

**“Doubt is Salutory in our Certainties:” Religious Fundamentalism, Terrorism and Identity in Driss Chraïbi’s Post-Postcolonial Detective Fiction**

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**Introduction:**

9/11 terrorism, characterized by Islamic extremism, irrationality and unlimited violence, was seen heavily within the historical trope of civilization struggling against barbarism. Islamist terrorists have become the paradigmatic new barbarians of our current geopolitical era. Nevertheless, many Western scholars expressed their opposition to the interplay of religion and terrorism post-9/11. In his article “Countering Ideological Terrorism,” Bassam Tibi, as one of many outspoken critics of contemporary

terrorism, defines terrorism in general as “a new kind of warfare,” “an irregular war,” “an action pursued with religious justification and legitimization” (103). In specific terms, he views Al-Qaïda’s terrorism as “a practice of terror in the name of Islam” (ibid). In his book *Ballot and Bullet: The Politicization of Islam to Islamism* (2009), Tibi explains that, unlike Islam as a faith, Islamism is a political ideology: “Islamism is nothing else but the Islamic variety of the global phenomenon of religious fundamentalism” (11). Besides, Tibi is indeed right to remark in his article “Countering Ideological Terrorism” that “September 11 [...] paved the way to the revival of established clichés about Islam which relate this religion without distinction to terrorism” (102). According to him, terrorism practiced by Al-Qaïda reveals with clarity the reference to religion involved, “even though in an ill shape” meaning not the essence of this religion. “For Islam is a faith and it by no means supports any kind of action that can be identified as terrorism, it rather prohibits it,” as he explains (ibid).

Within this understanding, the Moroccan-French renowned author Driss Chraïbi’s novel *L’homme qui venait du passé* (The man who came from the past) investigates the mobilizing force of Islamist terrorism, as a *politics* of its own, only justified and legitimized in the name of the religion of Islam. The detective novel critically reflects on the interplay of religion (Islam), terrorism and identity at the start of the new millennium. Published in

2004, the novel is a case of literature normally referred to as 9/11 literature or post-9/11 literature because it revolves around 9/11 terrorism, the war on terror and the assumed rhetorical clash of civilizations. In their article “Terrorism and the Novel, 1970-2001”, Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel explain the variety of genres in which the “terrorism novel”—the novel that revolves around terrorism—could be written. They states: “[i]f a police procedural can be comic, romantic, tragic, or ironic, [...] so can a terrorism novel expressed through the genre of a police procedural be comic, romantic, and so forth” (406). Chraïbi’s detective text, as a comic and ironic police investigation, could be included in this category of “terrorism novel” even though I prefer the terms 9/11 literature or post/9/11 literature.

*L’homme qui venait du passé* marks, then, Chraïbi’s literary innovation in both theme and genre after fifty years of literary production. Written in a transparent, direct style and tone, this detective novel extends the author’s thought-provoking critique in search for life outside the confines of the globalized drama of terrorism, the ideology of Islamism, and the assumed rhetoric of civilizational clash. The novel is part of Chraïbi’s last series of detective novels, which includes *L’inspecteur Ali* (1991), *L’inspecteur Ali à Trinity College* (1996), and *L’inspecteur Ali et la C.I.A.* (1998). Yet, this innovation in genre is not only in *L’homme qui venait du passé*, but in his literary corpus as a whole. As Chraïbi states in an interview with

the Moroccan weekly French-language magazine *Tel Quel* “Rencontre: Driss Chraïbi prend position”, “[i]t is a routine for a writer who is settled in her/his intellectual or material glory. Take all my works, from *Le passé simple* to *L’homme qui venait du passé*, from one work to another, it’s a different style, subject, tone, and register. A writer, can s/he write a linear work, from book to another? But not me.” [Un écrivain qui s’installe dans sa gloriole intellectuelle ou matérielle, c’est de la routine. Prenez toute mon œuvre, depuis *Le passé simple* jusqu’à *L’Homme qui venait du passé*, d’un ouvrage à l’autre, c’est un style, un sujet, un ton et un registre différents. Un écrivain peut-il écrire une œuvre linéaire, de livre en livre ? Moi non].

The author’s detective approach is an adaptation of detective genre conventions of crime-investigation plot that suits thematic developments, too. This innovative approach is intended to dramatize the global disorder, which 9/11 terrorism brought about in the world at large, and offer alternative imagination of the global order. As Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen contend in their edited book *Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective*, “postcolonial [crime novels] suggest that power and authority can be investigated through the magnifying glass of other knowledge, against the local or global mainstream, past and present, or against potential projections of a dominant group and a (neo-) imperial West” (5). In Chraïbi’s text, the detec-

tive is an indigenous Moroccan police investigator, but charged with an international investigation; he is often criticizing major world leaders, their global politics and their mainstream manipulation of peace and democracy.

Intriguingly, Chraïbi's detective brings to the fore the problematic issue of religious extremism, terrorism and identity in postcolonial theory. For postcolonial theory is extended and reframed to include new issues due to the aforementioned global changes: religious extremism, 9/11 terrorism, war on terror, etc. These developments brought the rhetoric of the clash of civilizations into the global scene, and which was considered by many Western politicians as a fight against barbarism—attributed to non-Western people, particularly Islamist terrorists. In her article “Neither East Nor West: From Orientalism to Postcoloniality,” Kerstin W. Shands underlines this change in postcolonial theory when he claims “while religion and the sacred have not been prominent matters in postcolonial studies until recently, they are now important items on the postcolonial agenda” (22). Nevertheless, the novel's innovation in thematics makes it fits to be classified within post-postcolonial detective fiction, rather than a classic postcolonial fiction, concerned with an investigation in an age of “accelerating globalization,” characterized by the aforementioned global changes.

