

The production of critical thought in the Maghrib:
Abdallah Laroui and Hichem Djaït
(1965-1978)

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ABSTRACT

The critical essay gained immense popularity in the sixties and seventies in the Maghrib as a way to depict national realities that had failed to live up to nationalist ideals. Their authors often shared similar attributes: young highly educated intellectuals, committed toward modernity and who steered clear of politics. Such was the case of Abdallah Laroui (born 1933) and Hichem Djaït (born 1935), two celebrated Maghribi thinkers of the post-1967 generation in Arab thought. Despite their different ideological positions, they share a similar trajectory and both wrote about the need for another Arab renaissance, in Laroui's *La crise des intellectuels arabes* (1974) and Djaït's *La personnalité arabo-islamique* (1974).

The turn to critical writing is routinely dismissed for being secondary, for having a restricted audience and little political impact, yet it highlights well the Maghribi postcolonial intellectual's competing demands: to conform to an ideal representation of intellectual "commitment" through critical speech, and to secure national recognition and integration. As such, this thesis confronts the often-neglected impact of nationalism on intellectual conducts after independence around the impact of their disillusionment, and forces us to rethink critically notions of engagement, the role of intellectuals and postcolonial cultural productions that are current in Middle East studies, and problematically envisaged by postcolonial studies

These texts have been approached as dynamic objects responding to a set of questions in their time, to account for the materiality of thought production, mobilising David Scott's concept of the "problem-space of intellectual production" (1999). This thesis looks at Abdallah Laroui and Hichem Djaït's intellectual projects from 1965 to 1978, to study the genesis and aftermaths of their critical moment, focusing on their published writings (critical essays and academic studies), press and journal articles, interviews, and fictional texts from a later period, in Arabic and French. Their writings will be read alongside several cultural journals, newspapers and memoirs dealing with this period of the Maghrib's history to account for the processes of circulation and reception by relevant audiences.

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List of abbreviated journal titles

<i>AAN</i>	L'Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord
<i>AdM</i>	L'Année du Maghreb
<i>ARS</i>	Annual Review of Sociology
<i>BJMES</i>	British Journal of Middle East Studies
<i>CdM</i>	Cahiers de la Méditerranée
<i>CSSAAME</i>	Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East
<i>IJMES</i>	International Journal of Middle East Studies
<i>JA</i>	Jeune Afrique
<i>JAH</i>	Journal of African history
<i>JAL</i>	Journal of Arabic Literature
<i>JNAS</i>	Journal of North African Studies
<i>MAS</i>	Journal of Modern African Studies
<i>ReFEPA</i>	<i>Revue française d'études politiques africaines</i>
<i>ReMMM</i>	Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la méditerranée
<i>TWQ</i>	Third World Quarterly

Note on transliteration

Cited passages from primary sources have been translated from Arabic and French as indicated, with occasional wording change for better intelligibility. When translations to English were borrowed from other authors, it has been indicated in the footnote. On some occasions, formulations in original language have been added when they were telling or for commonly used terms (“*engagé*” or “*iltizām*”).

Titles of authors and books have been transliterated formally, according to the International Journal of Middle East Studies simple transliteration system. As for the other words in Arabic that are regularly used in oriental studies, I have privileged a simple transliteration without diacritics (‘ulema’, ‘salafiyya’ etc.).

With regard to names of authors and people from Morocco and Tunisia, I have used the format under which their works are mostly published (‘Mohammed Charfi’ rather than ‘Muhammad Sharfi’).

Not until we have decided for ourselves what we are and are not – not till then have we escaped
the danger of suffering from alien judgements.
(Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Schriften*, Stuttgart, 1867, 509)

What is the point in talking about intellectuals? Their powerlessness means something about this
society [...] maybe it is time to talk in one's name and with modesty.
(Ammar Idriss, *Lamalif*, December 1981, n. 131, 5-6)

There is no such thing as "Arab thought". There are thinkers who happen to be Arabs.
(Overheard in 2012 in a restaurant in Rabat)

Amidst the noise, the writer can no longer hope to stand back and pursue the reflexions and
images he holds dear [...] every artist is today *embarked* in the hellishness [galère] of his time
(Albert Camus, *Discours de Suède*, 10 December 1957)

Introduction

This thesis considers how two of the most influential Maghribi thinkers, Abdallah Laroui from Morocco and Hichem Djaït from Tunisia, have responded to feelings of national disillusionment after the region's political independences by rethinking the intellectual's role and responsibility toward the national community. In substance, it is a broader investigation into the issue of representation and self-representation in formerly colonised societies on their path toward an uncertain modernity, a term itself that has been at the centre of multiple debates.¹ While this thesis is concerned with the Maghrib (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), it raises broader questions that were, and still are shared across formerly colonised societies.

The struggle for independence in the Maghrib took shape during the 1930s thanks to the alliance between traditional political notables and younger bilingual Maghribis who acquired a modern education in French schools and universities.² This was a strenuous alliance that managed to hold thanks to the respective parties' common opposition to French imperialism. During the fifties, the younger "intellectuals" in the second category began to take greater responsibilities within their national movements: thanks to their organisational skills and their use of modern media, they rallied the masses around the aims of liberation from foreign control and the promise of modernity and progress. When Tunisia and Morocco became independent in 1956,³ this generation of modern-educated intellectuals expected to play the leading role in shaping the modern nation.

Independence soon spelled the end of their idealist expectations. Independence unravelled alliances, it set off a scramble for power and for positions in the administration, and saw the use of violence between rival factions of compatriots. Meanwhile, the new leadership asked for patience and collective efforts to safeguard their fragile independence from the return of

¹ Cooper, "Modernity" in *Colonialism in question*, 2001, 113-152; Saler, "Modernity and enchantment" in *American Historical Review*, June 2006.

² Berque, *Le Maghreb entre deux guerres*, 1962.

³ Algeria was under a different colonial model, and had to wage a war of independence from 1954 to 1962.

European imperialism. They asked for vigilance, as the Algerian war of independence raged at the Moroccan and Tunisian borders and threatened to spill over. They also portrayed critical voices as internal enemies of the nation, delayed the building of political institutions and consolidated the central authority's power. As a result of these post-independence dynamics, the younger intellectual generation that refused to align with existing political groups was left ill-equipped, both ideologically and logistically, and at the mercy of more predatory political behaviours.⁴ By the early sixties, Morocco and Tunisia settled on the broad parameters of their development model, which usually fell short of what the young intelligentsia had in mind when their leaders spoke of a "national revolution".⁵ Feelings of national disillusionment began to spread as the young intelligentsia realised that independence came to mean, in Reinhardt Koselleck's words, the end of the "horizon of expectations".⁶ The rest, we are tempted to say, follows the common story of authoritarian regimes imposing their will over dominated societies, according to a configuration seen across the Arab world.⁷

From today's vantage point, devoting a thesis to intellectuals, it is often claimed and repeated, is of little relevance for a proper understanding of Arab realities and dynamics of change. First, intellectuals are often judged to have "met their end" under a "New World Order" where grand ideologies play a limited role.⁸ Additionally, intellectuals are routinely classified as secondary actors, whose political influence pales in comparison the military and the security apparatus, the monarchy, the private sector or the religious establishment, as most Middle East conference programmes or course syllabi indicate. Intellectuals are also portrayed as "idealists" whose talk carries no bite, in contrast with the interest reserved for "movements that succeed" rather than stories of failure or disillusionment.⁹ In fact, no serious research has been carried out to

⁴ Toualbi, "Crise culturelle et fonction de l'intellectuel dans le monde arabe" in *Sud/Nord* (14:1) 2001.

⁵ Flory, "Le concept de révolution au Maroc" in *ReOMM*, 1968, 145-152; Le Tourneau, Flory, Duchac, "Revolution in the Maghreb" in Vatikiotis (ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East*, 1972.

⁶ Koselleck, "'Space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation': two historical categories" in *Futures past, on the semantics of historical time*, 2004, 255-276.

⁷ Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab state*, 1995; Hudson, *Arab politics: The search for legitimacy*, 1977.

⁸ In reference to the polemic induced in North American academia by the publication of Jacoby, *The last intellectuals*, 1987, and in France by Winock, *Le siècle des intellectuels*, 1997.

⁹ Goodwin, Jasper, Polletta, "What emotions matter?" in *Passionate politics: emotions and social movements*, 2001, 1-24.

formulate a historical sociology of the post-independence intelligentsia in the Arab world (as discussed later in the literature review). Disinterest towards intellectuals is also common with the region's wider public: in their recent collection of interviews with fifteen of Morocco's most noted public thinkers, Driss Ksikes and Fadma Aït Mous began by recreating a semi-fictional exchange between two Moroccans on the margins of the 20 February Movement, Morocco's response to the Arab Spring. The first protagonist asks what purpose there could possibly be in seeking out what intellectuals have to say after such a long absence, prompting the other to an answer that intellectuals should be sought because they provide "frameworks for understanding" rather than "ready-made answers".¹⁰ The exchange revealed how Moroccans, but also Algerians and Tunisians, faced decades of cynicism, disappointment, and fatigue over the perspective of genuine change going forward, and for intellectuals to be involved.

For these reasons, the choice to devote a thesis on contemporary intellectuals, disillusioned intellectuals in particular, deserves a lengthier justification than usual in order to understand the challenges of the Maghrib's passage from colonisation to independence, and especially the turn from national idealism to disillusionment.

First, intellectuals have been at the centre of the modern state's efforts to achieve improved "governmentality", that is to say the managing by rulers of "men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities... customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking... accidents and misfortunes".¹¹ The European Enlightenment and spread of rationality consecrated the "science of government" according to Michel Foucault. These new "modes of thought" framed the population, rather than "material things" as the target of the exercise of power, and they included the use of statistics and the pursuit of efficiency for resource management.¹² Thus, the modern state as an instrument of control and discipline cannot be untied to the role of those who were in charge of producing, articulating and mobilising such new forms of knowledge. However,

¹⁰ Ksikes, Aït Mous, *Le métier d'intellectuel*, 2014, opening passage.

¹¹ Foucault, "Governmentality", Lecture given at the Collège de France, February 1978, reproduced in Burchell, Gordon, Miller, *The Foucault effect*, 1991, 93.

¹² Ibid, 97-9, 102.

we may ask what need there is to consider the processes of formation of such thought, rather than merely its content and operationalisation: in other words, why consider the “intellectual” rather than merely the “expert”?¹³

For this, we turn to Karl Mannheim’s writing on the “sociological concept of thought”, and “how [thinking] really functions in public life and in politics as an instrument of collective action”.¹⁴ Under the modern condition, democratised access to knowledge and social change have “disrupt[ed] the intellectual monopoly of the Church”, replaced dogmatism with the essential principle of the “multiplicity of thought”, and led to the appearance of new social perspectives in public debates. Those who produce ideas do not exist in abstraction but are instead products of their time, in its social and political dimensions, and form their thought in relation to collective action.¹⁵ However, two significant issues arose from the fragmentation of the conception of truth and the democratisation of knowledge: the absence of scepticism and critical sense among the population, and increased association of political aims with “a kind of political philosophy with a political conception of the world”, and the resulting distorted depiction of social reality that emerged from intellectual writing.¹⁶

These transformations posed challenges for sociology and Mannheim argued that it has become imperative to study the social roots of any intellectual production, to “transcend” statements tied in to one’s social existence, and instead located in a “sphere of truth”, and more broadly to display a heightened sense of self-criticism and awareness.¹⁷ Mannheim noted how the various intellectual groups have come to use the practice of the “uncovering” of “unconscious motivations” in every intellectual discourse to constantly attack one another rather than for the pursuit of truth.¹⁸ Therefore, he made three proposals for a more “aware” sociology of knowledge: to display self-criticism of collective-unconscious motivations, to read the relationship in the change in ideas and historical change, and to carry out an epistemological

¹³ As the work of Eric Gobe for example: *Les avocats en Tunisie de la colonisation à la révolution*, 2013 and *Jalons pour une sociologie des ingénieurs au Maghreb*, 2015.

¹⁴ Mannheim, *Ideology and utopia*, 1936 (1997), 1.

¹⁵ Ibid. 3, 11.

¹⁶ Ibid. 32-3.

¹⁷ Ibid. 39-41.

¹⁸ Ibid. 38

renewal of the discipline accounting for the social nature of thought.¹⁹ These axes form the justification for shifting the unit of analysis from intellectuals and their rapport to the state, to intellectuals as socially inserted individuals producing a variety of ideological discourses.

These two theoretical clarifications serve to bring intellectuals back to the front stage in the discussion on Arab social and political change: the Arab state's crisis of legitimacy, the challenges of good governance and fair distribution of public goods, and the difficulty in forming inclusive, pluralistic communities. These challenges have naturally afflicted the intellectuals that were engaged with their surroundings, who have reacted by adopting a variety of coping strategies and by reconfiguring their conducts and aspirations. For example, rather than having "disappeared" as is the common narrative, their modes of engagement have evolved, sometimes by turning to less "visible" spheres such as cultural life. There, they have expressed their own feelings of disillusionment, or *ihbāt*, and the frustration with their failure to translate these feelings into collective action. These observations show that the study of intellectuals in the Maghrib's recent history offers not only another historical narrative, but it opens a unique perspective to understand the interplay of emotions, cultural productions, and choices of conducts, especially because these emotions and conducts continue to shape Maghribi societies today.

Following recommendations from Foucault and Mannheim, I look at intellectuals as knowledge producers: their mindsets and the social context were elements that shaped the type of knowledge and discourses they produced at a given time. The above quote from Moroccan academic Ammar Idriss began to envisage the potential and urgency for the study of intellectuals as a way to identify certain key social dynamics. This thesis will build on his remark, making the case for the necessity of studying how intellectuals have coped with difficult emotions such as failure and disillusionment when came the time to determine their engagements and public conducts.²⁰ From there, I make a broader argument about the paramount emotion of disillusionment, *ihbāt*, a notion that has been brought back to the conversation after the Arab

¹⁹ Ibid. 41, 45.

²⁰ Belghazi, Moudden, "*Ihbat*: disillusionment and the Arab Spring in Morocco " in *JNAS* (21:1) 2016, 40.

political uprisings of 2011: while this notion has characterised the stationary nature of politics in the past decades, political scientists find it more satisfying than more negative notions such as *fashal* (failure) or *yā's* (despair). Disillusionment contains “a dynamism promising a potential rebirth and renewal” after overcoming a sense of “fatigue” and “resignation”.²¹ Hence, this thesis approaches a topic that is in no way a foregone story, but rather a tortuous and uncertain trajectory that invites a proper academic investigation into the ways Maghribi societies have come to terms with their own dynamics of change.

Framing the “Maghribi intellectual”

In this thesis, I argue that the way Abdallah Laroui and Hichem Djaït dealt with national disillusionment was highly revealing of their efforts to overcome the colonial experience and manage their integration in a rapidly changing national community. These efforts were encapsulated in their writings over what it meant to be an “intellectual” and their resulting public conduct in the face of political authoritarianism, a conservative revival in the social sphere, and heavily guarded and structured cultural fields. These three structuring axes offer an opportunity to shape a new sociology and typology of contemporary Maghribi intellectuals.

The independent nation-state, as discussed earlier, alienated a generation of Maghribi intellectuals who were socialised in the shadow of the national struggle and were later marginalised from public affairs after independence. Many dealt with this blow by staying silent and abandoning their public ambitions, while others turned to radical political movements. A third category turned to cultural practices such as novels to express the difficult experiences of the individual in independent society, and this third conduct poses an interesting challenge for theoretical models contained in the sociology of intellectuals. In fact, along with this generation’s struggles, the Maghrib experienced a spectacular cultural flourishing during the sixties and seventies. This cultural moment raises questions for having an ambiguous status and goals,

²¹ Ibid. 41.

encapsulated in the hovering dualities between “culture” and “politics”, “engagement” and “disengagement”, “aesthetics” and the “meaningful, and the “individual” and the “collective”.

