these two places (the nations) and the meanings attached to them that make them into spaces (national cultures and the relations between those) usually pay a key role in what we call 'migrant literature'. Such novels, then, do indeed create a 'theater' of frontiers and interactions. In Khemiri's novel, the two spaces 'Tunesia' and 'Sweden' come together in and through the text. Kadir writes his stories about Abbas from Tunesia, Jonas writes him back from Sweden. Both characters integrate both empirical and fictional experiences into their narratives about Abbas, migration, Tunesia and Sweden. They meet each other in and through written text and the distance between them decreases as they open up more and more to each other's accounts of what has happened. In the following fragment, the two characters, who represent respectively the first and second generation of Maghrebi immigrants in Western Europe, use the text as a space for rethinking, inviting the reader to participate. Kadir writes to Jonas:

> De komende maanden deed je je best om volwassen op te treden en de formulering van
> onze taalregels te assisteren. Hier kun je je herinneringen aantekenen die de lezer detailleren
> dat je dankzij je vader en Kadir werd aangestoken met de ambitie van de auteur. (Khemiri
> 181)

Jonas then responds, to himself and the reader:

> En je moet toegeven dat Kadir wel een punt heeft want tijdens de formulering van de
> taalregels zie je het Zweeds voor het eerst van buitenaf. En misschien wordt je
> nieuwsgierigheid naar taal hier gewekt. Papa's die besluit dat er een systeem in de taal zit en
> jou om hulp vraagt, en wat is er groter dan vaders die zonen om hulp vragen? (181)

Kadir suggests that Jonas tells the reader that his fascination for language started out right then and there with the lessons. Jonas then does this, indeed, by simply leaving Kadir's suggestion there for the reader to see and then confirming this idea. The interaction is left intact and the reader can witness it. Moreover, emphasis is put again on the textuality of this interaction. It is only through this book, using the implied reader as an excuse, that Kadir can suggest that the experience of being the son of a Tunesian migrant in Sweden actually awakened a creativeness in Jonas, that it is in his migrant background that he finds his inspiration to write fiction. The idea that Jonas, the character – and perhaps also Jonas, the author – uses his father's history of migration as an inspiration for writing fiction is a product of the encounter and interaction of Jonas and Kadir. This encounter, as we

learn already at the beginning of the book, is a textual encounter; and the interaction which produces ideas like these is also an interaction on a textual level. The text forms a space in which the stories can interact – conflicting, as well as complementing each other. To understand the text as a space, we could use Homi Bhabha's notion of *Third Space* to guide us. Interaction between two cultures and negotiation of these two cultures measured against one another or coming together somehow takes place *somewhere*, in a space that is neither (fully) the one, nor (fully) the other nation. This is what Bhabha calls Third Space: a space which is ungraspable in itself, a space merely meant for passing through; the hybrid, unfixed space of inter-cultural interaction. (Bhabha 9)

Rather, however, I want to apply Leslie Adelson's concept of Orte des Umdenkens and read the textual encounters between Jonas and Kadir in *Montecore* as 'imaginative sites where cultural orientation is being radically rethought' (247). In this imaginative, textual space that is *Montecore*, there is room for several experiences of migration to exist simultaneously and next to each other, always in relation to each other but never 'emplacing' each other, to use Crang's term.

> '. . . Ik noteer alleen de modificaties. De wereld is toch bizar. Hier in Tabarka worden gekopieerde Michael Jackson-cd's en *Dirty Dancing*-T-shirts verkocht. En in Stockholm leest mijn zoon de Koran, spendeert tijd met negers en weigert varkensvlees te eten.'
>
> 'Wat?'
>
> 'Niets', berouwde je vader en hij weigerde verder over dit subject te converseren.
>
>> Thuis in Stockholm woont mama's nog met drie zonen die opgevoed moeten worden en een grote broer die die lente volwassen wordt. Nu echt. Je neemt je verantwoordelijkheid als de man in huis. Je legt broertjes uit dat jullie nu het Dynamische Trio zijn want op papa's kunnen jullie niet rekenen en in ons gezin moet je je verantwoordelijkheid al vroeg nemen. (Khemiri 273)

The fragment starts out with Kadir's account of a conversation between Abbas and himself in Tunesia after Abbas left Sweden, before the focalization shifts to Jonas, who then recounts what he was doing and thinking at that time. In the text, within a space constructed out of written language, father and son finally find a space where they can converse, exchange experiences. This fragment stages the different ways the characters experience or 'think' Stockholm, Sweden, and Abbas' flight. In textual encounters such as these, the absolute authority of reality is left behind as the fictional characters Jonas and Kadir exchange experiences which do or do not refer to a social reality of Maghrebi migration to/in Europe – the reader cannot tell. Moreover, their stories are not made into 'one story'. It seems that in *Montecore*, 'meaning has now been disseminated in the trails and footpaths of a written crossing that knows no more frontiers' (Bensmaïa 79): the text consists of loose ends and conflicting meanings. It is fantastical at times and realistic at others, and it does not move in one direction. The term 'written crossing' suits *Montecore* well, as it is a text which stages

stories which 'cross' each other and which moreover emphasize their own 'writtenness', their rootedness in written language. Adelson moreover writes: 'This disorientation that arises when familiar categories are left behind becomes the very ground on which critical readers re-orient themselves anew' (247). The disorientation is the consequence of the blurring of the borders between poetical and political and, specifically in *Montecore*, of the use of stories that form and remain 'lose ends' existing next to each other in the text. *Montecore* plays with the reader's expectations of migrant literature. It forms a textual space in which various stories interact and meanings are not fixed, so that the reader is challenged to rethink the frontiers and categories commonly attributed to migration with the text as a starting point.

This chapter has provided an analysis of the diverse ways in which space is employed in Khemiri's novel *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen*. It has moreover attempted to show how in the narrative, space and metafiction are combined into a narrative that relates the experience of migration from different angles and uses the text itself as a space where rethinking can take place, opening up stories of migration to fiction and creative re-orientation. But of course, *Montecore* can hardly been seen apart from its social context: after all, this is a book about migration written by a migrant writer. Karlsson writes:

> When readers or critics have asked Khemiri about the social milieus in his books, he has often denounced any realist interpretation. An outspoken critic of the way immigrants and their children are categorized as 'others,' Khemiri prefers to discuss his aesthetic "play" with identities. I have wondered whether Khemiri's sensitivity in this regard, his reluctance to categorize or to discuss categorization, falsely obscures that reality of marginalization, which he clearly thematizes in his books. (Karlsson 145)

I have asked myself the same thing. Moreover, Karlsson's remark reminded me of another author who is often accused of 'falsely obscuring the reality of marginalization' and of awkwardly denying the influences of his own background of migration in his work: the Dutch writer Hafid Bouazza. In my next chapter, in which I will analyze Bouazza's novel *Paravion*, I will therefore attempt to explain this attitude expressed in the works of both Khemiri and Bouazza further.

Fourth Chapter
Space as Literary Watermark in *Paravion*

Tussen geboortegrond en zwerfplaats strekt zich de spiegelhal van mijn verbeelding uit…
(Hafid Bouazza, *Een beer in bontjas* 61)