In his chapter “Post-Postcolonial Writing in the Age of Globalization: The God of Small Things, Red Earth and

Pouring Rain, Moth Smoke,” in the book *Global Matters*, Paul Jay discusses the relationship between postcoloniality and globalization. He claims that there are two positions: “[w]here the first position insists on recontextualizing the study of colonialism and postcolonialism within the wider framework of globalization, the second position insists that globalization is a contemporary phenomenon, a dramatic rupture in the history of modernity to which colonialism and postcolonialism belong” (95). He shows how this tension between these two critical positions is reflected in contemporary fictional treatment of globalization. As a definition, globalization, characterized by the exchange of cultural commodities central to the fashioning of identity and the exercise of social power, facilitates new forms of agency, identity and subjectivity (Jay, *Global Matters*: 2). This stands in opposition to those scholars who lament what they see as the oppressively homogenizing effects of cultural globalization. With regards to postcolonialism, globalization is often considered as a contemporary post-postcolonial moment, or what Jay describes as “accelerating globalization.”

In literary studies, Jay points out that among contemporary literary engagements with the effects of “accelerating globalization” are distinguished as “post-postcolonial fiction” (96). He considers Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) and Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke* (2000) as being in many ways different from clas-

sic postcolonial texts, as they pay more attention to the contemporary effects of globalization than they do to the imperatives of postcolonial state-making and the construction of specifically postcolonial identities and subjectivities (95-96). For instance, Jay contends that Hamid's novel treats globalization as a contemporary post-postcolonial moment. In his words, "[i]nsisting that he belongs to a "post-postcolonial" generation of writers, [Hamid] suggests that the category of literature we have been calling "postcolonial" has become dated in an age of accelerating globalization" (96). Like Hamid's fiction, Chraïbi's detective novel, *L'homme qui venait du passé*, which narrates the problematic ills of fundamentalism and terrorism, as well as reflects on the rhetoric of a civilizational clash can be described as "post-postcolonial fiction" that represents the contradictions of the geopolitical states in post-9/11 world.

Importantly, selecting *L'homme qui venait du passé* to be a subject of analysis in this article originates from the fact that the interplay of religious fundamentalism and terrorism has received much criticism in media and academia alike since 9/11 terrorist attacks. Chraïbi's text responds to this criticism, adding its own coloration to the mythical identity of terrorism. What has attracted my interest, particularly, is not only the representation/re-narration of terrorism in Chraïbi's text, but also the encounter of this fictional narrative with something in the outside world, which makes the text in an embattled

relationship with the wreaking effects of terrorism. In this context, as Appelbaum and Paknadel claim, “terrorism has been *good to compose with* [their emphasis]. It has been handy subject matter for the composition of plots, the invention of psychological conflict, the discovery of interesting locales, the devising of timely themes, the rousing of political passions. Whatever the reality of terrorism may be [...], fiction has taken up terrorism as a thing of its own” (388). Indeed, Chraïbi’s text negotiates the complexity and contradictions of terrorism: as a politics of its own, an ideology and a myth. Situating Chraïbi’s novel within Jay’s conception of (post-) postcolonialism, my analysis will focus on its counter-consciousness in developing strategies of opposition and resistance in its investigation of 9/11 terrorism. I will explore, further, to what extent the text creates an oppositional space to dismantle the politics of Islamist fundamentalism and to denounce the impact of such politics on Muslim populations’ identity.

### **9/11 Terrorism’s Impact on Muslim Identity**

Replete with humour and irony as its narrative devices, *L’homme qui venait du passé* is a detective text about a progressive story of a police-procedural investigation. The investigation is undertaken in reaction to the subordinate story of crime which revolves around the discovery of a suspected Oussama Bin Laden’s corpse. This corpse is found in the well of the garden of a famous

hotel in Marrakech. Inspector Ali as the detective hero of the text is upgraded by the Moroccan authority as the chief-inspector of police and is charged of this investigation to find out the identity of the corpse. Embarking on his inquiry, Inspector Ali executes a transnational investigation in cooperation with Western Intelligence Services; and he finally identifies in a celebratory manner that the corpse is indeed Bin Laden's who looked for all secret services of the world since 9/11 terrorist attacks. With his utmost diplomatic efforts during his investigative journey, Inspector Ali announces heroically that he could root out Bin Laden's network of Al-Qaïda for fear of its potential threat of insecurity and instability in the world. The text plays, then, with references of factuality as fictional elements to contest the drama of terrorism launched since the devastating attacks of 9/11, unfortunately, in the name of Islam.

*L'homme qui venait du passé* is both reactionary and progressive in its narrative structure. The novel reacts to the Marrakech drama through an official investigation, tracing progressively the detective's activities. The text narrates the story of the ongoing investigation while at the same time framing the connection of particular events fitted into a single pattern of time, space and causality. In other words, the story of investigation is not only a search for the concealed story of the corpse-crime, but it is also a journey that aims to regain meaning and coherence in the aftermath of Bin Laden's 9/11 attacks.

Throughout this journey, the narrative goes beyond physical investigative efforts—of finding out Bin Laden's corpse and rooting out his network of Al-Qaïda—to thought-provoking efforts that aim at dismantling the very ideology of fundamentalism which terrorize in the name of religion. For this purpose, Chraïbi adopted the narrative device of doubt as a liberating strategy to counter the rigid and absolute subjectivity of fundamentalism—mainly Islamist, but not restricted to it—and to conceive an alternative, tolerant identity. The author's detective, identifying himself as a moderate Muslim, practices himself doubt which constitutes a critical interpretation of this subjectivity. The implication is to go beyond the confines of narrow thinking and dogmatic subjectivity which eventually leads to terrorist drama and widespread violence.