Throughout this thesis, I will argue that disillusioned Maghribi intellectuals continued having a public role because of their efforts they put into the transformation of their societies, and especially by thinking and writing about the terms of their self-definition. Despite being couched in cultural forms, these were eminently political questions especially in the early days of independence, and they were impossible to categorize as one or the other. In fact, these intellectuals were considered to be more than “engaged” (in the French meaning of *engagé*), but “embarked” by the historical socio-political circumstances, according to Albert Camus especially because “today, even silence has adopted a fearsome meaning”, and “abstention is considered a choice, lauded or punished as such, the artist is *embarked*, willingly or not” in the manner of a boat sailing in the wrong direction, or “military service”.²²

Furthermore, their cultural productions often identified power dimensions in society and its impact on individuals, be it the child growing up until the authoritarian conservative father, the adult struggling with the bureaucracy, or a community being unable to speak their language and remember their histories. These works were located in a “third” space (neither the “cultural nor “political”) where, according to Homi Bhabha identities were being challenged, differences were being negotiated and actors sought emancipation from oppression by reclaiming the means to define themselves and their aspirations.²³ They did so by challenging the “grand nationalist narrative”, in other words the official (and consistent) discourse produced by the authorities to bring the national population together and justify the state’s efforts of state and nation-building – a discourse with which they often found it hard to identify. This approach borrows from Sabry al-Hafiz regarding the genesis of narrative discourse in the Levant (and especially the short story), where he focused on how literary genres emerged “in a particular culture, at a specific time”, bringing in a dialectic explanation framework including elements such as “the transformation of a world view, the change in artistic sensibility, the emergence of a new reading

²² Camus, *Discours de Suède*, 1957, 26.

²³ Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 1994, 218; Lazarus, “Disavowing decolonisation: nationalism, intellectuals, and the question of representation in postcolonial theory” in *Nationalism and cultural practice*, 2009, 68-143.

public and the formation of a new discourse".²⁴ The richness of this approach explains why novelists have long been considered an ideal entry point to study how the "cultural conscience of the nation" was shaped in the Arab world, as depicted in Richard Jacquemond's book on contemporary Egyptian novelists.²⁵ However, in this thesis, I leave aside the question of realist novels, which experienced somewhat of a crisis after the 1967 Arab defeat against Israel, in Egypt and elsewhere.²⁶ Instead, I consider the emergence of the critical essay, which contained vibrant accounts of the oppressions of daily life, and were shaped not by the pre-independence possibilities but the post-independence realities.

This new writing genre can be traced to the profile of these intellectuals who often had a modern education and experiences in the social sciences and humanities, tried to make sense of their world through academic frameworks. In the process, they contributed to transforming the Arab intellectual's characteristics and field of concerns. Due to the new area where this investigation is located, it requires several theoretical clarifications of the term "intellectual". Faced with the challenge of settling on a single definition, I will rely in this thesis on a simple iteration: intellectuals are defined as "persons with advanced education, producers or transmitters of culture or ideas, or members of either category who engage in public issues".²⁷ In the important theoretical contributions that have shaped the sociology of intellectuals, thinkers have disagreed on the relationship of these individuals with the social order, and its impact on their public engagements. For starters, Julien Benda first introduced the notion that intellectuals' activities "is not in the pursuit of practical aim" but instead "seek joy in the practice of an art or science or metaphysical speculation", and they had a particular responsibility over society by virtue of the knowledge they held and their higher moral qualities, and were to avoid "material" political passions such as race, class or nation.²⁸ In response, Antonio Gramsci criticised how Benda depoliticised intellectuals. Instead, the Italian thinker made a seminal distinction between *traditional* intellectuals who devote themselves to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and

²⁴ Hafiz, *The genesis of Arabic narrative discourse: a study in the sociology of modern Arabic literature*, 1993, 10.

²⁵ Jacquemond, *Conscious of the Nation: Writers, State and Society in Modern Egypt*, 2008.

²⁶ Ibid. 93.

²⁷ Kurzmann, Owens, "The sociology of intellectuals" in *Annual Review of Sociology*, (28) 2002, 63.

²⁸ Benda, *The treason of intellectuals*, 1927, 43-5, 57, 64.

reason, and are socially independent, and *organic* intellectuals who belong to particular classes and defend these class interests.²⁹ For Karl Mannheim, as previously discussed, intellectuals could "transcend social class" thanks to their knowledge, and he envisaged the possibility that intellectuals might constitute a separate and independent social category that would promote understanding between the others.³⁰ More recently, Michel Foucault spelled the end of the *mandarin* intellectual, who had a self-attributed responsibility to statue on every issue, and instead depicted the *specific* intellectual who was legitimate to speak and lead the public on issues where s/he had expertise. This intellectual had a responsibility to "struggle against the forms of power in relation to which he is both instrument and object", while supporting movements who work toward that aim.³¹ Finally, Edward Said framed the intellectual responsibility within the constraints of modern society, as someone who must determine his/her public commitment in relation to its importance for social demands, but also someone who had to disrupt common beliefs (the consensus).³²

These theoretical insights have faced several obstacles including the challenge of maintaining distance from the topic at hand: research on intellectuals can hardly avoid projecting the author's concerns and self-representation, to which I will return later.³³ The greater obstacle, for this thesis, is to ensure these models account for the historical and social setting of concern. In fact, the sociology of non-Western intellectuals remains dependent on Western sociological theoretical approaches, and display a reluctance to theorise starting from sets of observations, or rethinking critically essential concepts such as "engagement", "politics" and "public sphere", with unsatisfying outcomes.

The historical role that intellectuals have played in national struggles across Asia and Africa in the twentieth century has made them important actors to study to understand under the

²⁹ Gramsci, *Sections from The Prison notebooks*, 1932 (1971), 5-12.

³⁰ Mannheim, "The sociological problem of the intelligentsia" in *Ideology and Utopia*, 1929 (1985 re-edition), 155-162.

³¹ Foucault, Deleuze, "The intellectuals and power" in *Telos* (16) 1972, 104.

³² Said, *Representations of the intellectuals*, 1994.

³³ Eyal, Buchholz, "From the sociology of intellectuals to the sociology of interventions" in *Annual Review of Sociology*, (36) 2010, 117.

framework of nationalism theory.³⁴ After these countries' independences, the theoretical literature on Third World intellectuals dries up and instead, attempts are frequently made to borrow from the rich sociological literature on intellectuals. Instead, scholars appear torn between an imperfect "theoretical fit" that safeguards theoretical models, or the temptation to settle by talking about "cultural specificity". For example, American sociologist Edward Shils in 1972 admitted: "Asian countries, including the Islamic Middle East, are distinctive in that they have intellectual traditions which are more or less separate and distinct from the modern Western intellectual traditions", and even in the case of those who still use "the language of the metropolis for their intellectual production", they have developed a complicated relationship to this legacy, including "a common sense of a faltering achievement of implantation [of western intellectual traditions]" and a "defensive or protective attitude toward their indigenous culture, resentment against the metropolitan culture, as well as a dissatisfied sense of its superiority".³⁵

Attempts to formulate a sociology of *Arab* intellectuals have produced generalising, erroneous or bland statements, bypassing the issue of how intellectuals consider themselves and their roles in relation to historical change. Hazem Kandil's sociology of Arab intellectuals under authoritarianism is an illustration of the problems with obstinate attachment to sociological theory.³⁶ Without any hard evidence or documentation, as he himself admits, he looks broadly at four "schools of Arab thought" to extrapolate Arab intellectuals' conduct after 1945 (mostly Egyptians), to observe the simultaneous rise of authoritarianism and decline of intellectual visibility, and to conclude that faced with repressive and hegemonic authoritarianism, they displaced their creative energies toward the cultural sphere "to avoid confrontation". In his opinion, this represented a clear case of failure of their responsibility, since the only "meaningful" objective is the pursuit of political change.³⁷ Moroccan political scientist Abdallah Labdaoui sought to understand Moroccan intellectual conducts following a long discussion of Max

³⁴ Smith, *Nationalism and modernism*, 2008: on intellectuals nationalist ideology, 39; on intellectuals and the invention of the nation, 117, 129; Suny, Kennedy, *Intellectuals and the articulation of the nation*, 1999.

³⁵ Passages from Shils, "Intellectuals, tradition and the traditions of intellectuals: some preliminary considerations" in *Daedalus*, (101:2) 1972, 33; Shils, *The intellectuals and power and other essays*, 1972.

³⁶ Kandil, "On the margins of defeat: a sociology of Arab intellectuals under authoritarianism" in Korany, *The Changing Middle East*, 2010.

³⁷ Ibid. 86.

Weber's typology on symbolic authority, yet the imperfect fit makes him spend large amounts of time salvaging his model by correcting it for the role of "tradition", the authoritarian state and the inexistence of a similarly constituted public sphere.³⁸ Finally, this approach completely neglects how intellectuals appropriate and put in practice their conducts, and are "actors of their own theory": such is the case of renowned Tunisian sociologist Tahar Labib who wrote extensively on the Arab intelligentsia.

As a result, these do not offer a rigorous and sufficient research framework, beyond reducing intellectuals to the instances where they have "spoken truth to power". Instead, in light of Mannheim's earlier recommendations, we must rethink the framework of the "Maghribi intellectual" as a sociological category and its impact on thought production. Yet, as previously highlighted, pursuing research into intellectual conducts and representations pose serious challenges for the social historian's ability to remain objective, or projecting one's views and concerns. It is a challenge I have continuously faced in this thesis, especially in the absence of a theoretical perfect-fit to act as a safeguard. Instead, I have identified and confronted the "axes" or "structuring questions" around which this thesis has been constructed, and which I expose in the following paragraphs: first the relationship between the cultural flourishing of the sixties and seventies and the emergence of critical essays; secondly, how intellectual *representations* have emerged in relation to intellectual *practices* in the Maghrib; thirdly, the place of the "social unit of analysis" in the current literature about postcolonial Arab intellectual history.

³⁸ Labdaoui, "Introduction: l'intellectuel arabe comme objet de science politiques" in *Les nouveaux intellectuels arabes*, 1993, 23-52.

Cultural flourishing and cultural critique

The sixties and seventies saw two simultaneous events that are relevant for the question of intellectuals and national disillusionment: first, the spectacular atmosphere of cultural renewal after independence that has left so many Maghribis today nostalgic of the old era. Secondly, the multiplication of works of cultural critique (articles or essays), distinctive in tone and in their ambition to throw critical and informed glances at their societies. As previously discussed, I see these two trends as linked rather than taking place simultaneously: the atmosphere of cultural renewal was an attempt to make sense of realities around them and shape them. Cultural critique, as a cultural *practice*, required erudition and a vision, and expressed an author's "subjectivity", and can serve to identify which elements factored in his/her decision to write.³⁹ I am especially interested in the relationship between critical writing and anxiety over intellectuals' and their place in the national community.

Post-War France saw a spectacular cultural renewal where the critical article and the essay became a fashionable genre for the intelligentsia to engage and debate with each other, which spilled over the francophone world. Ironically, colonised intellectuals appropriated this style to denounce colonial oppression and demand freedom. Two writers are often framed as the inspiration figures of this form of writing and who inspired a subsequent generation of committed intellectuals shaped by the colonial experience: Frantz Fanon in *The wretched of the earth* (1961) and Albert Memmi in *Portrait of the colonised* (1957). Parisian philosophical movements such as existentialism also shaped Arab intellectual life during the process of decolonisation. It drove thinkers such as the Egyptian Abderrahman al-Badawi, his readers and students to ask about the Arab subject on the wake of decolonisation,⁴⁰ and the Lebanese writers Suheil Idriss founded a literary movement with his journal *Al-Adāb*, inspired by his Parisian experience, as narrated in *Al-ḥay al-latīnī* (1954).

³⁹ Ortner, "Subjectivity and cultural critique" in *Anthropological Theory*, 2005.

⁴⁰ Di-Capua, "Arab existentialism: an invisible chapter in the intellectual history of decolonisation" in *American Historical Review*, October 2012, 1061-2.

Critical writing of French inspiration increased after independence, only this time it identified the multifaceted dominations intellectuals they still experienced despite independence. A significant idea pursued by this literature was that the ultimate independence required liberation from political *and* cultural system of domination. Just as their anti-colonial predecessors, these works grew as a branch of the sociology of domination, and their aim was simultaneously to *describe* domination and to be an instrument for emancipation, which would be achieved thanks to critiques that allowed the essential act of *realisation* of this domination (which was previously only felt but remained invisible to the naked eye). The intellectual-writer played the main role by tracing mechanisms of oppression as part of a complete system.⁴¹ Works of critical thought also envisioned the transformation that would be undergone by its readers, whereby they would become critical beings whose “true interests and desires... [had been] revealed”.⁴²

These books contained aspects of academic erudition and sought to offer a coherent reflection on the situation of their respective societies. They were also often unfinished and vague, with a greater emphasis on issuing a call for change and being timely. Jean-Paul Charnay noted this increase among Arab intellectuals in the seventies: “A mixed genre, ideally malleable, allowing every development, every hypothesis: a free thought (*reflexion*), free from the constraints of erudition, moving by large overviews that are more unquestionable than apodictic, often confusing the observation, the hypothesis and objectiveness, not always distinguishing between reality, the possible and what is hoped or wished”. Despite this methodological limitation, the critical essay was “endowed with incredible appeal”, and became a central feature of the post-War Arab intellectual and cultural scene.⁴³ Hisham Sharabi saw in these thinkers a movement of “Arab Cultural Criticism”. Its authors shared common profiles and ideological aims: they were an avant-garde of younger thinkers (usually academics), influenced by western political thought and its methods, a renewed conception of ideology in public debate (inspired by French Marxist circles in particular), and a new “scientific” truth-seeking approach which they

⁴¹ Boltanski, *On critique, a sociology of emancipation*, 2011, 5.

⁴² Ibid. 18-9.

⁴³ Charnay, “L’intellectuel arabe entre le pouvoir et la culture”, *Diogenes*, (83) 1973, 55.

wanted to reproduce in the context of a new critical discourse in order to improve the state of knowledge about the Self and the Other, and to inform better political action.⁴⁴ Finally, their practice of “social criticism” was a way to be made part of the community rather than be distant from it. Michael Walzer defined intellectuals who engaged in this type of writing as “specialists in complaint... that claim[ed] the right to castigate their fellows”, but the social critics complained for the purpose of self-assertion and to receive a response as a way to secure mutual recognition and proof of their belonging.⁴⁵

The social critics of the post-independence period initially faced various difficulties, chief among them the postcolonial state’s ideological hegemony in the public sphere, and its fight against dissent and criticism.⁴⁶ By turning to critical writing, they were also masking their intentions and evading political repression since these texts were not accessible to the wider public (due to their complex language, by being published abroad or at a cost inaccessible to some). In return, these thinkers “embraced their marginality” as a survival strategy by appearing less threatening to the authorities. This common approach allowed them to maintain the fascinating cultural flourishing of the sixties and seventies, but it complicates how we understand the aims of Arab social critics: whether they were political and radical, or more interested in aesthetic pursuits, a simple duality I strive to overcome. Rather than seek answers in a theoretical framework, I look at the crucial interplay between how intellectuals viewed themselves and how they acted, toward the emergence of a typical “postcolonial” intellectual model.

⁴⁴ Sharabi, *Theory, politics and the Arab world*, 1990, 1-2, 22; Sharabi, “Cultural critics of contemporary Arab society” in *Arab Studies Quarterly*, (9:1) 1987, 5.

⁴⁵ Walzer, “Introduction: the practice of social criticism” in *In the company of critics*, 1988, 3.

⁴⁶ For Algeria, and easily applicable across the Maghrib : McDougall, “Fetishism of identity: Empire, nation and the politics of subjectivity in Algeria” in Chalcraft, Noorani, *Counter-hegemony in the colony and the postcolony*, 2007.