In the previous chapters I have pointed out how *Lettres parisiennes* and *Montecore* both feature narrated spaces that are partly phantasmatic in a narration that contains both autobiographical and fictional elements – although the quantitative distribution of these elements differs strongly between both texts – and how both texts foreground the processes that lead to the existence of the spaces they feature: a particular meaning and function is attributed to these spaces by a particular narration or narrative use. Both Sebbar and Khemiri seem to claim to 'hang' their stories on a certain social realism – Sebbar stronger so than Khemiri, of course – even though Khemiri emphasizes the fictionality of the text in the introduction of the book in a way that I explained in chapter 3. Both describe the experiences of (Maghrebi) migrants, first and second generation, and their migration to and life in Western Europe. These two works are comparable to Bouazza's novel in that all three of the works seem to feature both fictional and autobiographical elements, and all three works make the process of the attribution of meaning to place through storytelling evident to the reader. Hafid Bouazza's *Paravion*, however, does not seem to be a social realist work – on the contrary, it explicitly claims its own fictionality, as I will point out further on in this chapter. If one were to categorize Bouazza's text in terms of literary genre, however, one would probably pick magical realism. Bouazza's style of writing reminds me of those well-known Latin-American works published by the end of the previous century that put the genre on the map. The style is fairytale-like and narrative; fantastic things occur in an environment that could well exist, but only 'far, far away' from here, wherever 'here' may be. Where readers are forced to keep a distance from Sebbar's and Huston's narrated personal experiences in *Lettres parisiennes* because of their uncomfortableness and self-reflection, and are shaken up time after time by the sharp remarks of Kadir – 'Begrijpt de lezer dat bovenstaande passages niet de realiteit van de waarheid, maar veeleer jouw fantasieën zijn?' (Khemiri 283) – which make sure readers will not buy into the story too much, in *Paravion*, a reader can lose her- or himself completely in the comfortable and beautiful fairytale of Baba Baloek who leaves for the magical land Paravion, his beautiful wife Mamoerra who dies in childbirth and their son, the young shepherd Baba Baloek, who is raised by the two witches Cheira and Heira. And even though I will go a little further in this analysis and look at the social references made in the text and the negotiation taking place in its narration of space, I am still convinced that it is there where *Paravion*'s literary value lies: it is an enchantingly beautiful story. Considering the writer's status as a 'Dutch-Moroccan author', one would, however, expect the book to be about Moroccan migration to

the Netherlands. Instead, it narrates the story of a fictional migration: a migration from one phantasmatic space to another, carried out on a flying carpet.

The last chapter ended with a citation from an article by Elisabeth Karlsson, who wondered about Khemiri's 'reluctance to categorize or discuss categorization' and about his reasons to 'denounce any realist interpretation' of his work whenever readers asked about 'the social milieu in his books' (145). Like Khemiri, Bouazza has denounced realist interpretation in reference to the social milieu in his books – and like Khemiri, it is often just for their social value that his books are celebrated. Bouazza is praised for addressing – or alluding to – the situation of Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands, and praised even more for the alleged celebration of Dutchness and denunciation of traditional Islam that critics have pointed out as themes in this books. As with most migrant literature, critics seem to look for political messaged of multiculturalism, integration and focus on the relations between immigrants and natives in Bouazza's works rather than read them as stories. '*Paravion* predominantly acquires socio-political instead of literary appreciation. Bouazza is praised and accepted as a soapbox orator rather than as a writer', writes Minnaard (142).

Unlike Khemiri, however, Bouazza has proved himself not at all reluctant to, in Karlsson's words, 'discuss categorization' (Karlsson 145). He even wrote a book about his position as a 'Dutch Moroccan migrant writer' in Dutch society: *Een beer in bontjas*, published in 2001. In this book he discusses his own categorization as what he calls an 'NSMANN': Nederlandse Schrijver van Marokkaanse Afkomst met Nederlandse Nationaliteit. He complains:

> Hoe zorgzaam de omgeving ook is, de ruimte die de NSMANN meestal toegewezen krijgt, is nogal beperkt. De verbeeldingswereld waarin hij ligt te kirren en spinnen, een wereld die zich weinig gelegen laat liggen aan de topografie, de enige wereld die telt bij een schrijver, iedere schrijver, wordt buiten beschouwing gelaten. (*Een beer in bontjas* 10[6])

Bouazza is one of the writers categorized as 'migrant writers' who actively contributes to the discussion about the critical reception of migrant literature. He states that a book should be valued for its qualities in literary fiction – for creating a fictional world that is not representing a socio-geographical reality. Moreover, Bouazza declares that he is not responsible for any social problems caused by migration and that he is of the opinion that it is not a task for literature to imagine or narrate solutions for those problems:

> Er leeft de hoop dat maatschappelijke problemen van immigranten via of in de literatuur hun oplossing vinden. Een schrijver bepaalt in de literatuur niet zijn maatschappelijke, maar zijn artistieke positie. Maatschappelijke problemen hebben sociale oplossingen nodig. (*Een beer in bontjas* 32)

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[6] Whenever I quote from Bouazza's essay *Een beer in bontjas*, I will state so explicitly in my reference. To refer to the novel *Paravion*, my case study, I will simply write down the author's name and the page number.

In this citation, Bouazza seems to suggest that an author should not take a social position at all in literature; he writes that in literature, an author determines not his socio-political, but his [sic] artistic position. That might be so, but a literary *text* itself often does take position and does engage in social debates, and that it maybe even *should* do so. But since art is often political, what Bouazza calls the writer's 'artistic position' might not necessarily exclude taking a political position in/through art. However, Bouazza makes clear here that he thinks that it is wrong to view literature as a mere social document or as something that has value only because of its political engagement – and that instead, more attention should be paid to what it is that makes a something 'literature'.

Often, migrant literature is literature in which a direct translation of social issues is made, and in which this moreover happens in a language that reacts against dominant culture or literature – a language that is hybrid, 'rotten'[7] or accented, or in various languages. *Paravion* deviates from this norm by placing itself firmly in both the 'dominant' Dutch culture and the literary tradition that comes with it by its bombastic, almost scholarly literary use of language. In her book *New Germans, New Dutch*, Liesbeth Minnaard analyzes the cultural 'labor' or 'negotiation' she sees going on in Bouazza's work as follows[8]:

> Bouazza combines his critique with the explicated intention to counter and compensate for this negligence by literary use of the voluptuous vocabulary the Dutch language has to offer.
> His appropriation of the Dutch language coincides with a claim of Dutchness (111,112).

Minnaard subscribes here to the tradition in postcolonial literary theory that reflects critically on the use of language in literature. From this quote it becomes clear that to Minnaard, the use of language in migrant literature is never self-evident, but always has political implications. As I have explained in the first chapter, the political implications of language are often foregrounded in postcolonial literature through a specific use of language. That way, as I pointed out in my first chapter, such books do not only call the reader's attention to language issues, but they also attempt to rework the language on which they reflect *while* they reflect on it. Where often a hybrid or accented form of a

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[7] In the tenth chapter of her book *The Translation Zone*, renown critical theorist Emily Apter arrives via Deleuze and Guattari's 'minor literature' at the use of what she calls 'rotten English' in literature. As an example, she calls upon Welsh's novel *Trainspotting*, in which the 'Scottish vernacular is not so much a transposition of accent and slang, but a subcultural *Sprache* that has the effect of wounding Standard English with the slings and arrows of warped speech, at least for a Brit or Anglophone reader outside of Scotland' (155). This is an example of how use of language in literature is never self-evident, because a writer's choice of idiom is always a choice with political implications. Language functions in this case as a medium for uttering questions about and protest against standard English and British domination in a Scottish nihilist narrative, but it is also already a locus of negotiation in itself: British English *is* being countered only through Welsh's us of language. In the next chapter, Apter mentions the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who, by explicitly avoiding the English language and writing only in his native language Gikuyu, chooses another tactic for reacting against imperialist domination through language.

[8] Minnaard does not explicitly mention cultural labor or negotiation in this citation. However, since Minnaard herself refers to Adelson's concepts several times in this book to support her analyses, and since I apply these concepts to one of Bouazza's work in this chapter, I feel it is appropriate to use them in this context.

dominant language is used to achieve this, Bouazza, in Minnaard's reading, seems to turn things around: instead of instating a hybrid or migrant identity through his use of language, he claims Dutchness for his texts through what Minnaard calls his 'literary use of the voluptuous vocabulary the Dutch language' (111). *Paravion* is a text that is written in a style of writing that is 'literary' in the traditional sense of the word. It is poetic, descriptive and rather bombastic. The description of Mamoerra in the beginning of the novel forms a good example of this style:

> Jaren van ingehouden en huiselijke genegenheid begonnen in een korte tijdspanne de ogen van de vrouw met ongegeneerde liefde te kleuren: de irissen bloeiden open als zonnebloemen. . . Haar huid: een landschap van blank waar haar gezicht het oosten was: daar kwamen twee zonnen als blossen op – en haar borsten waren het westen: daar gingen zij als areola's onder. Zij was zo blank dat het leek alsof zij enkel in duisternis leefde, nimmer het daglicht had gezien, noch het daglicht haar. (Bouazza 10)