The narrative traces, then, the changing status of Inspector Ali who started as a successful investigator to end up in a desperate situation of failure and loss. The investigative journey brings meaning to the reader, but the detective himself is affected by the results of his inquiring efforts. While grappling with the effects of Bin Laden's 9/11 drama, the detective realizes at the end of his investigation, which turns out to be disappointing and destructive, that Bin Laden had a profound impact on his personal life and his identity. As a result of this impact, he expresses doubts about his life and his existence as articulated in this passage:

I do not know who I am or what I am. I lost my bearings through the mistake of a man named Oussama Bin Laden. [...] At the end of a long career, I find myself stuck in my job and in my private and personal life. It's that damn Bin Laden who has shattered my foundations and the essence of my existence. [...] I struggled, I fooled everyone; I have all the elements at hand. I resorted to every imaginable trick; I traveled thousands of kilometers... back to my starting point. It's this woe Bin Laden to blame. He is dead and buried. But he still lives in me. He calls on my past, to our past, all of us. We are more than one billion Muslims around the world.

Je ne sais plus qui je suis ou ce que je suis. J'ai perdu mes repères, par la faute d'un homme du nom d'Oussama Bin Laden. [...] Au terme d'une longue carrière, je me trouve bloqué dans mon job et dans ma vie intime et personnelle. C'est ce satané Bin Laden qui a bouleversé les bases et les fondements de mon existence. [...] Je me suis démené, j'ai berné tout le monde, j'ai tous les éléments en main, j'ai usé de tous les artifices imaginables, j'ai parcouru des milliers de kilomètres... pour revenir à mon point de départ. C'est la faute à ce vieux Bin Laden de Malheur. Il est mort et enterré. Mais il vit toujours en moi. Il fait appel à mon passé. À notre passé à nous tous. Nous sommes plus d'un milliard de musulmans aux quatre coins du monde. (242-3)

Desperately, Inspector Ali's investigation resulted in disappointment, alienation, existential loss due to the im-

pact of the terrorist figure of Bin Laden, who launched his terrorist drama in the name of Islam. The narrative lays emphasis on the fact that the cosmopolitan detective comes to his consciousness: conscious of the unjust impact Bin Laden plays on his personal life and on his identity, as a Muslim. The impact leaves him in a state of profound weariness and melancholy, in moral and psychological uncertainties. This situation displays that the detective fails to regain meaning and coherence after a long journey of transnational investigation to become firmly established in the aftermath of Bin Laden's attacks in New York. What he discovers, instead, is that the "damn" Bin Laden is "dead and buried," but he still "lives in [him]," haunting him, affecting him and his psychology. To put it differently, even if Bin Laden is biologically dead, he is symbolically alive, having a strong impact on the geopolitical stability in the world at large after 9/11. This reinforces the idea that even though small in numbers, terrorists have devastating actions and impacts which can destabilize not only nation-states' security, but also Muslims' identity and psychology worldwide.

With a focus on the question of identity, Inspector Ali's reflection on his identity makes Chraïbi's text a metaphysical detective. In their edited book *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney define metaphysical detective as "a text that parodies or sub-

verts traditional-story conventions—such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as surrogate reader—with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot [...]. Rather than definitively solving a crime, then, the sleuth finds himself confronting the insoluble mysteries of his own interpretation and his own identity” (6). In this sense, Chraïbi’s text is indeed metaphysical when the detective addresses himself with Shakespeare’s well-known dramatic verse “to be or not to be, that is the question!” (213). This soliloquy is essentially all about life or death: meaning to live or not to live, to exist or to die. As such, the narrator’s identity quest implies a state of chaos and disorder not only in psychological, but also in metaphysical sense. As a Muslim, the narrator becomes conscious that his identity is a matter of suspicion and stigmatization in a world overrides by fundamentalist terrorists like Bin Laden, who speak in the name of his identity while addressing the West.

Intriguingly, this impact of Bin Laden’s drama transcends spacial and temporal zones, affecting more than “one billion Muslims” around the world, unbounded by the limits of time and space. The impact brings to the fore the question of Muslim identity and its past in the post-9/11 world, which remains difficult to settle into. Inspector Ali’s overwhelmingly puzzling situation expresses the mire of 9/11 terrorism and suggests that its

devastating impact is quite complex to resolve even in fiction and to bring justice to all Muslims around the world. The implication is that launching terrorism in the name of the religion of Islam affected Muslims' identity, culture and history. This is well implied when the detective says: "William Shakespeare wasn't a cop, certainly, but he had expressed the same evidence: a tree could hide the forest." [William Shakespeare n'était pas un flic, certes, mais il avait exprimé la même évidence: un arbre pouvait cacher la forêt. 111]. "[A] tree could hide the forest" is quite a significant statement in that it expresses how the terrorist Bin Laden as a single fundamentalist tree could affect a large community of Muslims symbolized by the *forest*. Through the detective's imagination, the text attempts to deconstruct the wrong image that the 9/11 terrorist events imposed on Muslims in the West and the Muslim world in general. The novel is, then, an attempt not only to condemn terrorism as an ideological fundamentalism, but also to denounce its long-running negative impact on the image of Muslims. In a nutshell, it reflects on how the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have changed the way people look at Muslims in the West, viewed as "terrorist," "violent" and "barbaric."