Intellectual conducts and intellectual representations in the Maghrib

A great number of new debates currently shaping Middle East studies have gained in resonance after the 2011 Arab uprisings. They include the discussion on collective memory and remembrance of the Maghrib's dark years of authoritarianism including jailed Leftists and Islamists in Tunisia, prison literature in Morocco, or overcoming the official myth of independence in Algeria.⁴⁷ Spurred by academic efforts and greater social demand, these debates often highlight the link between structures of memory and authoritarian rule. They often tie in with coverage of political disinterest and withdrawal in the Maghrib, particularly among youth. After decades of repressive authoritarianism, underperforming states and elite capture of economic resources, large segments have turned away from the political process, as the high rates of electoral abstention reveal. The now-regular sight of thousands of people in the streets defending political convictions serves to undermine the defeatist claims of an "incompatibility" of the Arab world with "democracy" or "modernity". Instead, it is an opportunity to revisit from another perspective how Maghribi societies shape their aspirations.⁴⁸

These discursive tropes can be read in the story of how Arab intellectuals became, again, a topic of discussion and interest around the "Arab Spring". In a keynote speech in June 2013, Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi referred to "the crisis of intellectuals" quite emphatically.⁴⁹ Several journalists portrayed the Arab spring as a missed opportunity for intellectuals to "return".⁵⁰ In May 2015, the Moulay Hicham foundation organised a conference on "Arab intellectuals and the historical transformations of the Arab world", which has also been

⁴⁷ See special volume "Besoins d'histoire" in *L'Année du Maghreb* (10) 2014, and special volume "La fabrique de la mémoire" (4) 2008.

⁴⁸ Volpi, "Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and authoritarianism in the Maghreb" in *Democratization*, 2013.

⁴⁹ Opening speech in the conference on "A hundred years of Arab nationalism, 1913-2013", Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 4-5 June 2013.

⁵⁰ Worth, "The Arab intellectuals that didn't roar" in *The New York Times*, 29 October 2011; M. Naggar, "The silence of the thinkers" in *Qantara.de*, 27 May 2011; N. Echchaibi, "Where are you, Arab intellectuals?" in *OpenDemocracy*, 30 June 2015; Viersen, "Where were the intellectuals during the Arab spring" in *Muftah*, 9 July 2015; M. al-Sayyad, "The cowering intellectuals of the Arab spring" in *Al-Monitor*, 8 February, 2013, originally published in *Al-Khaleej* (Sharjah).

the 2014-2015 theme for the annual research prize selected by the Arab Centre for Research and Social Policy studies, in Qatar.⁵¹ Spurred by the UNDP's Arab Development Report on the need to establish "knowledge societies", Lebanese scholar Mohamed Bamyeh coordinated in 2015 a report on social sciences in the Arab world that laid out the forms and structures of knowledge production, including the "characteristics of social scientists today".⁵²

Meanwhile in the Maghribi public sphere, two intellectual figures appeared more frequently in the media, cultural journals, cultural events and everyday discussions, than they had over the previous decades. Hichem Djaït, was named head of Tunisia's National Academy *Baït al-Hikma* and given a mandate to re-activate it after years of dormancy. Now in his eighties, the retired Tunisian medieval historian had entertained a difficult relationship with the Ben Ali regime and withdrew from the public sphere. After the Tunisian revolution, he was made part of a "council of the wise", a group of influential figures that advised political leaders during this tumultuous transition period. During the Tunisian presidential elections of 2014, he went on public television to support the incumbent candidate, Moncef Marzouki over Béji Caïd Essebssi, which divided the Tunisian intelligentsia. He was increasingly solicited to give interviews on current affairs in Tunisia on Islamism and on religious extremism. The "Arab UNESCO" (ALESCO) named him "Arab personality of the year" (2016),⁵³ he was invited to deliver the keynote at Moulay Hicham's conference on Arab intellectuals, his most recent books on the Prophet Muhammad's journey were displayed in every bookshop in Tunis. Finally, in May 2016 in Tunis, the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies held a significant event celebrating the half-century of his life and works, considering that this type of event is usually reserved after their passing, and Djaït was in attendance to reflect self-critically on the interventions and his trajectory.

Meanwhile, Abdallah Laroui made his audience wait before breaking his public silence after 2011. The retired Moroccan historian also in his eighties was better known to the current public

⁵¹ "Intellectuals and historical transformation in the Arab world", Moulay Hicham Foundation, Tunis, 17-8 May 2014; "The ACRPS announces the winners of the Arab prize for the social sciences and humanities, 2014-5", Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, 19 February 2015.

⁵² "The Arab Development Report 2003: Building a knowledge society", UNDP, 2003; Bamyeh, "Social Sciences in the Arab world today, forms and presence", ACSS report, December 2015.

⁵³ "Djaït est la personnalité culturelle de l'année dans le monde arabe" *Réalités*, 08.12.2015.

for having joined the high spheres of power in the 1980s and 1990s, but had since retreated to the proverbial “Ivory Tower”. In 2012, however, he gave a rare interview to the newly-created magazine *Zamane*, criticising the idea of a unified Maghrib as “an elite’s idea”.⁵⁴ He gave a couple of other less remarked interviews to national newspapers, but the breakthrough came when he took part in a prime-time television debate on school reforms and language of instruction in November 2013. It came in the midst of a national polemic on the adoption of *darja*, spoken Moroccan-Arabic dialect, actively promoted by his counterpart in the debate social activist Nourredine Ayouch. Laroui rubbished this proposal and dissected its problematic implications in a systematic manner laced with authority and erudition. He brought in examples from other regions of the world, putting this reform in a historical perspective, and making more measured proposals to improve the type of Arabic spoken by children and their parents at home “as a way to elevate the cultural level of the community”.⁵⁵ Since then, each of his few public appearances is debated, and several Moroccan publications have devoted special volumes on his ideas.

During this television debate for Laroui, and throughout the many interventions Djaït gave over the past years, the Moroccan and Tunisian publics rediscovered the two figures. Despite both their advanced ages, the grey hair and deeper voices, they both appear dynamic and engaged, they offered balanced and insightful reasoning, sometimes unapologetically polemic assertions, all of which makes them markedly different from what would hear elsewhere. Yet, those who expected these appearances to herald something greater were left disappointed: Djaït has recently stepped down from his post while Laroui remains withdrawn from the public sphere. Their cultural activities according to their publishers (Centre Culturel Arabe in Casablanca, Cerès in Tunis) do not indicate they will soon publish a book that would shape public debates.

In a way, there lies the difficulty: Djaït and Laroui’s pasts as public intellectuals are largely unknown to newer generations of Tunisians and Moroccans. For the older generation, the two have acquired near-mythical status, but seldom with critical engagement with their intellectual

⁵⁴ Bencheikh, Monjib, Bouaziz, “Entretien avec Abdallah Laroui” in *Zamane*, 20 April 2012, 62-9.

⁵⁵ “*Moubachara Maakoum*” aired on the 2M TV channel, 27.11.2013.

projects and how they have evolved over time: their names are brought up, their actions are commented, no attention is given to the “men behind the signature” and their social and cultural trajectories. These elements are symptomatic of an absent memory of the Maghrib’s post-independence years, in which these two figures have some responsibility by withdrawing in the nineties and failing to maintain this link with their countries’ histories. Furthermore, Djaït and Laroui’s historical trajectories share a similarity that invites a combined reading of the impact of life events on their intellectual choices.⁵⁶

Their experiences illustrate well the intricacy of national disillusionment and intellectual critical notoriety in the sixties and the seventies. Abdallah Laroui was born in Azemmour in Morocco in 1933, under the French protectorate. He was the son of a middle-class merchant and thanks to his good grades, benefitted from a scholarship that allowed him to pursue his education in schools reserved for notables. He acquired a modern and bi-cultural education in French and Arabic in Marrakesh, Rabat and Casablanca, and then Paris. He returned definitively to Rabat, Morocco in the early sixties to work at the newly established University’s history faculty. Hichem Djaït was born in Tunis in 1935, also under the French protectorate. His family belonged to the old bourgeoisie, and especially to a tradition of religious scholars of the Zaytuna mosque. He studied at the Sadiqi College in French and Arabic and also went to Paris for his higher education. He returned to Tunis in 1962, also as a historian, and worked at the theology faculty of the new University of Tunis.

Their two trajectories display remarkable similarity because they were perfect examples of true “bi-culturalists”, a rare instance of Maghribis equally versed and comfortable in both languages and both cultures, highly skilled but unable to settle in the national realities after independence. In fact, on their return from France they faced disillusionment, a difficult integration, and remained solitary figures for several years. A decade later, they achieved notoriety in Paris, each for the publication of a highly acclaimed critical essay in 1974: Abdallah Laroui published *La crise des intellectuels arabes: traditionalisme ou historicisme?* with

⁵⁶ A rare instance of combined reading: Guizouam, “Deux auteurs: Hichem Djaït et Abdallah Laroui, quatre ouvrages de la pensée Arabe contemporaine”, Mémoire DEA, Paris 2, 1982.

François Maspéro, and Hichem Djaït published *La Personnalité et le devenir Arabo-Islamique* with Le Seuil.

In Paris, they were seen as the Arab world's new voices but back home, they still had a hard time achieving a similar impact. I argue that the tendency to single them out as "lucid" and "singular" voices to emerge from the Arab world dangerously overplayed their uniqueness by removing them from the intellectual tradition in which they figured and the contexts that drove them to write. In 1970, The Egyptian academic Anouar Abdelmalek assembled a good account of the rich Arab intellectual tradition since the Arab renaissance, showing the diversity of ideological positions to have emerged. They include the contributions of several Maghribis such as as Allal al-Fassi or Mohamed Ouazzani for Morocco, Tahar Haddad or Mahmoud Messaadi for Tunisia, Ahmed Ben Bella or Malek Bennabi for Algeria. These cited intellectual figures emerged as part of the national struggle and some continued to be actively involved with post-independence challenges such as the imperative of shaping new national community while negotiating colonial legacies. However, Abdelmalek's chosen figures did not capture the younger generation emerging after 1967, which was slowly sprouting and expressing their views on the early experiences of statehood, the quest for modernisation and self-affirmation. They grew up looking up to the previously cited figures, but their intellectual *praxis* was shaped by new realities. In Morocco and Tunisia, they were often academic-intellectuals, figures such as Abdelkebir Khatibi, Fatema Mernissi or Mohamed Abed al-Jabri from the humanities faculty in Rabat, and or Abdelwehab Bouhdiba, Abdelkader Zghal or Lilia Ben Salem from the Centre for economic and social research in Tunis (CERES). These figures shared similar profiles and came together with a sense of responsibility as builders of the modern nation.

As such, we can treat them as an "intellectual generation", as used by Zeina Halabi to explain how Arab intellectuals of Palestinian origin came to terms with the 1948 Naksa and their tragedy of displacement.⁵⁷ This concept allows us to link major historical events that have shaped

⁵⁷ She uses the concept of "intellectual generation" as defined by José Ortega Gasset in *Man and crisis*, 1958, 62; see Halabi, "Writing melancholy: The death of the intellectual in modern Arabic literature", Doctoral Dissertation, University of Austin, 2011, 34; see also Ramadan, "The emergence of the sixties generation in Egypt and the anxiety over categorization" in *Journal of Arabic literature*, (43) 2012.

the world view, beliefs or orientations in a concomitant manner. These figure heads can also be linked to a wider group in society who were similarly affected, but did not express it so eloquently as these figures that we now remember. In recent years, several of these figures have passed away. Their contemporaries and students have organised events celebrating their thought and trajectories, during which the point was routinely made that they were “unique”, and that their successors, the current intelligentsia, is either inexistent or inept in comparison. While it is imperative to recognise their worth as an intellectual generation, it must equally be placed in its historical setting and linked to social and cultural experiences to avoid falling in the explanation trope of “geniuses” that were ahead of their time. Unfortunately, the common trend in Arab intellectual history is still to discuss ideas and trajectories separately.

From intellectuals to intellectual history: the social unit of analysis

In this thesis, I offer a different way to envisage postcolonial Maghribi intellectuals by reading Laroui’s and Djaït’s intellectual projects as intellectual efforts grounded in the social and material realities of the sixties and seventies in the Maghrib, and as profoundly personal endeavours. My approach is in open opposition to common trends in intellectual history: either the older “life and work”-style of intellectual biographies, or the increasingly prevalent postcolonial studies that devote significant attention to the interaction between aesthetics and politics, considering the text as an end at the expense of the shaping social experiences that lead to writing in the first place and how they and their works are embedded in national realities. I will now expose the importance of driving forward the concern for the “social unit of analysis” into postcolonial Maghribi intellectual history, and how this approach can be linked with current developments in the history of Arab political thought. It allows me to build a case for the consideration of dynamics of production and reception from a material perspective, by seeking out neglected spaces such as academic departments, journal editorial boards, writer’s

associations or other similar cultural spaces, which are a more reliable source of meaning than analyses rooted in textual criticism.

When James McDougall and Robert Parks reviewed Maghribi studies' position in relation to the "social unit of analysis", they classified the field between two levels: a perspective "from the top" bringing together political science and economics to look at macro-development and large trends, and another perspective looking at a smaller scale perspective, usually informed by anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. They also noted the dearth of studies that tried to tie the two levels together, or that engaged in comparative studies across nation-state units, despite the potential and need for such approaches.⁵⁸ In line with McDougall and Parks' effort to bring together both the local and the global to identify the "social" dimension of the Maghrib's history, in this thesis I have looked simultaneously at the individual and the universal, insofar as the intellectuals' theorisation efforts take place between these two poles: between the experience and the text in which the experience is made sense. Unfortunately, postcolonial studies practitioners routinely overlook the importance of this factor when approaching the study of postcolonial Maghribi intellectuals, creating a skewed representation of Maghribi cultural dynamics, as the following literature review will argue.

Since the eighties, Maghribi intellectuals have emerged as a privileged topic for postcolonial studies. Yet, there is something problematic in the way this field depicts intellectuals from the region and by extension, Maghribi postcolonial culture. The choice of figures hovers usually on the same people, or those sharing a similar profile: novelists that sometimes only have in common a passage in the region and their use of French, who were quite singular in the intellectual landscape, who lived in between their home countries in France. These thinkers include the likes of Albert Memmi, Tahar Djaout, Assia Djebbar and Abdelkebir Khatibi who have left fascinating texts, but on the basis of whose work it is difficult to generalise. These figures are regularly brought up by such scholars and today, have become a point of entry for a significant portion of students to Maghribi cultural studies. They illustrate appealing themes such as processes of resistance to colonial cultural hegemony and instances of an empire "writing

⁵⁸ McDougall, Parks, "Locating social analysis in the Maghrib" in *JNAS*, (18:5) 2013, 631-2.

back”.⁵⁹ Furthermore, these studies usually skip over these individuals’ relationship with the community, and merely assume their difference from others – an assumption postcolonial scholars use to pass rapid and dismissive judgement on the rest of the countries, which are routinely absent from their accounts. This amounts to taking these thinkers’ opinions for granted rather than diving in the complexities of their countries’ histories. A telling example is Jane Hiddleston in *Decolonising the intellectual* (2015), where she deals with the “complicit opponents” of France’s imperialism in the Maghrib (mostly in Algeria), who use the same language and concepts, acquired through the “*mission civilisatrice*”. Hiddleston offers an incisive and fascinating reading of Aimé Césaire, Paul Senghor and Frantz Fanon, followed by Mouloud Amrouche, and Kateb Yacine in order to identify how Algerian intellectuals sought to “decolonise themselves”. Yet, she neglects one significant dimension by failing to frame these writers in their surroundings and identifying their local conversation partners, or looking at practices of decolonisation that took place *after* political independence where, arguably, foreign control took opaque forms.⁶⁰

This strand of the research literature raises several issues such as the type of questions it asks to the primary material it brings forth to answer them. The greatest difficulty is the impact it has on representations of the Maghrib: according to Dick Pels, this popular “discourse of nomadism” is both “powerfully suggestive, but also risky and misleading set of metaphors”.⁶¹ It reproduces several images such as the intellectual as a “professional stranger”, more interesting than the “boring native” because in constant doubt, able to acquire a double-consciousness and larger truths.⁶² I share this assessment as this trope in scholarship risks misrepresenting the Maghribi ideological landscape as being eternally gripped and incapacitated by identity concerns, rather than these issues being evolving and connected to the way members of a community debates their collective norms. Furthermore, this approach misrepresents intellectuals’ motivations by

⁵⁹ Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin (eds.), *The Empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, 1989; Forsdick, Murphy, *Postcolonial thought in the French-speaking world*, 2009.

⁶⁰ Harrisson, *Souffles-Anfas, a critical anthology from the cultural journal on culture and politics*, 2015.

⁶¹ Ibid. 64.