The similes could only be made in a literary text – they would be totally misplaced in spoken dialogue, as well as in everyday written language. Even though they are not Homeric, they still remind me of ancient Latin and Greek texts, in which the simile is a much employed stylistic figure. Then there is the choice of words: words such as 'areola's' ,'nimmer', and 'noch' are considered old fashioned or at least a bit bombastic, and one encounters them only in (older) literary texts. Liesbeth Minaard perceives the use of language in *Paravion* as an explicit attempt to renegotiate the theme of migration: by using a language that is formal rather than, for example, accented or 'rotten', and literary rather than everyday, Bouazza emphasizes his own Dutchness and his place in the Sutch literary tradition. Following Minnaard's argument, the formal and sometimes even a bit outmoded use of language is there to validate this claim and give it credibility. Even if , through its use of language, *Paravion* positions itself as a very Dutch and very fictional piece of literature, the theme of migration, which is both one of the most pressing social issues in present day Europe and the one biographical detail about the author that will always be attached somehow to Bouazza's texts by readers and critics, is certainly not avoided: it is, on the contrary, the narrative's main theme. Paravion tells the story of Baba Baloek, who migrates from the Morean countryside to Paravion, a city where he hopes to be able to make a better living. He leaves his pregnant wife behind in the Morean valley, like all of the men: for as soon as the people in the village in the valley learn about Baba Baloek's plans, all the men in the village decide to migrate to Paravion as well, leaving their wives, who are all pregnant, behind. The reader then follows the men on their journey and, later, in Paravion; and also follows Baba Baloek's son Baba Baloek, who stayed behind with the women in Morea. *Paravion* apparently does not attempt to provide a solution for problems around North-African migration to the Netherlands/Amsterdam; instead, it tells the story of a different, perhaps 'literary' migration, a narrated migration that has literature as its context and is in the fortunate

possession of a beginning and an end. There is some rethinking, some 'Umdenken' going on in the narrative (Adelson 246). References are made to Moroccan migration to the Netherlands, but they come to the reader in a text that does not at all resemble the 'typical' work of migrant literature. Whereas I agree with Minnaard that one could read Bouazza's indeed 'voluptuous' use of language as some sort of compensational writing behavior, I am more interested in another, in my eyes more productive, negotiation that takes place in Bouazza's work; one that can be found in the narration of space and is connected to the choice for narrating a fictional rather than a realistic migration representative of experiences of Maghreb-to-Europe migration.

Space and Referentiality

In Paravion, the narration of the experience of migration is largely dependent on the narration of space. The spaces in this book are obviously phantasmatic spaces, in contrast to what the implied reader would probably expect: a story about Morocco and the Netherlands. Bouazza proves in *Beer in bontjas* that he is well aware of these expectations of readers and critics. He complains that as a migrant writer, he finds himself in a difficult position: 'Vanwege zijn specifieke sociale plaats binnen een dominante cultuur, lijkt hij (the migrant writer, JL) voorbeschikt – of gedoemd – om zijn positie, 'het migrantenthema', tot de drijvende kracht achter zijn schrijverschap te maken' (*Een beer in bontjas* 11). This imposition of the 'migrant theme' seems inescapable:

> wanneer een schrijver zijn verhaal elders situeert, dan wordt dat gezien als een krampachtige afwijking van de norm en zal er nog krampachtiger gezocht worden naar de exotische sporen in deze nieuwe, maar voor de auteur vertrouwde omgeving . . . – en uiteraard worden die gevonden (*Beer in bontjas* 32)

With *Paravion*, Bouazza seems to give substance to his reluctance to conform to all of this. The characters in this novel travel back and forth between a village in a valley in Morea, a country that bears a certain resemblance to Morocco and other North-African countries, and Paravion, a city that resembles Amsterdam in many ways. They seem to refer to a certain social reality. However, these cities are presented to the reader as backgrounds for a fairytale-like story and bear fictional names, which already makes them phantasmatic spaces – or at least partly so. '*Paravion's* narrative structure resists simplifying and homogenizing assumptions about the novel's referentiality', writes Liesbeth Minnaard (Minnaard 142). This is especially true, I would argue, thanks to the narrative's use of space. The text is situated in two spaces which seem to share a few characteristics with the writer's country of birth and his country of residence: they seem to form a whole different world, imagined, however, around the two classical points of departure and arrival. By the end of the essay *Een beer in bontjas*, the writer states:

> Tussen geboortegrond en zwerfplaats strekt zich de spiegelhal van mijn verbeelding uit en
>
> daar kunt u mijn reflecties vinden, u bent altijd van harte welkom . . . Daar treffen wij elkaar,
>
> goede lezer. (*Een beer in bontjas* 61)

With *Paravion*, Bouazza seems to have found a way to make concrete this hall of mirrors stretching out between birth place and shelter, which are connected to, but not equal to these lived spaces. This fragment implies that, even though both 'geboortegrond' and 'zwerfplaats' are there in Bouazza's writing, between them there is a whole range of phantasmatic narrative worlds. Apparently it is there, in the imaginative space between the existing or lived spaces of migration, where the reader can find Bouazza's 'reflections' – a term which can refer to both thought and writing – and it is clear that it is only this space that the reader is welcome to visit.

In an analysis of W.G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, cultural memory scholar George Kouvaros concludes: 'materialism at the heart of descriptive writing is only ever a shadow-game. The referentiality it seeks is always just out of reach' (Kouvaros 182). Kouvaros' citation is in fact one way of uttering the idea that literature can never quite reach reality – only aimed specifically at materialism. The term he chooses, 'shadow-game', I find rather unfortunate: in my view, literature is never merely a shadow of the real, but rather a different dimension that nevertheless refers to the real and stands in constant exchange with it. The second part of his statement – which says that the referentiality sought by descriptive writing is always just out of reach – I find, however, rather illuminating in this context. The reality described in a text can never be anything than a textual reality, and because of that, referentiality is always, to a certain extent, false. Bouazza makes evident in *Een beer in bontjas* that he is of the opinion that literature should not even try to reach the reality it might refer to. Neither should the author try to put autobiographical elements into his text. 'Private informatie hoeven we niet' (43). And yet there is always a trace of, or an entangling with reality and lived experience present in a literary text. Bouazza: 'Het watermerk van 'waarheid' in zijn werk moet een watermerk blijven, namelijk nauwelijks zichtbaar, het mag geen embleem worden' (*Een beer in bontjas* 43). In other words: naturally, there is referentiality going on, but the reality that is referred to is never made explicit, it stays 'just out of reach' (Kouvaros 182). In my reading, *Een beer in bontjas* encourages the reader to rather see literature as a whole different dimension, a 'verbeeldingswereld' in which the author lies gurgling and purring, a world that takes no notice of topography (10). *Paravion* seems to simultaneously stage this 'verbeeldingswereld' *and* foreground the impossible practice of referentiality. It stages a phantasmatic world, but it also plays with the relations between the various imagined spaces and the 'real' spaces that the reader will surely encounter allusions to. In the remainder of this fourth chapter of my thesis, I seek to point out how the 'shadow-game' of narrated space is being played in *Paravion*, and theorize the effects it produces.

First of all, the relation between the space 'Morean valley' and the space 'Paravion' is central in the book: their (quite different) natures and cultures are described elaborately and the travels between them form a connecting thread between the various narrative motives. It is interesting, for example, to see how the distance between the two spaces changes: it becomes smaller and smaller throughout the story. The story starts with Baba Baloek, who wants to migrate from Morea to Paravion, where his father migrated to many years before him. For Baba Baloek, and for his fellow villagers, the journey is a long one: they have to fly on their flying carpets for many days before they arrive in Paravion; Baba Baloek never even arrives at all. Then the women of the village are said to go to a bath house in 'town'. They travel by cart for only a few hours before arriving at their destination, but by the end of the book we discover that their bath house was in fact situated in Paravion. Then, we encounter the mail man, who drives up and down between the valley and Paravion by Solex:

> De postbode huiverde door de mirage alsof hij door wapperende sluiergewaden reed, parkeerde zijn Solex buiten de stadspoorten, stapte af. Hij gooide de posttassen over zijn schouders, spuugde op de grond, knikte de poortwachters toe en betrad Paravion. (Bouazza 71)

The two places can thus not be too far apart. We moreover learn that they are separated by a 'mirage'. Later on in the book, the reader learns that the school teacher even walks from Paravion to Morea and back every day: the distance has even become walkable. Finally, the young shepherd Baba Baloek can even see Paravion in the hair of the young girl he spends his time with.