### **Countering the Ideology of Islamist Terrorism**

Inspector Ali narrates Bin Laden's 9/11 drama as a moving incident, as history's material evidence which exists beyond the bounds of the narrative frame. As I have

mentioned in the introduction, the detective narrative is an attempt to counter Islamist terrorism and to deconstruct its totalitarian ideologies. While claiming that he knew Bin Laden in Sudan and his activities at the time, Inspector Ali narrates 9/11 drama as an outcome of Al-Qaïda's power and grievance in the world at large. The detective tells that according to Bin Laden's "brilliant idea," the powerful network of Al-Qaïda is constituted from wealthy people who are sick of the West and sick of their own countries. In an episode entitled "Ali" in which he chronicles his experiences which marked his investigation, the detective states in the following congruent historical narrative:

I knew some times ago Bin Laden in Sudan. He moved around the drops, schemed with the CIA and the oil majors. And one day, he had an idea; a brilliant idea: Al-Qaïda network. He had at his disposal money and men to constitute this powerful network: people trained in the West were sick of the West and sick of their own countries. But he committed an unpardonable sin: he spoke in the name of Islam and he launched his men to attack America.

J'ai connu jadis Bin Laden, au Soudan. Il a navigué entre les gouttes, magouillé avec la CIA et les majors du pétrole. Et un jour, il a eu une idée. Une idée géniale: le réseau Al-Qaïda. Il avait à sa disposition l'argent et les hommes pour constituer ce réseau très puissant: des gens formés en Occident, qui en avaient marre de l'Occident et marre de leurs propres pays.

Mais il a commis une faute impardonnable: il a parlé au nom de l'islam et il a lancé ses hommes à l'assaut de l'Amérique. (252)

This detective narrative enunciates that Bin Laden and his people launched terrorism with no ties to any nation-state, to neither the West nor their home countries. Their “[t]error is a kind of metastasis of war, war without spatial or temporal bounds,” it is indeed “terror [that] divorces war from the idea of the nation,” to use Appadurai’s statements in *Fear of Small Numbers* (92). As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, terrorism is a sort of “‘irregular war’ of non-state actors waged without honoring rules,” as Tibi puts it in “Countering Ideological Terrorism” (102). Tibi considers Al-Qaïda’s terrorism as ideological warfare articulated in religious-cultural terms undertaken by non-state actors (ibid). As non-state actors, Bin Laden and his allied people, perform *politics* of their own, stripped of any national ties, essentially adrift. Exclusionary to both the West and their home countries, these people are positioned in a mythical symbolic community that has no basis other than that of exclusion, terrorism and fear. Their politics is forged from inside this community exclusionary to any outside ties, antagonistic to both the West and to the home countries.

In this context, Chraïbi’s detective novel offers critical intervention in the issue of Islamist terrorism in the world

at large in an attempt to subvert totalitarian ideologies and imagine instead order and peace. While discussing history as material evidence in detective fiction, in her article “Detective Fiction and Historical Narrative”, Ellen O’Gorman contends that “[f]iction [...] does not challenge history; the two (insofar as they are two) are inter-dependent. Moreover, the materiality of evidence in both detective fiction and historical writing is [...] sustained as material by the congruence of narratives. Most chillingly, those narratives are only congruent, only work as narrative, when they are seen as appropriate or permissible by a given social order” (1999, 25). Chraïbi’s text falls into this conceptualization of narrative that intervenes in both social and global matters. If the fundamentalist figure of Bin Laden provides the materiality evidence in history, in the fictional work it is a fictional figure that acts in a particular social order/disorder, as O’Gorman articulates it (1999, 25). As an emblematic figure of Islamist terrorism, Bin Laden is killed, his network is deconstructed and his Islamist ideology is contested by Inspector Ali. This innovative thematic in Chraïbi’s novel implies that the complexity of social and global circumstances requires a particular genre. The adoption of the detective genre to combat the drama of terrorism distinguishes the novel from Chraïbi’s other literary works.

Further, the narrative denounces the fact that the fundamentalist Bin Laden spoke in the name of Islam during

his terrorist attacks on America. This incident presents Islam as a religion which promotes terrorist violence and views Muslims as “fundamentalists,” “terrorists” and “barbaric.” Inspector Ali refutes Bin Laden’s terrorism in the name of Islam, suggesting that the Muslim world is so diverse, represented by those who are either liberal, conservative or a tiny-minority of fundamentalist Muslims. Endowed with agency, Inspector Ali contends that Bin Laden and his network of Al-Qaïda—grounded on the rhetoric of polarization between Islam and the West—committed the “unpardonable sin” to launch drama of violence behind the religious mask of Islam. This demonstrates the fact that religion is victimized or hijacked by Bin Laden and his violent men to serve ideological ends; it is misused to forge their non-state politics, which sees terrorism as its means of power in its war against both Western and non-Western states. Consequently, the detective’s challenging voice articulates the text’s engaging counter-discourse to dismantle Al-Qaïda’s terrorism as politics of its own. His condemnation of Bin Laden and his people to speak in the name of Islam breaks down, thus, the interplay between Islam and terrorist violence, provoked since the incident of 9/11.