⁶² Pels, “Privileged nomads: on the strangeness of intellectuals and the intellectuality of strangers” in *Theory, Culture, Society*, (16:1) 1999, 64, 66-71.

implying that the most notable intellectuals the region has produced (i.e. the ones that reached notoriety with Parisian readership) were “blessed” from their contact with Western civilization, and were so alienated under the national states that they preferred to remain in the space of marginality that favoured cultural creation, rather than pursuing social change. Instead, I do not see the Parisian-celebrated Maghribi social and cultural critic has the representative of the whole of the post-independence Maghribi intelligentsia. This figure may be most often worthy of academic investigation by postcolonial literary studies, but access to outside readership must be replaced in its proper historical and cultural setting, with inclining factors such as continued cultural links with the former metropolis and the prestige of being published abroad in contrast with domestic constraints. The tendency to focus on this type of figure is often a matter of methodologies and academic specialisations. Broadening the investigation to non-Parisian Maghribis requires different types of non-literary methodologies, fieldwork that require several archival collection trips, mastery of European and Middle Eastern languages, and awareness of social and political history, rather than a reliance on French and/or translations, and a static conception of thought production involving the individual as the start and end point; with similar concerns in mind, Karima Laachir recently outlined a research agenda in favour of “reading together” Arabic and French Moroccan novels by overcoming the language-based marginalisation and departing instead from socio-historical experiences.⁶³ I build on her recommendations by paying more attention to the post-independence writer’s efforts to engage with the broader experiences found in the community, and to the efforts of engaging with the national public along with the pursuit of Parisian readership.

On the other hand, the theme of this thesis can be studied with the methodologies and approaches of contemporary Middle East intellectual history, which is currently experiencing a revival by devoting increasing attention to the material dimension of thought production. After Albert Hourani’s landmark and classical study on *Arabic thought in the liberal age* (1962), the

⁶³ Laachir, “The aesthetics and politics of ‘reading together’ Moroccan novels in French and Arabic” in *Journal of North African Studies*, 2015.

field stagnated and failed to adapt to the various “turns” in the discipline from the seventies.⁶⁴ Arab intellectuals were only studied to highlight traits of their authoritarian regimes, by depicting their marginalisation and defeatism.⁶⁵ In recent years, the discipline has seen an exciting revival, starting in 2008 when Israel Gershoni and Amy Singer coordinated a volume on “Intellectual History in Middle Eastern Studies” commenting on the “peripheral” nature of intellectuals in this discipline and the lack of proper theoretical and conceptual tools. They drew a research agenda, mobilised modern methodologies of intellectual history and focused on figures who disseminated ideas rather than just “great thinkers”.⁶⁶ Elizabeth Kassab then released an excellent monograph on contemporary Arab thought as “cultural critique in comparative perspective” (2010), looking at Arab thinkers who translated their malaise into wider outlooks on society and looking at the impact of the Arab defeat in 1967, framing this critical discourse in relation to a widespread cultural malaise in society. Ewan Stein coordinated a volume on “Intellectuals and political change” in the region (2014), building on Gershoni and Singer’s call for modern and robust methodologies of intellectual history to be brought to bear on Arab thought. He listed three thematic areas that have shaped the field: intellectuals as social actors, in relation to political power, and their positions on tradition and history.⁶⁷ Recently, Meir Hatina and the late Christoph Schumann discussed the developments and misgivings of “Arab liberal thought after 1967” (2015). While their initial intention is to devote focus to strands of Arab political thought beyond the “loud” radical ones, their quest for liberals can sometimes read as a teleological (and eager) attempt to locate those who subscribe to democratic values and principles of human rights, and link their failure to “convert” others to the authoritarian settings. These difficulties are a sign that the revival of Middle East intellectual history is a work very much in progress, liable to

⁶⁴ Moyn, Sartori (ed.), *Global intellectual history*, 2013; Jacoby, “A new intellectual history” in *The American Historical Review* (97:2), 1992; Darnton, “Intellectual and cultural history” in Kammen, *The past before us, Contemporary historical writing in the United States*, 1980.

⁶⁵ Milson, “Medieval and modern intellectual traditions in the Arab world”, Keddie, “Intellectuals in the Middle East: a brief historical consideration” in *Daedalus*, 1972; Charnay, “L’intellectuel arabe entre le pouvoir et la culture” in *Diogenes*, 1973, 43 ; Muflih, *Fī sūsyūlūjiyā al-muthaqqafīn al-‘Arab: dirāsa waṣṣfiya min khilālī taḥlīl maḍmūn majallat al-Mustaḡbal al-‘Arabī*, 1978-2008, 2013; Khoury, *Pensée Arabe contemporaine, tradition et modernité*, 2012, 11; Sharabi, *Arab intellectuals and the West: the formative years, 1875-1914*, 1970.

⁶⁶ Gershoni, Singer, “Introduction: intellectual history in Middle East studies” in *CSSAAME*, (28:3) 2008, 181-5.

⁶⁷ Stein, “Intellectuals and the Middle East in North Africa” in *BJMES*, (41:1) 2014, 2.

advances and setbacks. Instead of adhering to one single direction among these highlighted volumes, I borrow from several more specific studies that strike a good balance between specific cases and a desire to provide robust methodological future research on Arab intellectual history.⁶⁸

For this thesis, two of these publications deserve special mention: Carool Kersten published his doctoral thesis on a new type of Islamic intellectuals exploring Islam's civilizational legacy as modern scholars of religion. Kersten chose to read Mohamed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi and Nurcolich Madjid because these scholars used modern social science methodologies and shaped Islamic studies from their national setting and socio-political settings.⁶⁹ Kersten combines the discussion of three's intellectual projects with their biographical paths, intellectual influences, and a close textual analysis of their various publications to identify the epistemological reconfigurations of Islamic studies they pursued, while making good use of concepts such as the notion of "subaltern agency".⁷⁰ Secondly, Samer Frangie recently published two individual articles: a study on Lebanese Marxist Mahdi 'Amil and Syrian Marxist Yasin al-Hafiz.⁷¹ Both studies approach the intellectual project, the historical context (the Lebanese civil war for the first, the 1967 Arab defeat for the second) and their impact on thought production in a fruitful way for the understanding of the nexus of historical events and thought production in Arab thought. His approach consists of envisaging the context in relation the ideas, not as in parallel, but in a dynamic interaction that allows the reader to understand better how they impacted each other.⁷²

Frangie achieves this dynamic contextualisation thanks to the use of a concept this thesis will treat as a centre-piece: the "problem-space of intellectual production", a term borrowed from

⁶⁸ They include: Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab past: historians and history writing in twentieth century Egypt*, 2009; Meijer, *The quest for modernity: secular liberal and left wing political thought in Egypt, 1945-1958*, 2002; Schumann, *Liberal thought in the Eastern Mediterranean: late 19th century until the 1960s*, 2008; Sheehi, *Foundations of modern Arab identity*, 2004; Bardawil, *In Marxism's wake: the disenchantment of Levantine Intellectuals* (2016).

⁶⁹ Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and heretics*, 2011, 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 13-18.

⁷¹ Frangie, "Theorizing from the periphery: the intellectual project of Mahdi 'Amil" in *IJMES*, (44:3) 2012; Frangie, "Historicism, socialism and liberalism after the defeat: on the political thought of Yasin al-Hafiz" in *Modern Intellectual History*, (12:2) 2015.

⁷² Frangie, "Theorizing from the periphery", 466-7.

David Scott.⁷³ Reconstructing this space means rebuilding the answers *and* the questions that intellectuals were asking themselves, in order to offer a better representation of the constraints and opportunities they faced when they developed their thought projects. This notion also offers a robust and dynamic approach to the subtext, made up of the relationship with audiences, cultural change, and social class and socio-political stability, and a safeguard to avoid (or limit) the projection of the historian's concerns on past actors.

These methodological developments have not yet been applied to the Maghrib. The only existing volume on Maghribi intellectuals edited by Hassan Benaddi suffers from a lack of dynamic contextualisation, despite the high quality of the the analysis of the individual thinkers' intellectual projects it contains.⁷⁴ The volume fails to explain why there is a clear demarcation of profiles between pre- and post-independence intellectuals. Those in the second category have pursued their thought from an academic position at the margins of power (such as Mohamed Arkoun, Abdallah Laroui and Hichem Djaït), as opposed to the first who wrote and thought in the public sphere and in relation to national movements (figures such as Allal al-Fassi, Mokhtar al-Soussi or Ibn Badis). As a result, the study of the Maghribi contribution to post-1967 Arab intellectual history is a topic left wanting, but one which benefits from a positive research dynamic and reliable methodological guidance.

In this thesis, I take stock of the importance of the “social unit of analysis”, its absence as a concern in postcolonial studies, and the inspiring developments in contemporary Arab intellectual history (and especially the dynamic contextualisation provided by the notion of the “problem-space of intellectual production”). These markers are applied to a combined reading of Laroui and Djaït's projects and trajectories, especially as they were thinkers whose lives and trajectories are essential aspect of their intellectual projects in the sixties and seventies, as I now explain in methodological remarks.

⁷³ “Interview – David Scott by Stuart Hall” in *Bomb*, Winter 2005.

⁷⁴ Benaddi (ed.), *Penseurs Maghrébins contemporains*, 1993.

“Lives in ideas”: methodology and thesis structure

I offer a combined reading of the two figures, integrating equally their biographical trajectories and a textual reading informed by the dynamic context, from the angle of cultural criticism, a “reading of particular cultural or symbolic forms of expression as symptoms of the state of health of that society”.⁷⁵ By focusing on these two individuals, I argue that the production of critical thought was the outcome of individuals seeking to make sense of their lived realities through the act of writing, and specifically critical writing against the failures of nationalism to materialise “modernity” (with all the issues attached to this term, as discussed above). Their two essays had a profoundly personal dimension because they were written in a time of personal ordeal, and because their public role was on the line. They also aspired for their texts to resonate with others, as they were written as part of the region-wide moment of critical renewal. These two cases highlight the role that thought can play for the individual seeking to be re-inserted in the national community. In fact, their individual trajectories mirror widespread feelings of national disillusionment in their respective intelligentsias, and therefore, this thesis seeks to add a chapter to Maghribi social history.

I make use of David Scott’s notion of “problem-space of intellectual production”, which he came up with “as a way of grappling with ‘context’ [while] avoiding a narrow sociology or historicism in which [you] get a lot of backdrop but little sense of the way these shape the discursive and non-discursive action with which [one is] interested [sic]”.⁷⁶ Scott defined it as “a conjunctural space, a historically constituted discursive space... defined by a complex of questions and answers/or better, a complex of statements, propositions, resolutions and arguments offered in answer to largely implicit questions or problems”.⁷⁷ The historian needs to rebuild the set of questions “that an author in a particular problem-space was responding to”, which incidentally side-steps the polemic question of methodologies that read past questions

⁷⁵ Collini, “‘What, ultimately, for?’ The elusive goal of cultural criticism” in *Raritan*, 33, 2013, 5.

⁷⁶ “Interview – David Scott by Stuart Hall” in *Bomb*, Winter 2005.

⁷⁷ For more: Scott, *Refashioning futures: criticism after postcoloniality*, 1999, 9-10.

with today's concerns.⁷⁸ Thanks to this concept, this thesis is able to produce a different form of intellectual history, as described earlier, by portraying the dynamic interplay between biographical elements, broader context and the intellectual project, while providing a safeguard in favour of academic impartiality.

Concretely speaking, I have chosen to limit my investigation to their intellectual projects from 1965 to 1978 because it corresponds to a well-defined and consensual "cycle of thought", according to Paul Khoury: during this period, a generation of younger thinkers oversaw a cultural renewal and revisited essential concepts such as "modernity", "authenticity", "renewal", "reform" and "tradition".⁷⁹ I discuss to an extent their contributions to the important conceptual debates on Arab political thought, by proceeding to a conceptual historical analysis in relation to the socio-political contexts, to academic debates and how they travelled from other cultural traditions, taking special care to identify "junctures" after which these terms' meanings evolved or remained consistent.⁸⁰

Laroui and Djaït made contributions to Arab and European philosophical debates on the issue of historical change, historiography and modernity. They each subscribed to a different philosophical tradition: Laroui's historical materialism was inspired from the German Historical School and his writings interacted with the Paris thinkers undergoing a renewal of Marxist frameworks of analysis, and became known for his work on ideology, and his writings on "historicism".⁸¹ Djaït's added to the cultural personalism school and was inspired by anthropological debates in the United States (especially Abram Kardiner and Ralph Linton), and dialogued with the French school on personalism, while contributing to fight oriental stereotypes on the innate backwardness of Arab culture.⁸² Their contributions, it should be noted, took place during a particular period of revisionism in the sixties and seventies, where academics and thinkers were coming to terms with the power relations established and reproduced by academic

⁷⁸ Idem.

⁷⁹ Khoury, *Tradition et modernité, thèmes et tendances de la pensée arabe contemporaine*, 2013, 8.

⁸⁰ Browsers, *Democracy and civil society in Arab political thought*, 2006, 9

⁸¹ Sabry, *Arab cultural studies: mapping the field*, 5-6.

⁸² For more on this concept: Moughrabi, "The Arab basic personality: a critical survey" in *IJMES* (9) 1978, 100-5.

disciplines, that social location determined what one believed be the truth, and when such intellectuals spoke eagerly of the “decolonisation of knowledge”.⁸³

These temporal and philosophical markers offer a convenient structure for the conceptual discussion, but are also there to be challenged through the reconstitution of their trajectories. In fact, the period that ensued corresponds more or less to Laroui’s and Djait’s most productive period of thought: from the mid-sixties, they both interrupted their historical research in favour of essay writing and returned fully to their research after 1978, and their writings became less critical, more erudite. This period also corresponds to the cultural flourishing and political closure in the two countries, which created an audience for such critical texts. Finally, it represents a period during which the grand ideologies (nationalism, pan-Arabism and liberalism) went from their apex to a crisis and a sudden decline, until they were replaced by the parameters of the current ideological systems.⁸⁴ Therefore, these chronological barriers allows us to embrace the “1967 paradigm”, but as part of a total historical dynamic.

I also aim to identify their crucial experiences that shaped their viewpoint during this period. These events were not always straightforward to identify, but I have relied on several temporal markers to reconstruct a narrative which they themselves provided along the years, or which are known to have impacted the Maghribi intelligentsia. To that end, I divided the thesis into chronological chapters revolving around these turning point moments, which also happen to herald different stages in their intellectual projects. Such a structure gives access to the multi-faceted drivers for their ideas, which allows us to trace their evolution in this period not as a clear and thought-out evolution, but also as a set of tentative and uncertain choices, often in response to constraints and opportunities.

As this thesis also aims to account for the broader dynamics in the Maghribi intelligentsia, each chapter starts by setting up the historical context in relation to the two figure’s stage of life, in order to identify the “problem-space” and the questions that drove them to write and engage in the public sphere. That being established, I then delve into their relevant publications, which I

⁸³ For historians, see Majumdar, *Writing postcolonial history*, 2008, ix.

⁸⁴ Browsers, *Political ideology in the Arab world*, 2009.

read alongside each other, with the three “axes” identified earlier in mind, and, when relevant, confront one to another, or even other figures of the Maghribi intelligentsia. Finally, I carry out an assessment of their contributions to the questions of that period and make observations on what they meant for their respective trajectories.

The first chapter describes the paradox of modern education in the transition from colonialism to independence. Studying in French schools was supposed to advance the social status of the selected few, but the effected cultural transformation and changed outlooks created tensions between students and their families along the years that would sometimes be channelled into nationalist politics. These anxieties accumulated before independence heralded future divisions after independence.

In the second chapter, I look at the paradox of two modern and qualified intellectuals who failed to integrate after their return from France in the sixties, as the independent states was in high demand for skilled nationals and professors. A generation of young modernist intellectuals confronted the let-down of independence by establishing new structures of engagement and discussing their vision of a modern society, but were frustrated by being in the powerless margins of historical change. Alongside their difficult national integration, neither young intellectual could develop a working bond with a mentor figure, which meant they had to navigate independence on their own.