> De omgeving hing in wazige reflecties in haar weelderige dos. Maar naderbij gekomen zag hij dat het taferelen waren die visioensgewijs in haar lokken bewogen, beeltenissen tot zacht leven gewekt. Wat hij kon onderscheiden was bizar. (99)

Through the girl's hair, Paravion is directly accessible or at least visible; no need for travel. There is not only a very small distance between the two spaces. This is also noticeable in the structure of the narrative. At first, the narrative only tells what happens in Morea. Once the Moreans arrive, the narrative switches between the Morean valley and Paravion now and then. But after a while, these switches are executed faster and faster, until at a certain point there is no distance left and the the separation between the two spaces becomes less clear. In the following quotation, we see both the very quick alternation of the spaces in the narrative and the moment when the boundary between the two narrated spaces starts to blur:

> In groene valleien waar anemonen bloeiden, hoedde een oude herder zijn schapen en schramde met zijn schalmei de frisse stilte. De echo floot terug. Aan de Narvelzee haalde de visser zijn netten op die zwaar waren van lijken en spartelend zilver. Overal rondom hem dwarrelden witte uilen en vroegen 'hoehoe', een veel droeviger gezang dan het geluid van de geitenbellen.

In de mirage werd Paravion geboren, een spel van trillende lijnen en zwemmende kleuren. De kerktorens zwegen tegen een achtergrond van gebochelde wolken, de klokken waren oud en uit het nauwelijks zichtbare verleden hoorden zij als een kinderherinnering hun geschal als het geluid van geitenbellen.

In het theehuis zaten de postbode, de tapijthandelaar en de magere, nog levende karretier hun verhalen te delen en zoete muntthee te slurpen. Het theehuis was vol stemmen en vol ` sterke verhalen. Buiten bloeide een boom met gekaramelliseerde appels, de takken bogen onder de last, en de vruchten deinden op en neer, nog niet geheel rijp. Ze glommen als biljartballen. De ingang van het theehuis was behangen met een gordijn van kralen, dat de komst van een nieuwe bezoeker aankondigde met een fijn getingel als het geluid van de geitenbellen.

Onder de vijgenbomen hing een absintgroene gloed. Baba Baloek at zijn brood, olijven en kaas en begon langzaam te knikkebollen. Een onzichtbare brommer zoemde. Hij schrok op, knipperde, in de verte zag hij een donkerrood waas in de mirage sidderen, een speling van de zon, misschien. Op de achtergrond telde de koekoek een eeuwigheid van uren af en werd maar niet moe, de krekels tsjirpten, het beekje sprak in tongen. Zoet viel in zijn oren en werd vervormd in zijn dromen het geluid van geitenbellen. (Bouazza 88)

On one page, the text takes us to Morea, past the 'Narvel sea' that can be found between Morea an Paravion, to Paravion, where the Morean immigrant are sipping tea, and then back to the valley in Morea where Baba Baloek[9] is sitting underneath the fig trees. We read about an old shepherd in the Morean valley and a fisherman in the Morean sea. While the shepherd might actually be hearing the sound of goat bells, the fisherman can only hear them in his imagination as he, or the narrator, compares their sound to the sounds of the owls. Then we move to Paravion, after we see it appear in the mirage – this, again, suggests that Paravion is a phantasmatic space, an illusion. In this part of the citation, the sound of the goat bells alludes to past times and feelings of nostalgia. In the old days, the church bells in Paravion apparently did ring, and they sounded like the goat bells that rang in the past of the Morean migrants. Those migrants take a central position in the next part of the fragment, where we read how they sit in their teahouse in Paravion and tell eah other stories. Further on in the

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[9] it remains unclear if this the young shepherd Baba Baloek or an older ancestor with the same name, who would then be the old shepherd from the first paragraph. While the spatial boundaries fade, time also becomes less clear and the stories of fathers and sons start to blur. The blurring of time is hinted at in this citation and sets in a more certain fashion a little later on in the story, when father Baba Baloek, threatened by robbers, and son Baba Baloek, tormented by bullies, suddenly become one: 'Baba Baloek lag behaaglijk op zijn zij en sprak met veel armgebaren. Hij was goed op dreef. De bandieten luisterden. De jongens konden hun oren niet geloven. De geitenbellen hervatten de achtergrondmuziek' (108). The goat bells seem to function as a sort of signal for boundaries disappearing – they have a similar function when it comes to spatial transition, as I will explain a little further on in the text.

text can be read how these men try to recreate their homeland in the teahouse by thinking and talking only about Morea amongst each other, and by drinking Morean drinks and eating Morean food. The curtain in the door helps them with that, as the moving beats remind them of the sound of the goat bells in the Morean valley. Then we return to the protagonist, the young shepherd Baba Baloek, who sits under a fig tree in the Morean valley and sees Paravion in the mirage (the dark red perhaps referring to Amsterdam's famous red light district); but the city is still far away and the shepherd falls asleep to the sound of goat bells, which in his dreams become to signify something else – what, we are not told. This is a rather lengthy quote, but I chose to insert it completely because only then it would be possible to point out the transitions between the spaces. These transitions happen so fast that the distance separating the two spaces no longer seems to matter. The readers can travel from Morea to Paravion and back very quickly by now. Then there is the recurring sound of the goat bells, a striking detail that returns several times throughout the text. In this fragment, the goat bells seem to establish a direct connection between the two spaces, the Morean valley and the city of Paravion. They are the standard against which both Morean and Paravion experiences can be measured and given significance. They can be heard – or so it seems – in both Morea and Paravion, and their sound seems to mark the transition between the one space and the other: they bring Morea into Paravion and vice versa, as their sound triggers memories of the other space. Meanwhile, the two spaces are drawn to each other; they become nearer. The topography changes with the story: it depends on the story, or maybe it even *is* the story.

In Crang and Thrift's *Thinking Space*, there is the following quotation of Bachelard: 'space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here' (Crang 313). As both Bachelard and De Certeau argue, people always tell each other stories in order to attribute meaning to place. In the first chapter I also explained how stories are used again to separate the one place from the other ('this is familiar, here, and that is foreign, there') and to fill up the distances between the places with meaning, just like Bachelard states here. De Certeau argues that people tell themselves and each other 'legends' and that these narrations of legends are the 'signifying practices' that invent *spaces* where first there were only empty *places* (De Certeau 107). Allowing myself a little lack of nuance, I would say that this process of the attribution of meaning to place is one of the aspects of what Bachelard calls the 'poetics of space'. It seems extra interesting when space is narrated in a literary text, for then the poetics of space is made visible, black on white. We can see the attribution of meaning to place taking place, and we can see distance and the meaning of this distance change. Even formal aspects are important: when transition between spaces happens quickly and smoothly, as happens in the fragment above thanks to the quick alteration and the goat bells, the distance between those spaces decreases. The relation between spaces may always be

socially produced and may thus always be changeable; but as becomes clear from this fragment, the relation between spaces is especially negotiable in literary narration. In his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau writes:

> What the map cuts up, the story cuts across. In Greek, narration is called 'diegesis': it establishes an itinerary (it 'guides') and it passes through (it 'transgresses'). The space of operations it travels in is made of movements: it is *topological*, concerning the deformations of figures, rather than *topical*, defining places. It is only ambivalently that the limit circumscribes in this space. (129)

The fragment from Bouazza's novel is a great example of how a narrative can do precisely that: cut across the spaces that the map cuts up. Instead of dividing the two up, the quick transitions and the goat bells make two spaces come closer together, connecting them instead of comparing them. The itinerary, a journey from Morea to Paravion, is set forth early on in the text, and the passing through happens constantly. The journey stays the same, but the relations between the spaces changes. But not the whole quotation by De Certeau is applicable to my reading of Bouazza. I would argue that the space that the narration 'travels in', as De Certeau expresses it, is not completely devoid of a certain extent of definition. De Certeau states that the space that the diegesis 'cuts across' is not in itself topical; it does not define places. I would argue that narrated space in *Paravion* does practice a form of definition: it seems to *redefine* places. The story does make explicit references to Morocco and Amsterdam. We read, for example:

> In de mirage was Paravion zichtbaar, de trams gleden luid klingelend af en aan, groepen mensen meanderden door de straten, de rivier de Amstel weerspiegelde de gebouwen en voorbijgangers en voerde de hele wereld mee, de wolken zinderden en in het centrale groene paradijs schonken mensen de zeldzame zon hun naaktheid.
>
> De herder sliep. (111)

This is the first time in the book that there can be no doubt about the reference to Amsterdam. The trams, park, people, clouds and churches already hinted at Amsterdam, but after the river Amstel is mentioned, the reader can no longer deny Paravion's resemblance to Amsterdam, and thus can no longer comfortably sink back into the fictional world of beautiful fantasy Bouazza creates – not without having her or his thought wandering off every now and then to the possible relation between The Netherlands and this other country, Morea… Then again, despite the dropping of the word 'Amstel', Paravion is described in this fragment yet again in a dream-like fashion. First of all, Paravion is 'visible' (its visibility is, apparently, not self-evident) in the 'mirage'. A mirage, we all know, is an illusion, a vision in the desert. Moreover, the allusion to a dream is made by the last sentence: 'De herder sliep' (111). This is confusing, for the narrative gives the reader conflicting information: on the one hand, that Paravion is in fact Amsterdam, a place familiar and *real* to every

Dutch reader; one the one hand, that Paravion is in fact an illusion ('in de mirage was Paravion zichtbaar') or a dream ('De herder sliep'). Here, we see clearly how *Paravion* plays a game with the readers expectations when it comes to 'fiction' and 'reality'. The reader is invited to think about Amsterdam and an Amsterdam community of Maghrebi muslim migrants but is also immediately forced to rethink this – probably familiar – lived space, because it is presented here as a phantasmatic one, even as a 'mirage' or illusion. The text simultaneously refers to spaces that exist in reality *and* denies the credibility or 'reality' of these references by foregrounding its own fictionality.

On the one hand, it seems as though Bouazza inscribes himself here in a hermeneutic tradition that states it *is* possible to understand reality through language. Even though in *Een beer in bontjas* Bouazza denies to believe there is a purpose in engaging in social problems through literature, the relations between The Netherlands and migrants are alluded to in this novel without any doubt. So it seems as though by writing about migrants coming to Amsterdam and describing their lives there, *Paravion* comes to a certain understanding of these experiences of migration.

On the other hand, it seems also plausible to conclude that Bouazza inscribes himself in a literary tradition (the post-structuralist and/or postmodern one) that states that language can never 'reach' or 'grab' reality and should therefore not even try to do so. One could argue that Bouazza still tries, if only by not avoiding the infamous 'migrant theme' imposed on him. Yet in Minnaard's book there is a quote from well-known literary theorist Marie-Laure Ryan, which reads: 'even when fiction uses names that have currency in the real world, it does not refer to real-world objects, but to their counterparts inside its own textual world' (Minnaard 112). *Paravion* makes very explicit that it is not about Amsterdam, or about Moroccan immigrants. It is a work of fiction that, just as Ryan says, uses names, such as Amstel, and references, such as trams, that have 'currency' in the real world. Yet it becomes clear in the text that 'Amstel', for example, does not refer to the real world Amstel, as the Amstel in *Paravion* is not to be found in Amsterdam, but in a counterpart of Amsterdam inside *Paravion*'s own textual world, namely Paravion, the city in the mirage. By mixing spaces that do have currency in the real world with spaces that are purely fictional, Bouazza foregrounds and exploits the power of the textual world that is created in a work of literature: a world which can, but does not necessarily have to refer to the reality outside the text. This narrative strategy is likely to confuse the reader, to shake her/him up. Bachelard:

> Avec la poésie, l'imagination se place dans la marge où précisément la fonction de l'irréel vient séduire ou inquiéter – toujours réveiller – l'être endormi dans ses automatismes. Le plus insidieux des automatismes, [c'est] l'automatisme du langage. . . (Bachelard 17)

Even though Bachelard is talking about poetry here in a quite literal sense, I think we could easily replace the word '*poésie'* with the word '*littérature'*. Then, this quotation sheds light on the 'cultural labor' the narrative of *Paravion* performs with this play with fiction and reality. Imagination, explains

Bachelard, takes place on the margins between fiction and real, and it is precisely on this margin where fiction can seduce the reader into believing something, or make the reader feel uncomfortable because she or he feels that some elements ('Amstel') are incompatible with others ('mirage'). Automatisms, such as for example prejudices, but also fixed ideas about identities and spaces, can be confirmed and (re)produced in language. On the other hand, they can also be rethought in language Fragments such as this one about trams and the Amstel, that both make a reference to a social situation in reality and then do away with it as something phantasmatic, could wake up a reader from any automatisms that the she or he might have about Amsterdam, Morocco, or migration as signifiers in their everyday life. *Paravion* operates precisely on those margins Bachelard mentions: it puts words and spaces that have, to use Ryan's term again, 'currency' in the real world in a fictional context, and vice versa. Doing so, the text confuses its readers it perhaps stirs their '*automatismes'*, and with that, it invites them to rethink the automatisms that might be connected to a word like 'Amstel'.

<div align="center">Metaliterariness</div>

Above, I have attempted to indicate and explain how Bouazza's text simultaneously refers to spaces that exist in reality and denies these references by foregrounding its own fictionality. This is a form of metafiction. In *Paravion*, just like in Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novel *Montecore*, the element of metafiction in the text has a remarkable effect on the novels narration of space. First, these 'migrant novels' are probably expected to bring their readers a socio-politically engaged, realistic kind of story. Then they exhaust these expectations through metafiction: by foregrounding their own fictionality and by calling attention, to paraphrase Linda Hutcheon, to the fact that the text is a human construct' (2). Then, they start to give their readers a hard time by letting socio-political elements slip in and making the boundaries between fiction and reality blur. Even though the emphasis in *Paravion* is on fiction and the emphasis in *Montecore* on social realism, I still think their tactics are comparable. *Paravion*, however, brings in an extra dimension. It uses a narrative technique that I would categorize as a specific kind of metafiction: *Paravion* extensively emphasizes its own *literariness*. Hutcheon explains how, through use of metafiction,

> [T]he traditional mimetic assumptions of novel criticism are explicitly being contested by the fiction itself. The "referential fallacy," when applied to this kind of fiction, becomes in a sense short-circuited. It is no longer, in Michael Riffaterre's formulation, both the central obstacle to and the first step towards the reader's reaching the significance (semiosis) of the text. Instead, the fiction itself points to the fallacy as a fallacy, thereby preempting much of its status as necessity by presuming it as a given. What is immediately postulated as

axiomatic in such fiction is the fictiveness of the referents of the text's language. (Hutcheon 2)

When the text explicitly points to the 'fallacy' that fiction is in the end *as* a fallacy, this is what we call metafiction. But what if a text not only emphasizes its own fictionality and 'human constructedness', but also its own 'being literature'; its own textuality, or rather, its own *literariness*?

The term 'literariness' as we use and understand it in contemporary literary theory was developed by the Czech Linguist Roman Jakobson, who belonged to a group literary and linguistic scholars in the beginning of the previous century, who together founded the scholarly movement 'Russian Formalism'. The Russian Formalists were of the opinion that literary studies and linguistics were two disciplines that could, and should, support and complete each other, rather than behave like they were coming from separate worlds. Jakobson even writes about 'the right and duty of linguistics to direct the investigation of verbal art in all its compass and extent (Jakobson 93)'. He states: '[A] linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unconversant with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms'(94). The Formalists studied the possible distinction between 'normal', everyday uses of language and uses of language in literature. They tried to find out, in Jakobson's words, 'What makes a verbal message a work of art' (Jakobson 63). According to Jakobson, it is the poet or the author's approach of language that is somehow distinctive or new; it is thus in literature's use of language that it's *literariness* resides[10]. For the sake of clarity I make in this chapter a distinction between metafiction, which is strictly speaking that what a text practices when it makes reference to its own *fictionality* as a text, pointing out its own 'fallacy'; and 'metaliterariness', which is a term I would like to put forward for the narrative technique which entails a text foregrounding for example its own place in the literary tradition, or even its own 'book-being', the textual practice of emphasizing precisely that what makes a text *literature*, not merely what makes it fiction. Metaliterariness would then be the textual practice which makes explicit reference to its own literariness. I will argue that *Paravion*'s 'metaliterariness' can be found in three different narrative elements, which I will point out and explain one after one: first, the presence of the narrator; second, the use of intertextual references to (traditional) literary texts; third, the presence of letters, written words, and the book-girl.