This detective imagination situates the text in agreement with Tibi’s remark in “Countering Ideological Terrorism” that “September 11 [...] paved the way to the revival of established clichés about Islam which relate this religion without distinction to terrorism” (2008, 102). According

to him, “terrorism practiced by Al-Qāida reveals with clarity the reference to religion involved—even though in an ill shape” meaning not the essence of this religion. “For Islam is a faith and it by no means supports any kind of action that can be identified as terrorism, it rather prohibits it,” as he explains (2008: 102). Based in Germany, Tibi’s books often address Muslims in the West, but also non-Muslim Westerners who conflate terrorism with Islamic religion. In his book *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder*, Tibi expresses that religious fundamentalism which seeks to terrorize is not “a spiritual faith, but “a political ideology” based on politicizing religion” (20). Similarly, Chraïbi’s narrative engages the detective’s critical imagination and his intervention in negotiating the impact that the terrorist network of Al-Qāida played on Muslims in the West and in the Arab world alike. Through his labor of imagination and his counter-discourse, the detective attempts to subvert Islamist ideology, its launch of terrorism in the name of Islam and its impact on the image of Muslims particularly in the West.

Throughout the novel, Chraïbi’s detective exposes the sophisticated accusation of the religion of “Islam” by the West as being a driving force behind fundamentalism practised by Bin Laden. An interesting aspect of Chraïbi’s cynical narrative is a consideration of the problematic and complex interplay between fundamentalism, terrorism and the religion of Islam. Squaring with Tibi,

Inspector Ali narrates that Bin Laden's 9/11 drama was legitimized in religion, "even though in an ill shape." In his ironic voice, the detective claims:

The Koran asked in the Surat (chapter) of flamboyant, the same one that was found in Marrakech: Is it possible that, when returned to the state of dust, you become then a new creation?" a man of the present time [Bin Laden] believed. He was dead at the bottom of a well. He came from the past... hey there, hey! Wake up, Ali! You're a cop. The only certainty in this world is doubt.

Le Coran demandait dans une sourate flamboyante, celle-là même qu'il avait trouvée à Marrakech: "Se peut-il que, retournés à l'état de poussière, vous deveniez ensuite une création nouvelle?" Un homme des temps présents y avait cru. Il en était mort, au fond d'un puits. Il venait du passé... Hé là, ho! Réveille-toi, Ali! T'es un flic. La seule certitude en ce monde est le doute. (159).

Inspector Ali claims mockingly that Bin Laden performed his unquestioning loyalty to the religious traditions. The verb in the past tense "believed" indicates that Bin Laden's belief is a literal, direct knowledge of the religious statement, without to be situated in the right context and accurate interpretation. Inspector Ali's satirical claim, addressing himself: "hey there, hey! wake up, Ali!" challenges indirectly the "man of the present" whose literal reading of religion and his ideological be-

lief led him to commit devastating attacks in New York. In other words, the detective's imperative statement and his mockery spotlight on the illusion and myth of terrorist violence, unfairly legitimized in religion. Besides, the quote brings to the fore juxtaposition between a fundamentalist (Bin Laden) and a cynic (Inspector Ali): one believes in literal sense, the other mocks religious scriptures. If we consider the whole narrative intervention, this juxtaposition reflects on a resisting discourse which counters the man's wrong religious understanding, as a belief of illusion and a myth. Thus, even though in a cynic's mocking tone, the text refutes literal understanding and flawed reading of religion, as well as politicizing religion for ideological and political ends.

Chraïbi's narrative seems to suggest that both the fundamentalist Bin Laden and the detective as liberal cynic lose "the ability to believe in the proper sense of the term," in Žižek's words (348). In his book *The Parallax View* (2006), Žižek theorizes best "the formula of fundamentalism" as opposed to the liberal-sceptical cynicism. Žižek's drawn comparison between fundamentalism and liberal-sceptical cynicism is based on the common point which is "the loss of the ability to believe in the proper sense of the term." (2006: 127) He considers that while the cynic mocks religious statements, the fundamentalist accepts them as direct knowledge which both distort the proper sense of belief. About this issue, Žižek writes as follows:

[w]hat is foreclosed from the symbolic (belief) returns in the Real (of a direct knowledge). A fundamentalist does not believe, he *knows* directly. Both liberal-skeptical cynicism and fundamentalism thus share a basic underlying feature: the loss of the ability to believe in the proper sense of the term. For both of them, religious statements are quasi-empirical statements of direct knowledge: fundamentalist accept them as such, while skeptical cynics mock them. [...] In short, the true danger of fundamentalism lies not in the fact that it poses a threat to secular scientific knowledge, but in the fact that it poses a threat to authentic belief itself. (348)

Žižek considers, therefore, that the fundamentalist does “not believe,” but “knows directly” which threatens authentic belief and appropriate faith. Chraïbi’s above cited narrative seems to raise the same point as far as this danger of fundamentalism is concerned—as far as Bin Laden’s drama of terrorism is launched in the name of Islam, part and parcel of Muslim populations’ culture and identity. We detect in the cited quote an emphasis on the dichotomy between Bin Laden who “believed” in the religious statement as direct knowledge in a literal form and Inspector Ali who expresses his cynicism through doubt as the only certainty in this world. This brings to the fore the two figures in a juxtaposing manner: Bin Laden’s direct belief without any critical reasoning versus Inspector Ali’s skeptical subversive attitude

while mocking Bin Laden's fundamentalism. Yet, does this mean that Ali as a cynic does not believe also, as Žižek considers both the fundamentalist and the cynic? Identifying himself as a "Muslim," Inspector Ali's belief appears associated with his critical mind through replacing rigid *certainly* with doubt as a strategy of critical reasoning, of reading things beyond their literal confines.