The third chapter represents the turning point in the thesis, because the disillusionment of independence finally boiled into violent confrontation between regimes and young intellectual groups. Faced with this violence, members of this intelligentsia had to look critically and confront the sources of their malaise and in some case, as with Laroui and Djaït, it was carried in the painful setting of exile. Foreign estrangement was also an opportunity to take some distance after the disillusionment of the sixties and simultaneously broaden their ideological horizons.

The fourth chapter took place in the ideological setting of the early seventies, where intellectuals and writers were facing repression and closure, and experimented through new forms and cultural subversion. Laroui and Djaït each issued a call for a new Arab renaissance based on a “revolution” in modes of thought. Both re-engaged in the public sphere and with their

audience with contrasting levels of success, showing that intellectual strategies regarding the cultural and intellectual field can be as important as a sound intellectual vision.

The fifth chapter tackles the recurrent question of the “crisis of intellectuals” and how both intellectuals envisaged the role of intellectuals in favour of social emancipation in their writings. The new forms of political engagement that emerged in Morocco and Tunisia in the sixties were brutally shut down by the authorities in both countries. The oppressive context drove Laroui and Djaït to reflect on the theoretical frameworks of intellectual intervention with society, and their writings display some critical insight on the topic by reflecting on the notion of “usefulness” as valued members of the national community as a factor for national re-integration. While these critical frameworks appeared sound and showed vision on their part, they failed to account for social changes that impeded the intellectual to be an agent of historical change, including how the two states’ co-opted the urban middle class and mobilised conservative religious discourse in order to nullify the threat from radical leftism.

In the final chapter, in the mid to late seventies, both regimes began to slowly restore the political process, and Laroui and Djaït faced an opportunity to put in practice some of the modes of intervention they had discussed in writing. Morocco faced the issue of territorial integrity, the Sahara and diplomatic antagonism with Algeria, while Tunisia experienced trade union strikes, rising Islamist political demands and calls for political pluralism. Both made brief and unsuccessful attempts to enter politics in this setting. While disappointing at first, neither experienced a personal crisis as in the late sixties, because they had secured public legitimacy as public thinkers and re-integrated the national community, which then serves us to rethink the notion of the public responsibility as intellectuals, and the elements that motivates intellectual conducts.

To carry out these aims, this thesis has made use of a rich body of primary sources, which requires a few remarks. First, I have relied to the largest extent on the two figures’ body of writing, consisting of their well-known essays and novels, but also lesser-used articles. In order to reconstruct the “problem space of intellectual production”, I have mobilised traces of cultural

life from 1965 to 1978 by “following the conversation” between Laroui, Djaït and their readers and fellow Maghribi thinkers, branching out in order to depict the general cultural and intellectual atmosphere. When Laroui and Djaït began to write in the mid-sixties, French was the language they were most comfortable with and that ensured they would be published the most because the prestigious publishing houses were abroad. Later, the two thinkers also made a point of making their works available for Arabic audiences, sometimes with some delay and without the same success. It was important to read and integrate their interventions in both languages in order to overcome the language-based distinction and focus instead on the substance of their intellectual projects. The translation of quoted passages or words into English are always my own, unless indicated otherwise.

These academics were prolific over their careers, and they were historians before and after the period from 1965-1978, which means some texts will fall out of this research’s purview. While the separation is in no way perfect, I focus on “works of thought” (*fikr* or *pensée*), which address question of “identity” and “modernity” (see their above discussed contribution on “historicism” and “personalism”), which also usually have a personal dimension – evidently, the militant spirit of debates on the “decolonisation of social sciences” in the sixties and seventies renders this separation debatable, because young scholars were adamant that knowledge about their societies contributed to their continued sense of inferiority, and had to be renewed critically (and especially the discipline of “Orientalism” and colonial historiography).⁸⁵ But for these two thinkers, these works had an ontologically different value. Laroui and Djaït made crucial to the important conceptual debates as a whole, let alone in Arab thought, because they wrote during a crucial transition in philosophy and social sciences and made use of the new theoretical frameworks of discussion in their own texts, each with a different ideological position regarding

⁸⁵ See: Khatibi, “Le Maghreb comme horizon de pensée” in *Maghreb pluriel*, 1983; Vatin, *Connaissance du Maghreb : sciences sociales et colonisation*, 1984; Le Gall, Perkins (eds.), *The Maghrib in question: essays in history & historiography*, 1997; Ahmida, “Review Article: Beyond orientalist, colonial and nationalist models: a critical mapping of Maghribi studies (1951-2000)” in *TWQ*, 30:6, 2009; Roussillon, “Sociologie et identité en Egypte et au Maroc: le travail de deuil de la colonisation” in *Revue d’histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 7:2, 2002.

the way the Arab world should move forward: Laroui's universalist "historicism" and his call for "revolution, contrasting with Djaït's cultural personalism and his belief in "reform".⁸⁶

Laroui's intellectual project has attracted significant readership and critical discussion, especially his writing on Arab ideology,⁸⁷ on historiography,⁸⁸ on his contribution to Moroccan philosophy,⁸⁹ and, on his conception of "the intellectual".⁹⁰ As for Hichem Djaït, his thought project on the Arab renaissance has not provoked a similar interest as Laroui's intellectual project, or as the Tunisian's historical research on medieval Islamic history, and he is often found missing from the important survey of contemporary Arab thought the way Laroui is portrayed (despite their essays being read together when published in 1974), probably because he initially wrote in French, and his call for a reconciliation with an "Arab and Islamic personality" was mistakenly associated with a call for authenticity that was being expressed elsewhere in the seventies.⁹¹

In 1967, Laroui published *L'idéologie Arabe contemporaine*, followed in 1970 by *L'Histoire du Maghreb* and in 1974 by *La crise des intellectuels Arabes: traditionalisme ou historicisme?* The three essays were published in French with Francois Maspero in Paris, a famously militant publishing house. In 1973 he had already published the last essay in Arabic in Beirut as *Al-'arab wa-al-fikr al-tārīkhī* with *Dār al-Tal'ia* in Beirut, and it was translated in English in 1976 by the University of California Press in Berkley as *The crisis of Arab intellectuals: traditionalism or historicism?* (these two versions will mainly be used for issues of translation and clarification). Hichem Djaït wrote his first essay in 1974 on *La personnalité et le devenir arabo-islamique*, and

⁸⁶ Jebari, "L'histoire et l'avenir possible": Laroui, Djaït et la modernité du Maghreb dans les années 1970" in *L'Année du Maghreb* 2014 (10), 197-202.

⁸⁷ See Benaddi, *Penseurs maghrébins contemporains*, 1993 ; Al-Kurdi, *La pensée d'Abdallah Laroui*, 2000 ; Chapter on Laroui in Kassab, *Contemporary Arab thought*, 2010 and Abu Rabi, *Studies in post-1967 Arab intellectual history*, 2004.

⁸⁸ In Choueiri, *Modern Arab historiography*, 2000; Riecken, "Periodisation and the Political: Abdallah Laroui's Analysis of Temporalities in a Postcolonial Context" in *ZMO Working Papers* 6, 2012. Title of his unpublished PhD thesis: "Abdallah Laroui and the Location of History. An Intellectual Biography" (2011).

⁸⁹ Kamal Abdelatif in *Al-fikr al-falsafi fi al-Maghrib* (2008); since 2013, the Moroccan national library in Rabat (BNRM) has organised lectures on Laroui's ideas

⁹⁰ Abdallah Labdaoui, *Les nouveaux intellectuels arabes* (1993) on the emergence of secular and modernist Moroccan intellectuals, where Laroui is studied alongside Fatema Mernissi and al-Jabri.

⁹¹ Abdou Filali-Ansary, Benaddi, op. cit.; chapters in Balqiz, *Al-tārīkh wa al-taqqadum, Markaz al-Dirasat al-'Arabiyya*, 2011, following a conference on Hichem Djaït held at the University Hassan II in Casablanca; Lotfi Ben Miled "Orientalism in the ideas of Hichem Djaït" in *Al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabī* (2010).

it was followed in 1978 by *L'Europe et l'Islam*, both published by Le Seuil in Paris, but the second one was already destined for an audience of scholars, orientalist and medieval historians, rather than a large public. His essays were translated in Arabic in the eighties and also published with *Dār al-Tal'ia* in Beirut (1984) and University of California Press in English (1985).

These essays were the outcome of a process during which their ideas were published in incremental states in journals or exposed and tested at academic events. Therefore I also rely on their articles from *Lamalif*, *Libération/Al-Moharrir* and *Souffles/Anfas* (Morocco), and from *Al-Fikr*, *Revue IBLA* and *Erraï/Démocratie* and publications from the university of Tunis (*Les Cahiers de Tunisie* or the publications from CERES). In France, they had articles published in *Les Temps Modernes*, *Esprit*, *Le Monde* and *Jeune Afrique*. The articles from these two intellectuals were often completed with a reading of these publications to get a better sense of where they fit in the wider conversation.

Finally, the remaining primary sources consist of texts that form the basis of their self-narrative: these were usually interviews and autobiographical writing, and they are useful sources of information into their subjectivities, despite the risks attached with a narrative that has self-consciously been controlled and tailored to reflect a certain image. Methodologically, one must be aware of the limitations with this form of writing: the quest for self-justification, lapse of memory and post-facto reconstruction, but also the effect of editorial choices (type of questions, restricted answers, time constraints). Nevertheless, they remain indispensable and unexplored in the current literature. Each thinker gave a lengthy interview to Tunisian journalist Hassan Arfaoui in the nineties where they discussed their trajectories and intellectual motivations. Laroui completed it with another similar interview to American historian Nancy Gallagher in 1998 while Djaït gave several interviews to pan-Arab newspapers or television channels from 1996 to 2001. I conducted two one-hour long interviews with Djaït in January 2014 and February 2015 in his office at *Beit al-Hikma* in Carthage, Tunisia. Laroui recently published an edited version of his diary in several volumes called *Khawātir al-sabāḥ*, and I have made use of the first two volumes (1967-1973 published in 2001, and 1974-1981 published in 2003). Due to the chronological barriers, I have also relied on two semi-autobiographical novels: *Al-Ghurba* (1971)

and *Awraq* (1989). Both were reconstructions from “papers” he found from the diary he kept in his childhood and rediscovered years later. In both, he uses a similar literary device where he referred to his former self through another name (*Idris*) through the eyes of an imagined best friend (*Shu‘aib*) who is the one putting his papers in order. Finally, Laroui has very recently published his political memoirs *Le Maroc et Hassan II* (2005), that have been used to better understand his relationship with politics, despite the tone of self-justification.

Some use has also been made of historical material from the sixties and the seventies, articles and pamphlets from that period, or recently published memoirs that describe the sixties and seventies in the Maghrib. The past decade has seen a movement towards the recovery of collective memory under the dark years of repression in these two countries that has been expressed in a rich literature. In Morocco, it has been expressed by prison literature, while in Tunisia this movement has seen the publication of memoirs from former members of the radical left (also known as the *Perspectives* movement), which have proven useful despite not being used to the fullest. Finally, I also carried out informal oral interviews with around fifty people, mostly members of the Maghribi intelligentsia of the sixties and seventies, or those who were students at the time. These discussions have been useful for a better understanding of the atmosphere and dynamics of reception and they represent a rich body that deserves to be studied in its own right.

I have tried in this thesis, to account as faithfully and critically, the fascinating intellectual projects and trajectories of these two significant intellectuals in the Maghrib’s turbulent twentieth century. They add their perspectives to the ongoing effort to bring collective memory to the surface, thanks to the Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians who are luckily still among us, playing an active role in civil society and in the public sphere. It is my hope their stories will contribute to the plurality of views on the region’s difficult past and efforts to bring past and present generations together around a forward-looking collective project.

Chapter 1 Intellectuals and the anxiety of modern education

For many young and skilled Maghribis, their countries' independences put them in front of a dilemma: joining the administrative and political elite or pursuing their political ideals from a marginalised position.⁹² Laroui and Djaït found themselves faced with such a predicament, and they would later claim that intellectuals were especially concerned by the incompatibility of their world views with the countries' realities after independence, even if it meant turning down privileged conditions of life. At the root of this paradox was that modern education shaped both the countries' system of elites and the acquisition of political ideals, and produced different outcomes on its former students. It is important to keep in mind that it was a colonial system of education that was not initially designed to operate the transition from colonial rule to independent state and nation building. This chapter will focus on how modern colonial education shaped the two intellectuals' outlook on their countries' transformations and their ability to negotiate a place for themselves in the national setting, and how it later shaped their public conducts as "intellectuals".

For French historian Pierre Vermeren, modern education was one of the most important colonial legacies in the Maghrib: families competed to have their children secure a place in these modern establishments because it opened the door for better employment perspectives. Having a French education soon became the shared characteristic of the post-independence modern elites in Morocco and Tunisia.⁹³ Modern education also contained another, less discussed dimension: how the acquisition of new knowledge and practices led to the emergence of "modern subjectivities", which interacted with existing social and cultural references and sometimes produced personal and social anxieties. The resulting social and cultural transformations that

⁹² Ashford, "Second- and third-generation elites in the Maghrib", Marais, "The ruling class in Morocco", Schuster, "Bureaucratic transition in Morocco" in Zartman (ed.), *Man, State and society in the contemporary Maghrib*, 1973; Debbasch, "Les élites maghrébines devant la bureaucratie" in *Pouvoir et administration au Maghreb*, 1970.

⁹³ Vermeren, *Ecole, élite et pouvoir au Maroc et en Tunisie au XXe siècle*, 2002, 9-11.

affected *indigènes* children (the colonial terminology used in colonial Algeria to refer to non-settler “European” populations) have been discussed by French historiography for Algeria as the process of “*acculturation*” and especially by Fanny Colonna’s seminal book, and in her aftermath by looking at how individuals with two cultures have been torn between competing sources of social behaviour and perspectives on the world.⁹⁴ Francophone novelists have often grappled with this legacy and called it “cultural alienation” in a rich literature in which they identified the tension between their transformations in contact with French school, and the growing rift with their conservative families.⁹⁵ We know less about how these transformations played out in the transition from colonialism to independence, and how former students these legacies in their interactions with the social and political order.

This chapter will reconstitute Laroui’s and Djaït’s early life paths by identifying the marking events, from their childhood to the moment they chose to refuse the path of elitism, a narrative that was regularly brought up over the years and constitutes the self-representation of distinctiveness and disinterested nature of public intellectuals. In response to this narrative, Aïssa Kadri recommended tracing the singular sequences of marking events and transformative experiences in the lives of Maghribi intellectuals, because these serve to “fill their system of positive and negative values” that would later “determine the coherence or contradiction in their speech and their practice”.⁹⁶

Since the main issue this thesis deals with is critical thought on modernity, it makes sense for this first chapter to carry out a “genealogy” of their thought by focusing on the period of the two thinkers’ lives when they formed an initial understanding of the major concepts that were later shape their intellectual projects: the universalist ambitions of western philosophy that were transmitted by French education. However, these were colonial schools in the two protectorates in North Africa, infused with a colonial ideology that insisted on celebrating the beneficial aspect of French presence and the superiority of the West and the backwardness of the Islamic world.

⁹⁴ Colonna, *Les instituteurs algériens (1883-1939)*, 1975.

⁹⁵ The typical examples were Driss Chraïbi in *Le passé simple* (1954) Mouloud Mammeri in *La colline oubliée* (1952) and Albert Memmi in *La statue de sel* (1953); Yetiv, *Le thème de l’aliénation dans le roman Maghrébin d’expression française, 1952-1956*, 1972.

⁹⁶ Kadri, *Parcours d’intellectuels maghrébins*, 1999, 8.