By the end of the book, it becomes apparent that the story of Baba Baloek is told by a storyteller: a man who tells the story of his experiences of migration to an audience he addresses as 'mijne heren' – dear sirs. This narrator makes his presence known right at the beginning of the novel, which starts as follows:

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[10] The Russian Formalists also developed the term *foregrounding*, which by now is widely accepted and used in literary analysis whenever a text, through its use of language, emphasizes one element over other surrounding elements.

> Luister.
>
> Wat klinkt als een aanmaning tot stilte – ssst! – is in werkelijkheid het geluid van de wind
> in de bomen, een gerucht dat met vele tongen in de bladeren lispelt. En zou dat gekwetter
> van onzichtbare vogels niet geroddel zijn? (Bouazza 9)

In the first sentence, the reader is already addressed directly. This command ('Listen.') must be uttered by someone: someone telling the story. Two pages onwards, the narrator shortly interrupts his own story for a short remark between parentheses: '(dat is Moorlant voor u, mijne heren)' (11). Again, the reader is confronted with the fact that there is an implied audience. There is also a character in the story who is called 'de verteller', who plays a minor role on a story level but is mentioned several times – often only briefly, such as here:

> Toen de jongens uitgelikt waren, hadden zij er spijt van geld besteed te hebben aan smeltend
> water. De tandenstokers wipten tussen hun lippen. De verteller gebaarde heftig en temde
> daarna met een uitgestrekte hand – 'luister!'- de ademloze aandacht. (85)

It remains unclear whether or not this storyteller character is some other incarnation of the protagonist. It is, however, certain that by addressing the reader or listeners directly, the text calls the reader's attention towards the fact that this is all a story being told. This possibly prevents readers from getting all too comfortable in the fictional world presented to them. The narrator's remarks function in a way similar to Kadir's remarks in Khemiri's novel *Montecore*: they pull the reader out of the story itself by foregrounding the fact that it is (only) a story. The narrator's command, 'listen!', is repeated several times by various characters in the story, amongst whom Baba Baloek, the protagonist. On the last pages, it turns out that the narrator of the story might be Baba Baloek himself – yet we cannot be sure of that.

The second type of metaliterariness employed in *Paravion,* the use of references and quoting to other literary texts, is in fact rather an example of intertextuality than metaliterariness, but I will still point it out here, as it in effect complements *Paravion*'s metaliterariness: through intertextual reference, text places itself in a certain literary tradition and simultaneously confirms its own literariness. Towards the end of the novel, there is an adapted fragment from Theocritus' Bucolics:

> 'Wat is er toch, goede boer Boekaeus? Je snijdt de schoven niet goed, noch oogst je in
> hetzelfde tempo als je buurvrouw.'
> 'Goede meester Vroeg-en-laat-met-Sikkel, heb je nooit het verlangen om weg te gaan?'
> 'Nooit, voorwaar, waar kan een eenvoudige boerenknecht als ik heen gaan?
> 'En jij, heer Milon, lig jij 's nachts niet wakker van verlangen?'
> 'Nee, nooit, en Hallalief verhoede dat het ooit gebeurt. Ik slaap als twee ossen en een
> rozenstruik.'

> . . . En zo ging het door. Dan stond Boekaeus kreunend op, kraakte zijn rug en staarde naar de
>
> horizon, waar ooit Paravion in de mirage had gedanst. (201)

This fragment is based on Theocritus' tenth idyll, in which the farmer Bucaeus tells Milon that he is in love. In Bouazza's version, however, Boekaeus dreams of migration. Bouazza has adapted the fragment: Boekaeus has a female neighbor, Milon prays to a god called 'Halla' and Boekaeus lays awake at night and dreams of going far away, towards a better life perhaps. Earlier on in *Paravion*, detailed descriptions of the rural landscape and the people herding their sheep and working in the field might remind a well-read reader of the Greek Bucolic verses, but here, the reference is made explicit. This intertextual reference, however, puts an extra emphasis on the fact that *Paravion* is a literary text. It forces the readers to recognize two things: first, that Bouazza stands in the same (European) literary tradition as Theocritus many centuries before him, and second, again, that this is only a story, a piece of literary fiction.

Thirdly, there is the presence of written words, letters and the strange character of the girl (in the book simply referred to as 'het meisje'), who simultaneously is a young girl, Baba Baloek's mother and a book or long letter. Throughout the book, spaces, stories, songs and written words occurring in the narrative seem to slowly blur into each other. In this fragment, for example, one of the Morean man walks through Paravion. The water of the canals seems to function as a mirror-like heterotopia in which Paravion, Morea, ghosts, faraway singing and a hidden message about inner worlds, written mirrorwise, seem to come together:

> Hij liep langs de grachten en bleef op de brug staan om naar het water te kijken. Daarin zag
>
> hij schaduwen kronkelen, hoewel de kades verlaten waren. . . . Geesten wandelden
>
> ondersteboven langs, hand in hand, beroerd door de wind, verscheurd door motorboten en
>
> rondvaartschepen, maar daarna weer wonderlijk samengevoegd. De platanen werden
>
> weerspiegeld, evenals gele bollen en groene vegen als van een citroenboom die nergens te
>
> bekennen was of het moest zijn dat het water de herinnering aan zonnige vlekken behield.
>
> Het kabbelen leek een fluisterend gezang of geneurie, veraf, luister: *dlerewekjilrenni* en
>
> verder: *neenavgnizlehmo*. (150)

Even though it is said to be a song, the meaning of this song can only be understood when one *reads* it – mirrorwise, that is: embracing an inner world, the canals of Paravion seem to say. This paragraph, in which something, that is said to be a feature of a cityscape, can only be understood once it is read, pulls the reader's attention once again to the fact that we are not seeing, but *reading* Paravion and its inhabitants, its parks and its social issues. It foreground's the textuality of the text.

Furthermore, there is the presence of letters in *Paravion*. In all three of my case studies, letters seem to play a crucial role in the narration of stories of migration. In *Lettres parisiennes*, letters constitute the form in which the story comes to us. In *Montecore,* they form the level on

which the metafiction can take place, as well as the story layer that makes the reader become suspicious about what is fiction and what is real. In *Paravion*, however, they are merely present on the level of the diegesis, as the carriers of messages from and to Paravion. Baba Baloek (senior?) leaves for Paravion after receiving a letter from his father: 'Trillend en met eerbied opende hij de envelop en vouwde de brief die enkele vellen besloeg open. Het papier was fijn en teer, enigszins korrelig als het kippenvel van een jong meisje'(13). The Morean migrants in Paravion write letters to their sons in Morea as well. But there is one letter, or book perhaps, that forms a remarkable presence in the book. When the shepherd Baba Baloek is growing up, he is educated – erotically and otherwise – by a young girl he encounters and then continues to meet. She is a beautiful, light skinned, dark haired girl in a red dress who, as the reader knows from description, looks a little Baba Baloek's late mother, Mamoerra.