Read in this way, the author calls for critical thinking that goes beyond the literal interpretation of the religious text and that transcends the narrow literal representation of Islam. This argument is supported when Inspector Ali expresses that today Islam is as strange as it started out, illustrating with the following prophet Mohamed's saying: "[i]n Mecca, [prophet] has told his followers in a clear and intelligible voice: "Islam will become strange as it has started." [À la Mecque, il avait dit à ses fidèles d'une voix Claire et intelligible: "L'Islam redeviendra l'étranger qu'il a commencé par être." 158]. This narrative reference to the prophet's saying illustrates that Islam today is at its utmost strangeness. Yet, the saying implies that between the first period of strangeness (as it started) and the second period of strangeness (today) Islam has known light and glory. The detective's recourse to this saying suggests, thus, a reconciliation of Islam's past, its history and civilization, with Islam's present, to be rescued from the intolerance of fundamentalism and dogmatism. In his interview to *Tel Quel*, the author himself states in a debate about Islam:

[d]o you remember the most famous saying uttered by the prophet three days before his death: sayakoun al islam ghariban kama kana min gabl (Islam will become strange as it has started.) Currently, the letter has taken over the mind and there is a perfect dichotomy between the two. Islam is for me a goal to achieve.

Souvenez-vous de la phrase très célèbre qu'a prononcée le prophète trois jours avant sa mort: sayakoun al islam ghariban kama kana min gabl (L'islam redeviendra l'étranger qu'il avait été). Le prophète était très lucide. Actuellement, la letter a pris le dessus sur l'esprit et il existe une dichotomie parfaite entre les deux. L'islam est pour moi un but à atteindre. ("Rencontre: Driss Chraïbi prend Position") (2005: 157)

Chraïbi's detective novel is thus a severe critique of the fundamentalist terrorists' misuse and abuse of religion to launch the drama of violence. The critical questioning of Islam is common in Chraïbi's works, the most of which is *L'homme du passé*. Chraïbi lays emphasis on the importance of reason or rationale in reading and interpreting a religious text. He even considered that Islam is a goal to achieve, of course through achieving moral standards: peace with one's self and the other, justice and dignity, etc. The word "Islam" itself means peace, and Islamic religion teaches Muslims how to approach others with love, peace and tolerance. All throughout the text, Chraïbi's detective assumes the role of a sub-

ject who strategically and self-consciously manages to dismantle the problematic interplay of fundamentalism and terrorism; he represents a moderate Muslim who defends morals and principles against the dogmatic certainties of fundamentalists; the implication is that Islam promotes tolerance, peace and security, instead of terroristic violence.

In this context, in “Countering Ideological Terrorism,” Tibi considers Islamist fundamentalism as an ideology that seeks “the invention of tradition, not the tradition itself” to serve ideological and political ends (103). The idea here is that Islamism is at stake with modernity, contrasting and rejecting each other in today’s globalized world. The detective narrative’s *mise-en-scène* of the past shows that seeking the “invention of tradition” over modernity is the main factor behind Bin Laden’s 9/11 attacks. Interestingly, both the title and the cover of the novel conform to this *mise-en-scène* of the past in the present time. The title *L’homme qui venait du passé* (The man who came from the past) reinforces that the text’s main plot and its central theme, which are about a particular man, represented as an identified person, “*the man*”: The definitive article lays emphasis on a unique, single man, attributing an absolute, totalitarian character to this man. The article presupposes, also, that the man is already identified because he came from the past, already known, who acts in contrast to the present. The front cover is significant in the sense that it portrays or

rather identifies an old man with a Moroccan *djellaba* (traditional dress) as a sign of traditions, which signals cultural and civilisational significance of the ancient past. The detective's claim that "the man of the present" "came from the past" suggests that the challenge is to discover a balance between the preservation of past identity and dwelling in the present, between traditions and modernity.

The front cover's other metanarrative signs reinforce the ideology of Islamist fundamentalism represented by Bin Laden's belief of illusion or ideology. On the right side where the man sits leaning on the wall of a house is a shadow of a palm tree reflected on the house, hiding the day light. The palm tree is actually an emblem of the Islamic world to which the man who came from the past—always a reference to Bin Laden—belongs. But it is a shadow, why not a real palm tree? The shadow opposes light and it never reflects the object it represents in its real form. It signals, rather, darkness, evil, ghost and illusion. In this sense, the shadow of the palm tree could symbolize Bin Laden's terrorist network launched behind the "shadow" or the mask of "Islam." For this shadow comes close to the house as darkness to settle on the light and to hide it. The light here could symbolize Islam itself masked by the shadow of the palm tree, masked by the ideology of Islamism represented by the old man. The subversive symbol of the shadow of the palm tree, however, connecting the earth and the sky as

well enunciates that the man's fundamentalist belief is an illusioned belief, a myth, or rather an ideology. The shadow demonstrably symbolizes the dark side of the ideology/politics of fundamentalism which seeks the "invention of tradition,' not the tradition itself," in Ti-bi's words (103).

**“Doubt is Salutory in our Certainties:” Rationale  
*versus* Certainties**

Against the illusion of fundamentalism, the detective proposes that the only certainty in this world is doubt which offers sceptical space for critical reasoning. His oppositional voice serves as a subversive strategy of the fundamentalists' rigid certainties, implying that absolute knowledge is impossible. In his ironic voice, the detective expresses doubts himself the existence of God, the religious “contortions” and the significance of the word “believe”. In his diegetic voice, the sceptical detective contends as follows:

Illusions die hard, mirages, self-interested love of the neighbour. Beginning with God, I do not know his name, Jehovah, our Father in heaven, or Allah. I do not know if he really exists. If he exists, I reckon he looks a bit like my back: I cannot see him, even in a mirror. And in this case, I would get a stiff neck because of twisting myself. (Voice of a cop) This is what we call religion, contortions, I blaspheme? What does the word “believe” mean? Doubt is salu-

tary in our certainties; our old certainties came from the past. That's why you write. That's why I'm a cop; a cop is no soft touch. Fortunately, I am not Catholic. There are too many mysteries, which I cannot solve; nobody has ever solved them.