School programmes transmitted these ideas on their students as Driss Abbassi found by examining textbooks.⁹⁷

The second clarification remark highlights the social dimension of modern education, especially how those who became the country's young, urban, modernist elite very often shared the experience of French education. This was the case for both Laroui and Djaït, yet they purposefully chose to deviate from the common path reserved for the elite, without turning their backs on their modern education either. This indicates that other equally important factors can explain the choice of conducts adopted after independence. This is a necessary clarification because of the tendency to reduce the Maghrib's post-independence elite to their "torn identity" and "cultural malaise", having studied in French and living in Arabic-speaking country, having a modern outlook but living in conservative countries.⁹⁸ I depart from this reductionist approach by placing a greater emphasis on how these intellectuals have dealt with the legacy of modern education at different turning points of their trajectories. I will seek to go beyond the explanation usually given by Maghribi francophone writers and literary specialists on the "traditional" family as an obstacle for national integration and personal fulfilment.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, I recognise that modern colonial education contributed to a set of social dislocations from childhood to their adulthood which constantly placed these individuals in front of (occasionally) competing references points determining their conducts. These different cultural conducts put the two thinkers in a dynamic of anxiety where the choices associated with their modern education were ambivalent: the choice to join these schools, securing the completion diploma, travelling to Paris for university, and eventually returning to their home countries after independence. Laroui and Djaït offer interesting cases for the examination of these dynamics because they came from different social origins, yet have both experienced these difficulties, which disrupted their relation with their respective fathers and their families.

⁹⁷ Abbassi, "Enseigner aux indigènes la 'mission civilisatrice' et l'identité de l'Afrique du Nord" in Boyer (ed.), *L'école aux colonies*, 2013, 70-2.

⁹⁸ Vermeren, *Maghreb, la démocratie impossible*, 2004, 131.

⁹⁹ Kelly, *Autobiography and independence*, 2005, 16-7, 32-3.

This exercise will inevitably lack precision because it relies on incomplete evidence of internal transformation. In addition, of course, both thinkers made sure to control the story of their childhood to suit their later needs. Despite these obstacles, there is sufficient information to identify the broad contours of this paradox of modern education and social anxiety. Djaït gave several interviews during his career, but his profile and trajectory only became a source of discussion in 1996 during the interview with Hassan Arfaoui, and in recently conducted interviews for this research. Laroui spoke more regularly about his trajectory (he conducted a similar interview with Arfaoui in 1993, and another with Nancy Gallagher in 1998); but he also covered his childhood and teen years in his novel *Awraq*. I will reconstitute a contextualised biography to discuss the transformations incurred during their years of primary and secondary education: in the first period from 1933 to 1953, under colonialism, they acquired a double-culture by studying in bilingual schools and were part of the system that produced future elites. The second period took place from 1954 to 1962-4, during which they witnessed the national struggle for independence and then left for university in Paris. At the end of that period, they returned home to join the national project.

1. 1933 – 1953: Colonialism and double-culture

Among the institutions French colonial authorities set up to help run the two protectorates in Morocco and Tunisia were the mixed schools, also known as *Collèges musulmans*. They taught local children in French and Arabic and their aim was to form a class of ‘intermediaries’ that would facilitate contacts between the bureaucratic administration and local population.¹⁰⁰ Far from rejecting these institutions as elements of foreign occupation, elites appeared to rush and compete to enrol their children, since they opened the perspective of better employment, material benefits and European knowledge. This system was stabilised during the inter-war period, when indigenous elites and nationalist movements alike began to demand better access and improved quality education from colonial authorities. After France was defeated in 1940 and the perspective of political independence was actively pursued, education provision became a source of contention between the authorities and national elites, with the former making promises to dissuade the latter from demanding independence.

At first, colonial authorities in the protectorates recruited students from the notability in order to maintain existing hierarchies, and to convince the leading classes of the benefits of colonisation. From 1942, according to Pierre Vermeren, they enlarged their recruitment pool to other groups, hoping to undermine the power of notables and nationalist movements. For a new group of Moroccans and Tunisians, mixed-schools became a tool to climb the social ladder rather than maintain social privilege.¹⁰¹ They began to form an emerging social category: the urban middle class that was bilingual and frequently worked in the administration. They began to crowd out the old or “traditional” elites that found it increasingly difficult to adapt and ensure that their offspring maintain the continuity of their families’ privilege. Meanwhile, lower social

¹⁰⁰ Knibiehler, “L’enseignement au Maroc pendant le protectorat (1912-1956). Les ‘fils de notables’” in *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 1994, 489-498; Nordburch, Ryad (eds.), *Transnational Islam in inter-war Europe*, 2014, 68-72.

¹⁰¹ Vermeren, *Ecole, élite, pouvoir*, 6, 120.

categories saw an opportunity to challenge well-entrenched social hierarchies and experience upward mobility.

Abdallah Laroui and Hichem Djaït joined these schools in the forties and their trajectories highlight the relationship between modern education and changing social dynamics.

Abdallah Laroui was born in 1933 in Azemmour, a mid-sized city on the Atlantic Ocean and 150 kilometres south of Casablanca. He began his education in the local *kuttab*, as was the local custom, learning to read and recite the Quran. At 7, he was joined the local primary school for “*indigènes*” Moroccans, which he attended from 1941 to 1945. He came from a small city, so he had to move on a regular basis to bigger cities for school; he was an accomplished student and benefitted from grants from the colonial authorities.¹⁰² He attended the *Collège* Sidi Muhammad in Marrakesh until 1949, where he lived as a boarder with fellow students from small cities and rural areas. During those years, as he recounts in his novel *Awraq*, he was more of an introvert than his classmates, but that did not prevent him from being fascinated by what the big cities had to offer. Marrakesh was the first place where he ‘encountered modernity’: it was one of the country’s biggest cities with Europeans, modern amenities such as newspaper stands and cinemas, which he regularly visited and described vividly.¹⁰³ He moved again to Rabat, and studied at the prestigious *Collège* Moulay Youssef from 1949 to 1951. This establishment was established in 1916 next to the Palace, and was where the sons of the elite studied, and became a breeding ground for nationalism.¹⁰⁴ From there, he was less the uncertain provincial child but a more assured teenager who chose to spend time in the company of a small group of students with similar backgrounds, and far from the sons of the capital and the important families they grew to resent. Finally he joined the French *lycée* in Casablanca in 1951 to prepare for his *baccalauréat* where he encountered another form of segregation as the *lycée* contained mostly French and settler students.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Abdallah Laroui” in *MARS*, 1993, 5.

¹⁰³ Laroui, *Awraq*, 1989, 26.

¹⁰⁴ Segalla, *The Moroccan soul: French education, colonial ethnology and Muslim resistance*, 2009, 39.

¹⁰⁵ Gallagher, “Life and times of Abdallah Laroui” in *JNAS*, (3:1) 1997, 133-4.

Hichem Djaït was born in Tunis in 1935 and also went to a *kuttab* as a child. As opposed to Laroui, his social origin pre-destined him for long studies. He was born into a prestigious, erudite family from the Zaytuna establishment, the reputed Mosque-University. He did not have to move or live as a boarder, and instead remained in the family home in La Marsa, in the Tunis outskirts. Despite his “traditional” origins, his family chose to send him to the Sadiqi College, a bi-cultural, bi-lingual and secular school, as opposed to the traditional religious schools where his family members had previously pursued their education. The aim was to increase his chances to secure employment in the colonial administration and join the new indigenous elite.¹⁰⁶ In 1946, he moved to secondary cursus of the Sadiqi College, where his progression was also the fruit of his good grades: the institution operated under a meritocratic system and thinned its numbers as the years progressed. He was surely influenced by the studious familial legacy, especially considering that his uncle taught theology at the College. The Sadiqi College was known for educating the children of the elite, and those who became prominent Tunisian nationalists. This institution also reached out to students from across the country while increasing its recruitment from the middle classes.¹⁰⁷ It meant that the likes of Djaït, with a traditional *beldi* background, were a smaller group. Therefore, he became a double-outsider: to his classmates, who developed strong and lasting bonds (on which numerous political factions were shaped), and from his family members as he was increasingly shaped by the Sadiqi College’s way of thinking.¹⁰⁸ Finally, he transferred to the French *lycée* Carnot to prepare for his *baccalauréat* when he turned 18; here he was alongside French students and European settlers, and for the first time attended a school located in the European, modern part of town.¹⁰⁹

Along the way, Laroui and Djaït became bi-lingual and bi-cultural colonial subjects: they enthusiastically adopted French while maintaining a link with their Arabic cultural heritage. This meant they were quite distinctive among the Maghribi student body, members of which were

¹⁰⁶ Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and World literature*, 2006, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Sraieb, "Le collège Sadiki et les nouvelles élites" in *ReMMM*, 72, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ In a recent interview, noted journalist Mohamed Ben Smaïl referred to the Sadiqi “group” or “mafia” in France and the great solidarity that overpowered regional identifications: Camau, Geisser (eds.), *Habib Bourguiba, La trace et l’héritage*, 2004, 551.

¹⁰⁹ Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Hichem Djaït”, 28 ; Sebag, *Tunis*, 1998, 311, 322.

versed in French or Arabic (*fusha*) education. While they mastered Arabic alongside French, they usually developed a stronger affection for the new language. They often cited its expressive literature and because it allowed them to acquire rational and critical knowledge. On the other hand, this newfound affection was also induced by the underlying ideological commitment of French school programmes to devalue Arab culture by emphasising notions of historical delay and backwardness and contrasting them with the “superior” characteristics of western culture.¹¹⁰

Djaït evoked how he embraced this new language and its culture during his childhood, but he added that it had been a challenge from the start:

In my family, no one spoke French. I had to contend with a heavy handicap towards my classmates until I was 13 or 14. I had to devote additional efforts by spending more time at the Sadiqi College library, then the library of a friend and later the [Tunisian] National Library. When I was 15, I became an avid consumer of French books because I felt a strong lacuna.¹¹¹

It would undoubtedly have been easier for Djaït to find refuge in his language and culture of origin, interrupt his education or re-orient himself towards the Zaytuna. Instead, he persisted with his efforts, especially “between 16 and 18 ... thanks to a couple of French teachers and wide range of readings”.¹¹² Along with his broadened cultural horizons, Djaït assimilated to his surroundings during those years: a class picture from 1947/8 shows a young Djaït in the *sixième* grade, a 12 year old, standing assuredly and centrally on the top row, despite not being the tallest, in a cream-coloured European blazer and a smart shirt. His head was not adorned with the crimson *chechia*, the traditional Tunisian hat worn by about half his classmates on the picture, nor was his head shaved like students at any Islamic *medersa*, and instead he had what would be referred to as a “European haircut”.¹¹³ The picture also contains a list of his classmate names. It is a combination of household names from the Tunis aristocracy and of Ottoman descent (Cherif, Ferdjani) and names that have a provincial ring (Ben Haha, M’Baza, Robbana etc.). The picture

¹¹⁰ Chabchoub, *Ecole et modernité en Tunisie et dans les pays arabes*, 2000, 68, 82; Abbassi, “Enseigner aux indigènes la mission civilisatrice”, 71-2, 77-8.

¹¹¹ Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Laroui”, 28.

¹¹² Idem.

¹¹³ Abdessalam, *Sadiki et les Sadikiens: un texte*, 1975, 238.

does not give any indication of how these logics played among students, and instead it projects a sense of equality, an essential characteristic of the French republican model. In fact, even the teacher, the Tunisian Hédi Annabi sat there among his students, without the pomp or contrast we would have seen if he had been a French teacher. In all, however much we can conclude from one picture, Djaït appeared well at ease in this setting.

Laroui did not express the same difficulties learning French, but he spoke about the broader social dimension of education in his novel. For him, education as *ādāb* meant two things: first, as the word implies, it was the acquisition of good manners, civility and morality. His education also meant the “successful mastery of the means of expression”.¹¹⁴ It gave him the tools and desire to express his subjectivity, liberating him from the constraining influence of his social environment, especially the family environment in his small town of Azzemmour, to which he returned once a year for the summer, and in relation to which he grew further every year, especially as his studies took him to further cities in Morocco. Increasingly, education began to shape his views and forge his personality: he discussed how in the fifth year of secondary school, in the midst of a bout of melancholia and sadness, Racine and Nietzsche had an important impact on him, addressing his cultural needs as a rebellious and uprooted teenager. In fact, *Awraq* contains several quotes from Nietzsche, which he described as “a sun that shone on his spirit”.¹¹⁵ The opportunity for education, Laroui stated, filled him with a sense of optimism that he would be able to improve his condition and liberate himself from tradition and his modest origins, something that he would have been made to feel in comparison to his more well-off classmates in Marrakesh or Rabat.¹¹⁶

The colonial bi-cultural schools both figures attended as children had an undeniable transformative effect, regardless of their different social origins, as the previous passages suggest. French colonial authorities believed these schools would produce superior subjects and students often believed this about themselves. However, this education also risked antagonising the students: a risk for “double belonging” to turn into “double exclusion” after being made felt to be

¹¹⁴ Laroui, *Awraq*, 22.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 29

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 24.

different from their social origins and other students, especially as these were, after all, tools of colonial control.

Late at the *lycée* (secondary school), they were finally set in an environment that reproduced the colonial dynamic and were made to experience their second-class status. Neither Laroui nor Djaït experienced significant interactions with French students until their preparatory year for the *baccalauréat*: Laroui came from a city with few French families and kept to his group of Moroccan friends in Marrakesh and Rabat while Djaït's traditional environment was largely undisturbed by the French authorities. Apart from occasional influential teachers, colonialism had been an abstract notion in their daily lives, especially because their classmates were all "indigenous Muslims".

Laroui described at some length a hurtful experience of institutional racism he suffered from his French philosophy professor: after submitting the first essay of the year, it was returned to him with "a good grade alongside an interrogation mark".¹¹⁷ Upon distribution, the French teacher publicly expressed "doubts" that he would have been able to produce such a work without plagiarism. Laroui was strongly afflicted by the implication that, as a Moroccan *indigène*, he would have been unable to write such excellent work in a cultural tradition to which he was alien. He concluded this passage by noting that "the wound was still there, unhealed", adding the exact date (6 December 1952), while the rest of his narrative had seldom included any.¹¹⁸

Hichem Djaït did not express such a marking experience of hurtful racism at school. He did experience the flip side of the coin that reveals the same power relation: the external validation received by the colonised subject for mastering the coloniser's culture. In the previously-cited passage, he indicated how he worked hard to speak better French in order to continue studying at the Sadiqi and eventually, he joined the French *lycée*. Several other Tunisian thinkers or writers have experienced this validation, such as Tunisian-Jewish novelist Albert Memmi, who in his 1953 autobiographical novel, *La statue de sel*, described the child's pride when he received the

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 43.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 43-44.

teacher's praise for having "understood Racine".¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the help of "a couple of French teachers" reproduces the common trope of the *benevolent educator* that is found in several life stories, such as that of Tunisian Islamologist Mohamed Talbi, who even stayed in contact with one of his teachers for years after he graduated.¹²⁰ It reinforces the idea of an underlying power relation between the western teacher and the recipient colonised student. While there is always such a power relation between teacher and student, what was significant was the added dynamic of the colonial condition.

This education path also drove them away from their social origins, especially as both figures later referred to the fights, disagreements and differences of views they had with their fathers. This had less to do with a conflict of generations, and more with a fundamental change of perspective as described in Driss Chraïbi in his 1954 autobiography *Le passé simple*. Just as in Chraïbi's novem, Laroui's and Djaït's father were central figures in their young lives, they had a strong influence over the way they thought which was in a silent competition with the modes of thought inculcated by the French colonial school. Laroui described his family *ethos* as "Makhzanian", characterised by authority, responsibility and the importance of "giving one's word".¹²¹ Djaït's family *ethos* was erudite and religious with occasional forays into the Beylicat's political power, but largely withdrawn and reliant on the importance of tradition.¹²² Their fathers were both portrayed as the products of Islamic reformism and the awakening of political consciousness in the early twentieth century: men of tradition but not dogmatic.¹²³

Laroui's father was "educated in Arabic" and "he could have climbed high in the legal administration". His son would describe him as "a moderate cultural nationalist of the Muhammad Abduh type", a man informed by the questions of his time who "from 1910 regularly read dailies or weeklies published in neighbouring Algeria or even Cairo".¹²⁴ His father also sparked his early intellectual interests. Growing up, they often discussed Ibn Khaldun, and

¹¹⁹ Yetiv, "Albert Memmi: The syndrome of self-exile" in *International Fiction Review*, 1974.

¹²⁰ Talbi, *Penseur libre en Islam*, 2013, 23, 32.

¹²¹ Gallagher, "Life and times of Laroui", 132.

¹²² Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Djaït", 27.

¹²³ Segalla, "French colonial education" in *JNAS*, (11:1) 2006, 88; Zisenwine, *The Emergence of nationalist politics in Morocco*, 2010, 145; Sraïeb, "L'idéologie de l'école en Tunisie coloniale" in *ReMMM*, (68) 1993, 244.