Whenever the girl is described, references to paper are made: '[Het meisje] zag er vermoeid uit, leek een lange afstand te hebben afgelegd. Ze schudde haar ledematen, streek haar onzichtbare kreukels weg. De bladeren ritselden'(90). The 'kreukels', even though they are invible, refer to fabric or paper. The last sentence can be a description or what is happening in the background ('the leaves of the trees rustled') but it might also refer to the pages of a book rustling[11]. The readers also learn that the girl is busy making paper whenever she is not teaching Baba Baloek. With every occurrence of the girl, the allusion to books or letters is made more explicit. First, it becomes clear that not only is her skin white, but her blood is black: 'Een heestertak schramde haar boven de enkel en het duurde even voordat het bloed in de puntjes opkwam. Het was zwart' (Bouazza 103). As time passes, the girl's white skin gets dry and fragile, and it turns out her tears are black like her blood:

> Ze was niet ouder geworden, hoewel haar huid verdorde en ruwer werd, brozer, alsof hij bij een ademtocht kon verstuivelen. . . . Zij keerde haar gezicht naar hem toe en lachte weer, veegde haar tranen weg. Hij zag dat haar polsen zwart waren van haar tranen die als zuur strepen in haar gezicht hadden getrokken. Ze schreide tranen die even donker waren als haar bloed en fijne adertjes. (Bouazza 200)

Her skin, like paper, gets dry and old, and her veins are fine black lines upon it. By now, she has told Baba Baloek almost everything she had to tell him. Then finally, we learn the purpose of the new paper the girl has been making all this time: 'Haar huid was verweerd, vergeeld en stond op het punt te vermolmen. . . Zij nam een reep vers papier en wikkelde die voorzichtig en behendig om haar onderarm en ziet! – haar huid was weer gaaf' (216). This time, words are used that are explicitly about paper: 'vergeeld' and 'vermolmen'. The girl wraps paper around her old 'skin' like one would do with a papier-mâché doll. But it does not work: only two pages later, the girl literally falls apart

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[11] In Dutch, the word 'blad' can be used both to indicate the leaves of a tree and the pages of a book.

and says goodbye to her son, Baba Baloek. She predicts that he, too, will leave her for the magical Paravion. 'Opgesloten in eenzaamheid, in dat zo geliefde Paravion, zie ik nauwelijks het daglicht', she says (218). Her final words, with which she makes her true identity known, are like the signature at the end of a letter: 'Je moeder, Mamoerra' (218). Now we understand what Mamoerra meant earlier, when she whispered as she lay dying:

> 'Mijn kind, mijn kind,' fluisterde zij huilend, 'mijn kind, ik zal je niet verlaten.' En zij bleef dit herhalen en voordat zij stierf, zei zij iets wat Cheira en Heira niet goed verstonden, iets wat eindigde op 'blijven' of 'schrijven'. Zij verkeerde blijkbaar in een delirium, want zij bleef niet, noch kon zij schrijven. (68)

She both 'stayed' and 'wrote', for she came back to be with her dying son as a book. This means that the hours the young shepherd spends with his girl, he probably actually spends reading: reading her. This is another way in which the story emphasizes its own textuality, and with that its own openness to fiction, imagination and the rethinking of what is familiar.

To summarize the three most obvious narrative techniques employed by Bouazza to foreground *Paravion*'s literariness: The mother of the protagonist is a book, in a story that is narrated by a narrator who makes his presence clearly known. This narrator tells a story that places itself in the tradition of bucolic verse, a modern version of Theocritus in which migration is the central theme. *Paravion* takes elements from reality, from imagination and from literature and mixes them up into a confusing unity. It refers to spaces in reality (Amsterdam, Morocco perhaps), it stages phantasmatic spaces (Paravion, the Morean valley), and it refers to other narrated spaces (Theocritus' rural landscapes). The two central spaces in this book, which consist of all three elements, start out far apart and then become closer thanks to a recurring sentence: the narrative literally brings them together by cutting across space.

Paraphrasing the author Zafer Şenocak, Birgit Kaiser writes:

> Given that many lives seem to have become more complex than the territorial vocabulary we have to adequately describe them, this – as Şenocak holds – might not be a bad time for writers, since writers "are challenged to create new designs, which should be judged less in terms of normative validity than in terms of imaginative achievement" (81).

Where normative validity in this case would entail providing a solution for a social problem or inventing an adequate new identity for European migrants, *Paravion* takes a different path and imagines a different story of migration. With this particular 'new design', *Paravion*, we might conclude with Minnaard that Bouazza tries to prove the literary value of his work. I agree with Minnaard that he partly does so through his 'voluptuous' writing, installing himself firmly in the Dutch literary tradition, but I hope to have shown in this chapter that there are other narrative strategies being used for this goal in *Paravion* that are more inventive and also more productive: they

invent new spaces that are related to experiences of migration but that are not the fixed national spaces with which migration is usually associated. These new spaces can be found in the 'spiegelhal' of the imagination rather than in a topographic reality. Making use of metafiction and what I have called 'metaliterariness', *Paravion* narrates a story of migration that has social reality, literature, and imagination as its context. *Paravion* seems to simultaneously stage the untouchable 'verbeeldingswereld' defended by Bouazza *and* foreground the impossible practice of referentiality: the narrated spaces Paravion and Morea refer to real spaces while they simultaneously foreground their own fictionality. This way, *Paravion* stages a phantasmatic world, but it also rethinks the relations between the various imagined spaces and the 'real' spaces that the reader's mind will certainly be drawn towards. Through narrative techniques of metafiction and metaliterariness, for example through its traditionally 'literary' use of language, *Paravion* thus shakes up its readers from what Bachelard calls the automatisms of language while telling a story of migration. And through its use of referentiality, it plays with the reader's perception of spaces as 'real' or 'fictional'. By being ambiguous about what is referred to (a lived space or an imagined one?), the text opens these spaces and the relations constituted between them through experiences of migration up to rethinking: multiple meanings are simultaneously attributed to narrated spaces, and it is up to the reader to interpret and combine just as she/he likes. De Certeau has shown us that it is the *narration* that attributes meaning to place and turns it into a space that bears significance and can be experienced. Like Bachelard, De Certeau was of the opinion that narration can be a spatial practice. This is what we see happening in Bouazza's *Paravion*: the narrative practices space by creating fictional spaces and referring to lived, real spaces. It does so within the narrative space, the textual space, which stretches between lived spaces and is related, but not equal to them. It is in this narrative space that the reader encounters narrated spaces through Bouazza's play with referentiality. I see cultural labor taking place there where the spaces are being brought up by the text and encountered by the reader in the text. One is being confused by the fictional narrative spaces 'Paravion' and 'Morea', and as a consequence one is forced to rethink the fixed and automatic meanings of signifiers like 'Amsterdam', 'Morocco' and 'migrant'. This takes place in the 'space' that is the text, which therefore can be interpreted as one of Adelson's 'sites for rethinking'.

Conclusion

Creative writing and critical thought certainly make reference to concrete places in the world, where people and nations have loved, lost, struggled, and died. These places haunt human imagination, but the imagined spaces of cultural labor cannot be mapped or measured with surveyor's tools. (Adelson 247)

This thesis started out with a critical description of the field. In the introduction, I positioned myself within a recent trend in postcolonial theory that focuses primarily on Europe, studying the effects of (post)coloniality within European society In the introduction, I presented three positions that formed a starting point for my research: the first being that postcolonial relations and more generally postcoloniality within Europe deserve attention; the second, that even if literature engages in and reflects upon social and political issues, it should always at least partly be studied and valued as a form of art, never only as an anthropological case study; and the third, that in some works of literature, space functions as something more than just a décor against which narratives take place. I narrowed my area of research down to 'migrant' or 'migration' literature, a focus that would suit my study program and within which issues of postcoloniality often take a central position. I explained my aim to analyze the narrative function of space in contemporary European migrant literature which foregrounds the relations between Western Europe and the Maghreb through narrations of experiences of Maghreb-to-Europe migration. Finally, I formulated my research question: How is space employed in the narration of Maghreb-to-Europe migration in three contemporary European works of literature? In an attempt to answer that question, I chose three contemporary European works of literature that narrate stories about experiences of migration from the Maghreb to Western Europe as case studies: Sebbar and Huston's *Lettres parisiennes*, discussed in Chapter 2, Khemiri's *Montecore, en unik tiger,* discussed in Chapter 3 and Bouazza's *Paravion*, discussed in Chapter 4. Together, the analyses form the answer to my research question, as they show the various ways in which space is foregrounded and rethought in the three books. As a theoretical frame for my analyses I used theories from cultural memory studies and anthropology with theories from the field of postcolonial (literary) theory, which I set forth in the first chapter of this thesis. In this first chapter, I explained theories of space by moreover Maurice Halbwachs, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault and Leslie Adelson. Analyzing the books, it became clear that these theories did not always combine well, and often I where Halbwachs, De Certeau, Bachelard and Said constituted more of a general starting point for thinking about space, sometimes I chose to employ De Certeau rather than Foucault, or Foucault rather than Adelson. Despite their incompatibility they proved a helpful set of tools for analyzing the books of my choice, and they became theoretical options which guided and supported my own observations.