Les illusions ont la vie dure, les mirages, l'amour intéressé du prochain. À commencer par Dieu. Je ne sais pas comment il s'appelle, Jéhovah, Notre Père qui est aux cieux ou Allah. Je ne sais pas s'il existe réellement. S'il existe, m'est avis qu'il ressemble un peu à mon dos: je ne peux pas le voir, même dans un miroir. Et dans ce cas, j'attraperais un torticolis à force de me contorsionner. (Voix de flic: )C'est cela qu'on appelle la religion. Des contorsions. Je blasphème? Que signifie le mot "croire"? Le doute est salutaire dans nos certitudes, nos vieilles certitudes venues du passé. C'est pour cela que tu écris. C'est pour cela que je suis flic, un flic à la redresse. Heureusement que je ne suis pas catholique. Il y a trop de mystères, je ne peux pas les résoudre, personne ne les a jamais résolus. (247).

If Žižek points out that both the cynic and the fundamentalist do not *believe* in the proper sense of the term, Chraïbi's detective interrogates the verb "believe" as a problematic concept without giving a definitive answer to it. In other words, Ali questions everything, but does not answer his interrogative questions perceptibly to give space to the practice of doubt. While confronting the embedded narrator—the pseudo of the author—the detective reinforces that doubt is *salutary* in our certain-

ties that belong to the past. Doubt serves here as a liberating, subversive strategy from past totalitarian knowledge. It is articulated as a remedy to the mystery of religious fundamentalism in the present modern world. As the author himself expresses in his interview to *Tel Quel* “Rencontre: Driss Chraïbi prend Position:” “doubt is salutary in lifetime. If we do not doubt, we are sheep. You let yourself be fooled by thinking of others” [Le doute est salutaire au sein d’une vie. Si on ne doute pas, on est des moutons. On se laisse berné par la pensée des autres. J’ai cherché à avoir ma propre pensée au niveau social, politique, et même religieux]. For doubt signifies a constructed process rather than a given essence, opening a space for one’s rationale; doubt is adaptable to new contexts and environments, a rethinking process of life issues.

Chraïbi’s text does not only refute Islamist fundamentalism, but all other religious extremism, too. Reinforcing the state of doubt, the detective stresses the difficulty of being Catholic as a religious identity which constitutes “too many mysteries.” He views these religious-based certainties and mysteries as being complex, “contortions” beyond one’s understanding. As such, Inspector Ali expresses openly his non-religiosity. Earlier in the novel, in the first chapter, the detective defines his spiritual dimension ascertaining his non-religious identity: “I am not religious, I am a non-religious person” [Je ne suis pas “culte,” moi. Je suis inculte. 36]. His non-religi-

osity or rather moderate religiosity—“a Muslim without beard and without turban” [un mahométan sans barbe et sans turban]—is a liberating force which expresses a sort of resistance to the fundamentalist “bearded” Bin Laden [un barbu, 87]. The juxtaposition introduces different faces of reading “Islam” ranging from extremism to moderation. This situation leads Amartya Sen to claim in his book *Identity And Violence* that “the recognition of multiple identities and of the world beyond religious affiliations, even for very religious people, can possibly make some difference in the troubled world in which we live” (79). For “violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror” (ibid), as Sen contends. This narrated diversity in the perception of “Islam” suggests that the detective text argues against the singular and primordial view of fundamentalist religious identities.

Chraïbi’s narrative makes clear that fundamentalism exists in all religions, be it Islam, Christianity, Judaism, etc. In an attempt to confront the proficient artisans of terror, Inspector Ali opposes all kinds of fundamentalisms ranging from Islamist to Christianist and Judaist. While his old friend David Moine-Moise—presented as the officer in Moroccan DGSE (Service Action)—comments on the five attacks which took place in Casablanca that the Islamist are behind these terrorist violence, the detective confronts him in a challenging voice:

— I know. These are the Islamists who have made the shot? [David]

— Islamists? Cried Inspector Ali hiding his face. What does that mean, Islamists? Why not the Judaists or the Christianists while you are there? The underlings exist everywhere. Think it over, David. [Inspector Ali]

— Je sais. Ce sont des islamistes qui ont fait le coup de feu?

— Des islamistes? Se récria l'inspecteur en se voilant la face. Ça veut dire quoi, islamistes? Pourquoi pas des judaïstes ou des christianistes pendant qu'on y est? Les lampistes existent partout. Réfléchis, David. (186).

David's accusation of the Islamist to be behind the five attacks in Casablanca seems based on the fact that several of his Jewish family members are died and other injured in this incident. The detective, however, undermines David's accusation as he simply doubts that it is done by the Islamists since the Judaist and the Christianist fundamentalists exist as well. Since they exist, Ali seems to say, they could be behind these attacks, too. His doubt urges David to admit that today we do not only face the Islamists' terrorism but also the Judaists' and the Christianists'. The implication is that all kinds of religious fundamentalisms foment intolerance and violence. Thus, Chraïbi's narrative warns, as Amartya Sen reminds

us, that “the artificial diminution of human beings into singular identities can have divisive effects, making the world potentially much more incendiary” (ibid). The belief in religiously fundamentalist identity makes the extremists recognise only their “own politics”, opposing any other lifestyle. Through its counter-discourse, the text subverts any religious fundamentalism as a “politics of its own”, resisting a state of incendiary world.