¹²⁴ Gallagher, "Life and times of Laroui", 133-4.

his father carried everywhere his “worn-out” *Mūqaddima*. They spoke about “issues raised by Ibn Khaldun [that were] historical and theological in appearance, but fundamentally political”.¹²⁵ And because he lived and worked in Azemmour, his father was also in touch with the deeper realities of Moroccan society, and expressed pessimism on whether nationalism would be the solution to its historical delay.

On the other hand, Djaït was not as intimate with his father, still described him as a product of the reformist ideas of his time:

Even before independence, [he was] a modern man and almost a modern Sheikh at the time. It was thanks to newspapers, journals and books he purchased that I was able to know Egyptian cultural production and everything that was modern in the Arab world. He spoke to me at length about national movements in the Mashriq, of Saad Zaghlul, Muhammad Mahmud, of Abduh and al-Afghani but also of Egyptian theatre, literature and modern religious thought. It was something that he had a passion for... his books contributed to my own education, in addition to the ones I obtained at the Sadiqi College.¹²⁶

By living in the family home, Djaït attended daily discussions and readings in the company of his father and grandfather, both of whom were erudite Sheikhs of the Zaytuna mosque. This ritual had a counter-weight to his modern colonial education. Implicitly, Laroui and Djaït were both enriched by these interactions that contributing to portray Arabic culture as a living body rather a decaying mass. Somehow, thanks to their fathers’ initial discussions, the two figures would later be positively predisposed toward the study of reformist Arab thought and its questions. Furthermore, the two fathers belonged to a generation that received ideas on the necessity to modernise and improve education for their compatriots, which explains the fathers’ support for the sons’ extended education in colonial schools, and later at the University level in France.¹²⁷

Hichem Djaït benefitted from the proximity to the debates and intellectual renewal on political reform and social change, especially those held at the *Khalduniyya* association, where

¹²⁵ Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Laroui”, 6.

¹²⁶ Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Djaït”, 27.

¹²⁷ Moreau, *Réforme de l’Etat et réformismes au Maghreb*, 2009; Charnay, “courants réformateurs de la pensée musulmane” in *Normes et valeurs dans l’Islam contemporain*, 1966, 225.

his family were active members.¹²⁸ Hichem Djaït also evoked nationalist figurehead Abd al-Aziz Thaalbi's return from his exile in the Mashriq in 1937, and how his father went to see him – a rehearsed story since he will have been too young to remember. The father will have subscribed to Thaalbi's exaltation of Tunisia's Islamic past that contrasted with the oppression brought about by colonial occupation.¹²⁹ These circles subscribed to the ideas on the necessity of western science and education reform,¹³⁰ especially the imperatives and difficulties of modernising old institutions such as the Zaytuna, was discussed at length.¹³¹ Morocco was further East from the centre of reformist renewal in the Arab world and was less affected by this wind of change, but these ideas still left a mark on Moroccan nationalists of the salafiyya, people such as Mohamed Hassan al-Wazzani and Allal al-Fassi, who frequently argued for the necessity to extend modern education in order to push for political independence.¹³²

These debates infused political and cultural aims and contributed to a favourable atmosphere for young students such as Laroui and Djaït in the forties and early fifties to devote all their efforts in these schools, and ignore the personal misgivings of being in a colonial institution. In fact, both excelled at school because they were allowed to continue until the final year, and given the opportunity to prepare for the final diploma. The *baccalauréat* was the final examination students took to complete their secondary education. Under the two protectorates, it had a symbolic and professional value as this degree opened doors for a different level and type of employment than clerical posts or translators in the administration because they could acquire advanced skills at the university. There were several obstacles they first had to overcome.

¹²⁸ The Khalduniyya was an educational society created in inspiration of reformist ideas. It delivered lectures, organised debates and classes on modern topics that were not given at the Zaytuna, especially on sciences, but also debates on social reform. See Sayadi, *La première association nationale moderne en Tunisie: Al-Jam'iyya al-Khaldûniyya (1896-1958)*, 1974.

¹²⁹ Abdelaziz Thaalbi was a reformist thinker and a founder of the Dустur party. He campaigned for political independence and spent several years in exile. He then devoted his time to a reformist reading of religious text so support a social reform; Ben Hamida, "Identité tunisienne et représentation de l'Autre" in *CdM*, 2003, paragraph 13 and following.

¹³⁰ Livingston, "Western science and educational reform in the thought of Shaykh Rifaa al-Tahtawi" *IJMES*, (28:4) 1996.

¹³¹ Sraïeb, "de la Zaytuna à l'université de Tunis: mutations d'une institution traditionnelle" in Bleuchot, *institutions traditionnelles*, 2000; Vermeren, "Une si difficile réforme" in *CdM*, 2007.

¹³² Damis, "Early Moroccan reactions to the French protectorate: the cultural dimension" in *Humanoria Islamica*, (1) 1973, 21-22; Halstead, "The changing character of Moroccan reformism, 1921-1934" in *Journal of African History*, (3) 1964, 440-1.

The nationalist movements in Morocco and Tunisia gathered pace after the Second World War, while the French colonial authorities responded with a combination of repression and appeasement measures, including enlarging access to schools. After 1945, these two countries experienced a spike of admissions but it would take years before this change was felt. Those who secured the *baccalauréat* remained a privileged few: Pierre Vermeren's estimated roughly that 640 Moroccans and 1300 Tunisians secured the *baccalauréat* over the whole period of French colonialism, which was longer in Tunisia (1881-1956) than in Morocco (1912-1956); on average, 17 a year in Tunisia and 14 a year in Morocco.¹³³ The mere right to take the examination was hampered by various obstacles: for example, the academic level of these mixed-schools was voluntarily kept lower, following pressures from European settlers in order to remain privileged in the job market. It was only after an extended struggle between parents' families and the colonial administration that provisions were made for Maghribi students to take the examination (non-Europeans), after an additional year in a French, not a mixed *lycée*.¹³⁴

On a symbolic level, this diploma was the first time Maghribi students were on a par with French people. The *baccalauréat* was thought of as the reward for a gruelling and selective process that was the same for everyone, regardless of nationality. Those who succeeded felt validated for their efforts to learn this new culture and modern knowledge, but also a personal revenge. In the *lycées* where they prepared for it, they were a small minority of *indigènes* who managed to make it all the way. Furthermore, Laroui and Djaït secured a good enough final grade to be admitted in two of the most prestigious universities in Paris. Laroui achieved his degree in 1952 with a "*mention bien*", a very good distinction, and was then able to secure a scholarship to study history at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* after a one-year hiatus.¹³⁵ Djaït overcame his initial linguistic disadvantage and also achieved his *baccalauréat* with flying colours, and then went to Paris in 1954 where he studied history and philosophy at the prestigious Sorbonne.¹³⁶

¹³³ Vermeren, *Ecole, élite et pouvoir*, 214

¹³⁴ Ibid. 120-9.

¹³⁵ Gallagher, "Life and times of Laroui", 134.

¹³⁶ Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, January 2014.

This diploma capped several years of hardship and opened new perspectives for travel and learning. In the process, those who began as children grappling with French culture had changed significantly as they became adults. Education was no longer about social concerns such as privilege and working for the administration, otherwise they probably would not have gone so far. Instead, it became about a vocation and something more personal, but political considerations loomed on the horizon. The meaning of education changed, as it was not primarily a decision of the group, but increasingly a decision by the individual obeying different imperatives. It began with Djaït's father who put his children in colonial schools "to maintain their social privilege", but after that, they became the first generation "to choose for themselves".¹³⁷ In the summer of 1953, Laroui went back to Azemmour to wait for results of his scholarship and passport request. When choosing a career orientation, his family angled for medicine, because it was an assured path for wealth and upward social mobility. Laroui disagreed with this vision and argued that "the Nation did not need doctors and lawyers" who were useful thanks to their expertise, but "knew nothing of politics and the economy". One evening, he recounts in *Awraq*, a childhood friend asked whether he intended to study politics (*al-siyāsa*), to which Laroui replied politics was not something that could be "studied", but it was a set of questions that had "preoccupied" him to the point of affecting his studies.¹³⁸

The national cause permeated colonial education as it did much else. These schools produced the new elites in Morocco and Tunisia, especially the Sadiqi College graduates in Tunis and its equivalents in Rabat and Fez. They took over the struggle for independence thanks to their ability to mobilise the masses.¹³⁹ In the meantime, the "traditional" path was unable to provide job opportunities, thus weakening the old social structure in the power, causing a transformation of the elite composition. The competition between a modern urban middle class and the notability would extend into independence and define social and political dynamics in the following years. Laroui's and Djaït's departures for France corresponded to the escalation of the

¹³⁷ Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Djaït", 28.

¹³⁸ Laroui, *Awraq*, 53.

¹³⁹ Sraïeb, *Le collège Sadiki de Tunis*, 1995, 211-301; Segalla, *The Moroccan soul*, 88; Knibiehler "L'enseignement au Maroc pendant le protectorat", 490-2.

nationalist struggle: in 1953, the French authorities in Morocco decided to exile the Sultan for his collusion with the nationalist Istiqlal party, which sparked urban guerrilla actions. In 1952 in Tunisia, the escalation of protests and violent responses by the colonial authorities sparked arrests and forced Bourguiba to leave the country.¹⁴⁰ Just when they reached the age of political engagement, Laroui and Djaït had to go far from these events for their higher education, and this shaped their later relationship to politics.

2. 1942-62: Decolonisation and the first withdrawal

The rise of nationalist politics from the forties to the early fifties was driven by men sharing similar traits: they were younger and highly educated, often equally versed in Arabic and French culture, aspiring for modernity, and unafraid to turn against their communities' old ways in order to stand on equal footing with Europeans. Such figures began to take the lead in their nationalist movements, and yet, politics ended up being a source of unhappiness for Djaït and Laroui, who were withdrawn from these events in the fifties.

The notability and bourgeoisie first led the struggle for independence, highlighting among other things the risk of social fragmentation incurred by colonialism, its alienating cultural transformative effects (such as the erosion of old structures of solidarity), and the undermining of religious institutions. From the inter-war years, the nationalist struggle was shaped by new forms of militancy and new discourses, usually imported from the western model, which showed a shifting source of power in society. The urban middle class grew in size and influence and began to seek better political representation in a colonial system where their professional opportunities were limited or capped to favour settlers and French people.¹⁴¹ The urban educated, often from

¹⁴⁰ See Julien, "La crise franco-marocaine", 223, and "Tunisie : l'indépendance", 137 in *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 1972 (second edition).

¹⁴¹ Le Tourneau, *Evolution politique de l'Afrique du Nord musulmane*, 1962, 57, 186; Rivet, "L'émergence du nationalisme au Maghreb: de la fin du XIXe siècle à la veille de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale" in *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 1993, 19-20.

provincial middle class origin, were often found working as clerks for the colonial administration or other skilled occupation (pharmacists, teachers or even lawyers). They were also closer to the small (and more numerous) shopkeepers and small traders than the wealthy land-owners.¹⁴² Their intellectual voices were able to mobilise such strong urban constituencies as the post-1930s economic depression impacted the colonies, with poor European settlers competing with these educated *indigènes* over jobs in the administration and in the private sector. The social composition of Istiqlal and the neo-Destour illustrates the emergence of this group and their concerns.

The struggle for independence saw a temporary halt during the Second World War, during which France received support from its colonies. However, the nationalists were also emboldened by France's defeat and the brief vacancy of power and made clear demands for independence. In 1944, the Moroccan Istiqlal party struck an alliance with Sultan Mohammed, and issued a manifesto demanding independence. Similarly in August 1946 in Tunisia, existing nationalist forces coalesced around Moncey Bey to make formal demands to *Résident Général*.¹⁴³ In response, colonial authorities stood firm and arrested massively among militant ranks, provoking two crises at around the same time. Istiqlal and the neo-Destour launched international diplomatic campaigns, regular nationwide protests and even guerrilla-style attacks.¹⁴⁴ These crises saw a change of tactic in the two nationalist movements, in large part because a new type of militants, as Charles-André Julien argued.¹⁴⁵ In 1934, the neo-Destour party replaced the Destour, and the old nationalist guard was sidelined. Similarly, from 1944 (though to a lesser extent) in Morocco, the Istiqlal party saw two tendencies co-exist (and often compete): a group of notables allied with religious establishments, advocating *salafiyya* ideology, they were in charge of stirring the masses; on the other hand, younger leaders who were often French-

¹⁴² de Montety, "Old families and new elites in Tunisia", Marais, "The ruling class in Morocco", in Zartman, *Man, state and society in North Africa*.

¹⁴³ Zisenwine, *Nationalist politics in Morocco*, 17. See Special Issue on Morocco from World War II to Independence in *JNAS*, Autumn 2014; Le Tourneau, *Evolution politique*, 110-116.

¹⁴⁴ Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 77.

educated and originated from the provincial middle class, and were charged with organisational tasks (mobilisation, newspapers etc.).¹⁴⁶

Laroui was in Rabat and Djaït lived in Tunis during part of this highly politicised and volatile period. Their schools were often an extension of the political battleground and in return, these institutions provided a constant stream of new members to these movements: the Sadiqi College, according to Nourredine Sraïeb, was a “school for nationalism” that introduced students to national ideals, equipped them for political activism, and developed networks and frameworks of engagement.¹⁴⁷ This atmosphere explains why demands for education reform were so important for nationalists (in Morocco, independent schools were created as an alternative) and why colonial authorities regularly promised to make better provisions in this area.¹⁴⁸

To a large extent, Laroui’s and Djaït’s social origins explain the nature of their relationship to political engagement. They were too young to have joined the struggle, but they were influenced by the discussions that took place at the time. Their education predisposed them for these issues, but the social groups from which they came were obstacles to their participation. Once again, the relationship with the father explained their outlook on nationalist politics.

Laroui was in the midst of the nationalist cause as a student. He studied at the *Collège* Moulay Youssef in Rabat where, as Elbaki Hermassi noted, there were about a thousand Moroccans who had access to secondary education from 1912 to 1955, and they usually came from the same families from Fez, Rabat or Casablanca. Furthermore, when Hermassi looked at the biographies of Moroccan political leaders (“the 200 or so belonging to the urban leadership circle”) he found that they had either studied there or at the *Collège* Moulay Idriss in Fez.¹⁴⁹ Laroui came from one of these two schools, but not from one of the usual families, rather from the provincial middle class. He owed his upward mobility to his colonial education thanks to the protectorate’s expanding recruitment policy. On the other hand, the content of the nationalist narrative moved him and gave him a sense of purpose. He wrote that he eagerly joined the

¹⁴⁶ Terasse, *Histoire du Maroc*, 1967, 395-402.

¹⁴⁷ Sraïeb, *Le collège Sadiqi*, 211, 230, 255.

¹⁴⁸ Pennell, *Morocco since 1830*, 2000, 228; Zisenwine, *Nationalist politics in Morocco*, 145; Waterbury, *Commander of the faithful*, 1970, 83-102.

¹⁴⁹ Hermassi, *Leadership and national development in North Africa*, 1972, 102.

struggle for independence in his late teens, though the exact nature of his involvement is not specified.¹⁵⁰

His father did not campaign in favour of national independence with Istiqlal. Instead, he repeatedly advocated caution to his more enthusiastic son, but prided himself on knowing the mood of Moroccan society outside of the big cities. He was landless, did not have a renowned family name, and was the head of a big household. He was not poor either and had held a number of jobs from small business to personal secretary for a local authority figure. The son and the father disagreed repeatedly, and especially during the fateful summer of 1953: Laroui had just returned from Rabat to his hometown, waiting to leave for France for his studies. That summer witnessed a crisis between the Residency and the Sultan, because of the latter's support for nationalists and the Sultan ended up being forcibly exiled to Madagascar on 20 August.¹⁵¹ Laroui was distraught when he learned the news. To make matters worse, he came back home one evening to find his father had burned his whole collection of *Al-'Alam*, Istiqlal's official newspaper. When confronted, the father advised caution and self-preservation above all else: "Think whatever you want, but keep your thoughts for yourself. Do not say anything, do not do anything".¹⁵²

The father's warnings were well-timed as Abdallah Laroui was briefly detained by the local police in Azemmour. He claimed that it was for no other reason than because he was a student from the capital and the authorities were afraid that urban disturbance would spread to the countryside. Laroui interpreted his detention as an act of colonial arbitrariness and increased his resentment against the colonial condition, as he picked from Istiqlal's narrative, and it further distanced him from his father. The father pleaded for caution and patience but the son was a partisan of immediate action, advocating the need for a deeper revolution in Moroccans themselves, to do away with their backwardness.¹⁵³ He had been marked by the infectious nationalist atmosphere in Rabat, and was dismayed by this "cowardly attitude", which he

¹⁵⁰ Laroui, *Awraq*, 53.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 46.