Not by chance, all three different authors of these books about migration are European authors with a Maghrebi background. Therefore, it seemed logical not to leave the subject of autobiography undiscussed, even though I have tried to not let it overrule my analysis of the fictional elements of the story, in which, to my opinion, lies the literary value of all three of these books. In the second chapter, an analysis of Sebbar's and Huston's *Lettres parisiennes*, I referred to some articles on Sebbar's to complement the theoretical framework presented in chapter 1. As the correspondance *Lettres parisiennes* is the most obviously autobiographical work of the three, I also called upon some theory about the relation between migration literature and autobiographic writing by literary theorist Azade Seyhan. Seyhan is of the opinion that with its use of autobiography, migrant literature 'defies and redefines the boundaries of [that] genre' (181), because contemporary migrant literature freely mixes autobiography and fiction: 'These writers do not see the presence of fictionalized experience in their accounts as a threat to the validity of autobiography' (181). I have made apparent how this happens to a smaller or larger extent in any of the three books, and how space often plays a role in the transition from autobiography to fiction and vice versa.

In this conclusion, there is room for some comparison between the various ways space is employed in the various books. In her letters to Huston, Sebbar ponders about how, with her writing, she can give a place a soul, and how fiction allows her to 'preserve' the spaces she remembers. I first showed some examples of her struggle to attach meaning to place – a struggle she reckons is caused by her background as a 'voluntary exile'. Sebbar tries to 'stake out her territory', to use Bensmaïa's words, with her writing: she has no place in which she feels 'at home', so she uses her writing to create such a space (Bensmaïa 14). After this, the chapter focused primarily on the narrated space of Paris in the late 1970s, which plays an important role in the book as the literary reconstruction of lived memories and nostalgic imaginations about a certain place and time, and which I interpreted with the help of Foucault's concept of 69eterotopias. I pointed out how Sebbar recreates her time with the journal *Histoire d'elles* in Paris from 1977 to 1980 in her text: she narrates a virtual, textual space in which there is room to recreate the feeling, the *meaning* of Paris '77-'80. To Sebbar this space, the lived one as well as its textual recreation, counters the negative sentiments that accompany her exile. In my reading of *Lettres parisiennes*, Paris '77-'80 thus takes the form of a'counter-site' in which the possibilities and limits of physical spaces are both made apparent and stretched, complicated, changed or inverted through the (imagined) formation of new relations between physical spaces, and of which the function in the narrative is to literally 'counter' the 'spacelessness', to use Seyhan's term, in this work of migrant literature (Seyhan 186).

In my reading of *Montecore, een tijger op twee benen*, I focused on the extensive use of metafiction in the book. I moreover set forth how *Montecore* uses space as a signifying framework for the memories and stories of migration told by Abbas, Kadir and Jonas, there where *Lettres*

parisiennes rather uses what Seyhan calls 'spacelessness' as a framework around which the letters are written. On the level of the story of Abbas' migration, space in *Montecore* is used in a metaphorical sense (Abbas' initially perceives Sweden as a metaphor for Pernilla, and imputes to the space all the characteristics he praises in his beloved) and in the sense of identity (re)construction (again by Abbas, who tries to capture and appropriate some sort of 'essence' of Sweden). Then it pointed out how *Montecore* creates a new, textual space in order to rethink existing spaces and relations and to open space up to multiple experiences, stories and 'meanings' in a way that, as I already stated in my first chapter, might be uniquely possible in literature – because in literature the fictional and real can come together into one virtual, textual practice of space. We saw this happening in the *Lettres parisiennes*, and we are confronted with it again in *Montecore*. The narrative of *Montecore* foregrounds its own textuality and pushes the text forward as a meeting place for the two characters in which there is room for multiple narrations and experiences to coexist, *Montecore* plays with the reader's expectations of migrant literature. It forms a textual space in which various stories interact and meanings are not fixed, so that the reader is challenged to rethink the frontiers and categories commonly attributed to migration with the text as a starting point.

In my analysis of Bouazza's novel *Paravion*, I started out with discussing further the topic of the reception of migrant lit. I explained Bouazza's own position on the subject with the help of his essay *Een beer in bontjas*, and used this as a starting point for my reading of *Paravion*. I moreover called upon Minnaard's interpretation of Bouazza's text. In Minnaard's reading of *Paravion,* Bouazza uses voluptuous, overly 'literary' language to confirm his Dutchness as a writer. I agree with Minnaard that he partly does so through his 'voluptuous' writing, installing himself firmly in the Dutch literary tradition, but I hope to have shown in this chapter that there are other narrative strategies being used for this goal in *Paravion* that are more inventive and also more productive. I argued that Bouazza's use of literary language is a form of metafiction (that I call *metaliterariness*) which is a narrative technique used to foreground the fictionality of the text, which is done in order to open up exiting and fixed stories of migration to fantasy and rethinking. References to a socio-political reality as well as to other literary text are being made (intertextual use of space), and to the textuality of the narrative itself is emphasized. The fourth chapter points out how *Paravion* puts words and spaces that have, to use Ryan's term again, 'currency' in the real world, in a fictional context, and vice versa. Doing so, the text confuses its readers it perhaps stirs their '*automatismes'*, and with that, it invites them to rethink the automatisms that might be connected to a word like 'Amstel' (Bachelard 17). Social realism and fiction blend together even more seamlessly than in *Montecore*, where the reader is warned now and then not to believe such and such. Paravion seems to simultaneously stage the untouchable 'verbeeldingswereld' defended by Bouazza in *Een beer in*

bontjas and foreground the impossibility of the narrative practice of referentiality: the narrated spaces Paravion and Morea refer to real spaces while they simultaneously foreground their own fictionality. This way, *Paravion* stages a phantasmatic world, but it also rethinks the relations between the various imagined spaces and the 'real' spaces. The narrative practices space by creating fictional spaces and referring to lived, real spaces within the narrative or textual space, which stretches between lived. This narrative spaces and is related, but not equal to either lived or fictional space, but it does bring them together. The text thus forms the site for rethinking where the reader is invited or even forced to rethink those signifiers that have 'currency' in the real world in the light of what is presented to her or him as fictional.

This conclusion also leaves room for some suggestions for possible further research. The longer one engages oneself in a topic, the more interesting matters one discovers. I have, for example, not paid attention to the fact that letters and written correspondence play a key role in all three of the books: Sebbar's and Huston's book is written in the form of a correspondence, Khemiri's novel is a fictional e-mail correspondence and Bouazza's novel starts out with a letter and, in the end, turns out to be one long letter written from a mother to her son, retold by the son. It might thus be worthwhile to study the function of letters in stories of migration.

Furthermore, the conclusion is often used to sate a clear answer to the main research question. I have, however, answered my research question with three analyses of the various uses of space in three works on migration, and have attempted to summarize these various uses above. One can conclude that space in stories of migration is often used for rethinking experiences of migration, for freeing them from their social realist burden and instead opening them up to the imagination of the reader and writer; space is often used to trigger what Leslie Adelson calls 'cultural labor'. But, to quote Michel De Certeau: 'It remains to be discovered, of course, what actual changes produce this delinquent narrativity in society' (De Certeau 130). One has no actual way of testing the possible effects of these narrations on society, one can only philosophize. This thesis has, however, attempted to contribute to contemporary critical debate in three ways. First of all, I hope to have made a contribution to the relatively recent trend of 'postcolonizing' Europe by applying postcolonial theory to cultural expressions from Europe and about Europe, that are obviously engaged in postcolonial issues and should thus be studied as such. Moreover, I hope to have contributed to the move away from the eternal emphasis on the biography and background of the writer of stories of migration, not by ignoring this background, but by putting into perspective its significance compared to the significance of the narrative techniques used in contemporary European stories on migration. Third of all, I hope to have followed the line of contemporary theorists such as Leslie Adelson, Réda Bensmaïa, Azade Seyhan and Birgit Kaiser, who claim that space in migrant literature has a function beyond being a mere décor against which narratives take place.

Acknowledgements

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