In contrast to these divisive, religiously fundamentalist identities, Chraïbi’s text proposes a fluid, flexible and moderate identity able to interact with differences and accept other cultures. It offers the example of Inspector Ali and his friend David who shared the misery and the joy of their childhood and their adolescence in a popular neighborhood in Casablanca despite their different religions. The narrator comments on their friendship as follows:

David Moine-Moïse was a Jewish at heart, without kippa and faithless, as Ali was a Muslim without beard and without turban. [...] And both, beyond the Mediterranean, the confessions of faith, the ideologies, the space and time, shared the most precious thing in life: friendship.”

David Moine-Moïse était juif dans l'âme, sans kippa et sans foi, tout comme Ali était un mahométan sans barbe et sans turban. [...] Et tous deux, par-delà la Méditerranée, les confessions, les idéologies, l'espace et le temps, avaient en commun le bien le plus

précieux de la vie: l'amitié. (184)

This analogy between Ali and David unfolds the text's aspiration to a tolerant identity that goes beyond the religious affiliation and primordial differences; it addresses an appeal to a "human identity" which is characterized by a sense of humanity, tolerance and respect. In his aforementioned interview, "Rencontre: Driss Chraïbi prend Position," the author stresses this point when he claims: "above the differences of countries and beliefs, for me it is a human being. [...] We have to get out of the self, of one's country, one's identity to have a greater identity." [Au-delà des différences de pays et de croyances, pour moi c'est un être humain. [...] Il faut sortir de soi, de son pays, de son identité pour avoir une grande identité]. This view is well expressed in his epigraph of the novel as he writes: "It suffices that a human being is there, at the crossroads, at the right time, so that our destiny would change" [Il suffit qu'un être humain soit là, à la croisée de chemins, au moment voulu, pour que notre destin change, 10]. This epigraph summarizes best the author's argument against religious fundamentalism, its ideological certainties which foment terrorist violence. He proposes, rather, that it suffices to be religiously moderate, respecting and accepting other religions, beliefs and convictions. This attitude counters the fundamentalist's tendency for the rigid, literate "invention of tradition". It proposes, instead, an alternative form of tolerant, human identity, at peace with other cultures, religions. As such, Chraïbi's detective makes an essen-

tial contribution to countering the politics of religious fundamentalism, be it Islamist, christianist or Judaist, promoting instead tolerance, peace and security in the world.

### **Conclusion:**

*L'homme qui venait du passé* is remarkably innovative in style, genre and theme. The detective novel offers critical intervention in post-9/11, as painful times that were a turning point in the world at large. The text dramatizes, first, the murder of the network's chief, Oussama Bin Laden who launched 9/11 attacks, as an aspiration to a world less imprisoned by the drama of terrorism and the enormous fear it inspires. In disclosing the ideology of Islamism, Chraïbi's novel deconstructs the contemporary rhetoric of the interplay between terrorism and the religion of Islam. The text engages a counter-discourse that opposes and challenges the ideological or illusion-based fundamentalism which unfairly legitimizes terrorism in the religion of Islam. Criticizing Bin Laden's 9/11 drama, the text creates an oppositional space in which it dismantles Islamist fundamentalism as an illusioned "invention of tradition," not the real tradition, and as *politics*, not faith. The text propels, then, its argument through considering the concept of doubt as a liberating and thought-provoking strategy to the rigid certainty of Islamist fundamentalism. Out of the need to establish a much more rational discourse on cross-cul-

tural and inter-religious contacts, the text goes further in opposing all sorts of fundamentalisms, Islamist, Christianist, and Judaist that inspire the drama of terrorism or any other violence. Even though the text's focus is on Islamism, Chraïbi's message is that all kind of religious fundamentalisms should be resisted and their terrorist violence should be condemned.

*L'homme qui venait du passé* demonstrates deconstructive efforts undertaken to unfold the counter-discourse that Chraïbi engages in his narrative to subvert the ideological forces of fundamentalism as the roots of today's terrorism. Through the detective's agency, authority, power, the text offers a productive and challenging poetics in search of life outside the confines of these ideological forces. In this sense, Chraïbi's text seems underlying the fact that it is not the case that "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and un-monolithic," as Edward Said assumed in *Culture and Imperialism* (xix). The novel shows that since 9/11 drama, cultural pluralism is rather withering, paving the way for the emergence of narrow and chauvinistic identities, of religious and political fundamentalisms alike. The text's critical opposition is, therefore, a mechanism engaged to transcend the barbarity of violence; it counters the intolerance which terrorists promote to serve their ideologies and political agendas. Chraïbi proposes, rather, that one should be at the cross-road where identity is constructed

and reconstructed in moderate terms to pave the way for alternative forms of human identity. As such, Chraïbi's detective novel is a fully engaged philosophical practice, a productive post-postcolonial text that responds to the world's global matters.

Indeed, if the category we call postcolonial requires a political engagement with the history of decolonization and its ramifications, Chraïbi's detective novel which narrates the interplay between religious fundamentalism and terrorism can be described as "post-postcolonial fiction." I consider all 9/11 or post 9/11 literatures as "post-postcolonial fiction" that represent the contradictions of the geopolitical states and their conflicts in an age of accelerating globalization. Importantly, Chraïbi's detective suggests that power and authority can be investigated through adopting narrative strategies of opposition and resistance. The text positions its chief-inspector of police, its single questing detective as a centre of consciousness to contest the power of Bin Laden's network of Al-Qaïda, as well as to undermine the ideology of Islamism. This literary innovation distinguishes, indeed, the text from Chraïbi's previous non-detective works. Chraïbi's text is, thus, a case of post-postcolonial detective fiction that offers critical negotiation of today's global matters, aspiring for tolerance and peace in an age of accelerating globalization.

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