¹⁵² Ibid. 37.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 38.

attributed to old Morocco's apathy, and in which he saw the reason why colonial authorities succeeded in keeping the country under control. He began to think about the shackles that kept Moroccan society in its position of "backwardness", especially in the countryside and wrote on the need for an "overall revolution" in collective representations.¹⁵⁴ His dismay turned into rebellion against sources of authority that his father symbolised. He portrayed the summer of 1953 as a long wait to hear back from Rabat: for news on the crisis with the French, and to hear back about his application to pursue his higher education in Paris. In his words, he was "haunted by politics".¹⁵⁵

Hichem Djaït, on the other hand, remained away from political activism during these two decades. It was something that "did not interest him".¹⁵⁶ In addition to his personal preferences, there was little chance for him to be involved in the struggle: he studied at the Sadiqi College, where so many of his fellow students were initiated to nationalism but he belonged to a social group that was stigmatised by others, or just disinterested in nationalist politics.¹⁵⁷ He came from the old urban aristocracy, who lived in the *medina*, traced their lineage to Andalusian roots, and often looked with disdain and a sense of superiority at rural and provincial (*afaqi*) Tunisians. Furthermore, his family was an important pillar of the erudite religious establishment and in this social environment these professional identities mattered and determined social perception, career choices and public conducts.¹⁵⁸

Djaït's father and uncles were from a long tradition of religious scholars. As a rule, they steered clear from politics, however, they were sympathetic to the movement of reformism and the need for modernisation (but not westernisation): it was itself a political conduct. They supported Abdelaziz Thaalbi who appealed to reformists Sheikhs within the *Zaytuni*

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 50-1.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 39.

¹⁵⁶ Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Djaït", 28.

¹⁵⁷ See Essebssi's interview in Camau, Geisser (ed.), *Habib Bourguiba*, 578.

¹⁵⁸ For descriptions of the social order in Tunisia before the proctorate and its transformations: Sebag, *Tunis*, 270-1, 318; Ghazzi, "Resiliency and decay in ulema groups in Tunisia and Iran as examples" in *Sociology of religions*, 63:3, 2002, 322; Chater, "Les notables citadins en Tunisie au cours de l'ère coloniale: le beldi et ses mutations" in *CdM*, (45) 1992; Ben Achour, *Catégories de la société tunisoise dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle*, 1989.

establishment while advocating conformity with the social and cultural values of Islam.¹⁵⁹ His father visited Thaalbi several times on his return in the 1940s, and was closely aware of political developments in Tunisia and the Arab world.¹⁶⁰ Like Laroui's father, Djaït's father's approach to the nationalists was cautiously disengaged, especially during the escalation of the Tunisian crisis. In the family, they often adopted a similar conduct: Mohamed Abdelaziz Djaït, (his uncle) was an important professor at the Zaytuna and the Sadiqi college where he taught generations of nationalist leaders, among them Bourguiba himself; but did not actively campaign for the national cause as other Sadiqi professors. On the other hand, while the Zaytuna establishment was known to be notably conservative through this period, some of its Sheikhs (such as Ben Ashur) and student body had been demanding education reforms alongside their students to compete on the job market as they were marginalised from the secularised administration. This was an eminently political question that led to periodic waves of protests from 1910 to 1950, and critical articles in their publication *Sawt al-Tālib al-Zaytūni*.¹⁶¹ Salah Ben Youssef¹⁶² courted and attracted a significant number of members of the Zaytuna and its graduates to the neo-Destour on this issue, forming a significant counter-weight to the more secularised elites of the Neo-Destour.

Because his family did not take a direct and active part, Hichem Djaït lacked an entry point in these networks of engagement. Instead, he described how he ended up at the Sadiqi because his father wanted to ensure that his children had the tools to adapt and be able to secure employment, and ultimately, to maintain the family's material wealth. The son later saw this as a sign of his father's lack of awareness of how much social dynamics had changed. Like Laroui who shunned medicine for politics, at the Sadiqi, the young Djaït was concerned with acquiring knowledge rather than social advancement. Laroui was an educated but provincial Moroccan who sought to resolve his malaise with politics in rebellion against his father's lukewarm approach. Djaït came from the religious aristocracy that was either excluded from or indifferent

¹⁵⁹ Perkins, *History of modern Tunisia*, 2004, 68-71

¹⁶⁰ Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Djaït", 27.

¹⁶¹ Sraïeb, *Le college Sadiki*, 120.

¹⁶² A Tunisian political leader who was head of the Neo-Destour in the late stages of French occupation, especially during Bourguiba's absences, he had greater ideological leanings towards the Arab East and the conservative constituency. He was assassinated in 1961 in Germany, presumably on Bourguiba's orders.

towards politics, and he replicated these feelings, staying away from engagement altogether. For age reasons, these differences of opinion were sidestepped as they both left for France at the apex of the colonial crises, in 1953-4, delaying the confrontation of family-related anxieties.

A significant dimension of their rapport to politics was built during their time in Paris during their higher education. For Laroui, it was a period of restlessness and harrowing questions, whereas Djaït seemed more fulfilled to be away. Despite leaving in order to later come back and contribute to national development, their time in Paris marked how they first began to stray from the conventional path of social elitism

Abdallah Laroui arrived in Paris in early October 1953, and stayed at the residential hall reserved for Moroccans.¹⁶³ Despite having regularly travelled for his studies, going to France required another level of adaptation. He was not drawn by the French capital's romanticism and the idealism of the student community of the *Quartier Latin*, nor did he form a strong attachment to the city.¹⁶⁴ Instead, nationalist politics followed him to the capital, as he began to consider a career as a civil servant or a politician. While studying economic and social history at the *Institut d'Etudes politiques*, he had planned to join the prestigious *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* to train for a political career, but Moroccan independence made him ineligible as a foreigner.¹⁶⁵

Hichem Djaït arrived in Paris in 1954, with a belief ingrained in him by his teachers at the Sadiqi College that the only relevant objects of study were those of the “geniuses”, philosophers, artists and the great thinkers in history, instead of political leaders.¹⁶⁶ He had a predisposition for the humanities and was particularly fascinated by the European Enlightenment, citing Spinoza and Kant as two of his favourite philosophers. He also studied theology and the philosophy of religions. His Tunisian peers tended to privilege science (in 1962, close to 70% of Tunisian students in France studied natural sciences or pharmacy), to a lesser extent law and economics (17%), and only a minority opted for humanities (8%).¹⁶⁷ It meant he would have spent more time with French students. He studied without interruption until he obtained his *agrégation* in

¹⁶³ Laroui, *Awraq*, 53.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 65.

¹⁶⁵ Gallagher, “life and times of Laroui”, 135.

¹⁶⁶ Ahmad Ali El Zein, “Interview with Hichem Djaït” *Rawāfed, Al-Arabiyya*, aired 7-8 January 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Vermeren, *Ecole, élite, pouvoir*, 568.

history in 1962, a gruelling oral and written examination that gave one a high academic recognition and the right to teach at university level. Only around 10% of those who took this exam each year passed (giving, for each discipline, around a hundred *agrégés* for around a thousand candidates on average each year).¹⁶⁸ Of the candidates who took the examination, Maghribis were certainly a tiny minority in disciplines other than Arabic. Later, Hichem Djaït claimed he was the first Tunisian to secure this degree in history (with another Tunisian that year).¹⁶⁹ By then, he was married with a French woman and return to Tunisia.

In Paris, Laroui and Djaït witnessed a new form of political engagement. The Algerian war of independence broke out in 1954 and unsettled France more than the Moroccan and Tunisian protectorates. The student organisation for North Africans (AEMNA), held a number of events in relation to the Algerian's independence effort and its headquarters on 115 Boulevard Saint-Michel became a hub of activism.¹⁷⁰ Laroui attended those quite regularly, but Djaït stayed away. In fact, Djaït did not join the Tunisian student organisation (UGET), an organisation created in 1952 to support the call for independence and had organic links with the national movement.¹⁷¹ His disengagement marked a significant difference to his Moroccan counterpart. Laroui played an active role within the student cells of the Moroccan nationalist party, but it left him frustrated. He expected to be engaged in real politics, but he was disappointed to find these student cells (that he pejoratively qualified as “cultural clubs”) were given menial administrative tasks, or asked to raise funds. He found students to be in politics for the wrong reasons, “accumulating [academic] failures”, spending their time idle, “drinking beer, playing cards and propagating rumours about the situation back home” rather than studying seriously or playing a genuinely avant-garde role. They were merely waiting until they could return and “claim their share of the spoils of independence”.¹⁷² He refused to “play the game” as the “experienced students” did:

¹⁶⁸ Chervel, *Histoire de l'agrégation: contribution à l'histoire de la culture scolaire*, 1993, 189, 207.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, January 2014. Vermeren, *Ecole, élite et pouvoir*, 570.

¹⁷⁰ Ageron, "L'association des étudiants musulmans nord-africains en France durant l'entre-deux-guerres" in *Revue Française d'Outre-Mer*, (70 :258) 1983, 32.

¹⁷¹ Nourredine Ben Khider describes how UGET saw the cohabitation of two strong trends opposing the PSD's hegemony: leftists and Arab nationalists in the 1960s, an the atmosphere of important politicisation and their meetings would attract 200 to 300 Tunisians, an impressive figure; In Camau, Geisser, *Habib Bourguiba*, 534.

¹⁷² Laroui, *Awraq*, 60, 74.

simply taking orders from the party and maintaining the image of a country under crisis.¹⁷³ Instead, he was drawn to radical utopias and ideologies: “in Paris... everything encourages foreign students to embrace militant Marxism”.¹⁷⁴ These students benefitted from the infectious post-War atmosphere of ideological renewal that saw critical humanism, Marxism and existentialism combined with Third-Worldist sentiments of freedom and equality, especially in the writings of Leopold Senghor, Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon or Aimé Césaire (Chapter 3).¹⁷⁵ For Laroui, his time in Paris ended becoming a time of isolation and despair because of his frustrated ambitions to play a meaningful political role.¹⁷⁶

At this point in his memoirs and his experience, Morocco secured its independence. Laroui realised that politics might still be the solution to his issues, politics in which “everything was still possible... even arrogance”.¹⁷⁷ It is very likely that this change of perspective corresponded to when he met Mehdi Ben Barka, one of the younger and more inspirational leaders of the national movement. Changes in the autobiographical text reveal a transformation taking place around 1956-7, when Laroui’s tone was very “Istiqlalian” as he was influenced by Allal al-Fassi’s *Al-Naqd al-dhāti* (self-criticism), describing himself as “a young Moroccan of an Arab and Islamic culture” in relation to the different others in Paris. He then evolved to a more leftist tone, talking about “revolution”, and evoking notions of “solidarity” and “equality” that corresponded more to Ben Barka’s political line.¹⁷⁸ In fact, two years after Morocco’s independence, Laroui eventually decided to return to Morocco. His return corresponded with Mohammed V naming Abdallah Ibrahim as Prime Minister of a (short-lived) socialist government.¹⁷⁹ Laroui joined the ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the meantime, worked as Ben Barka’s assistant or secretary, collaborating with the publication of the party’s newspaper. His political career did not go as planned: he was first sent to the Cairo embassy as a cultural

¹⁷³ Ibid. 70.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 72.

¹⁷⁵ Forbes, Kelly (eds.), *French cultural studies an introduction*, 1995, 99-135.

¹⁷⁶ Laroui, *Awraq*, 63.

¹⁷⁷ Idem.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 65, 108-9.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 101. Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 2010, 6. Ibrahim was also a Sorbonne-educated socialist and a figure of consensus, but his government only lasted eighteen months.

attaché then to Paris as the representative to UNESCO in February 1961. In the meantime, the Ibrahim government was dissolved in May 1960 and Laroui “survived” another nine months the purge of socialist supporters in the administration, before he succumbed to pressures and decided to step down. Laroui was already in Paris at the time, where he remained to continue his studies. He prepared for the *agrégation* that he obtained two years later in 1964.

Conclusion: The shock of return

In the sequence of events that formed the interaction between their modern education and their social anxieties, the *agrégation* was the last instalment. In its aftermath, both figures returned home to start their “adult lives”. What is meant was how educated Maghribi students felt compelled to return to their home countries and take part in establishing the national project. The community held strict expectations and imposed on individuals a course of action that would clash with the amount of freedom they enjoyed as university students in Paris. Considering they were called to occupy privileged positions in the state, they effectively tended to return after the completion of their studies. In Laroui and Djaït’s cases, this return ended up being difficult because it stressed their accumulated anxieties.

Laroui returned in 1964 to see how big a difference there was between the great hopes of his youth and life under the independent state. This was not a shock, but rather a continuation of the disillusion he felt on his first return and the realisation that the country was going in another direction than the one he preferred. This time, it was Laroui’s turn to remain withdrawn from public affairs. Djaït returned in 1962, and received a greater shock because he had not been back since before independence in 1956. What he referred to the most was the authoritarian and populist turn of Tunisia’s political system: the “shouting masses [...] and the personality cult” and the rampant factionalism.¹⁸⁰ And he also referred to something more personal: the dilapidation of the family’s *ethos*, the social ideology that consolidated their group and distinguished them from the rest of Tunisian society.

¹⁸⁰ Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Djaït”, 29.

These reactions, withdrawal and frustration, reveal that young educated Moroccans and Tunisians were uneasy with the fundamental reality of politics after independence: patronage, clan-based approaches, the lack of transparency and accountability. These two political systems had no time to celebrate the return of two skilled young historians, but it could have been otherwise, had they “played the game”. The qualifications they brought back predisposed them for academic careers, but not necessarily to those alone, and they could have both aspired to achieve political functions and jobs in the administration despite arriving later than their more politically connected peers.

But in both cases, they chose to remain outside the system of power. Laroui was hired as an assistant professor at the newly established faculty of humanities at the Mohammed V University. He also withdrew from active politics and from the UNFP, indicating that the fascination and idealism had worn off.¹⁸¹ Meanwhile, Djaït set himself on a course that conflicted with his family’s wishes and the behaviour of the country’s new elite. He had no interest in political favours and refused to give regard to those who held the reins of power. Instead, he pursued modern education for the sake of knowledge rather than career advancement and privilege.¹⁸² As much as Djaït was “excluded” from politics because of his aristocratic origins, and Laroui because of his middle class provenance, they also contributed to their condition.

Laroui and Djaït were accomplished young men, possessing a strong double culture and modern skills in the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century and were ready to claim their place in the national community on their return. They were also saddled with social anxieties: a problematic relationship with their fathers, and revulsion towards the prevalent attitudes of the national elite. The following years would illustrate their difficulties of re-integration. While education was respected and valued, it was not enough without political connections. These unresolved tensions would come to shape their lives in the sixties and explains their withdrawal.

¹⁸¹ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 43-44.

¹⁸² Idem.

Chapter 2 Alienation and the difficult sixties

From independence to the early sixties, Morocco and Tunisia changed at a rapid pace as their destinies were placed in the hands of their own people. The euphoria of liberation created high expectations, but it was soon replaced with the realisation that independence also brought considerable challenges such as the imperative of state consolidation and nation building: in other words, turning a population into compatriots (or citizens) working toward a common goal. To secure this objective, political leaders relied heavily on their “intellectuals”, their educated nationals, of which professors and teachers made up a large part.¹⁸³

Nationalist leaders such as Bourguiba, Ben Barka and many other figures of the first order shared a commitment for modernisation and the fight against backwardness, which were inscribed in the two countries’ national projects as the pursuit of modern education. Despite launching important initiatives such as the creation of modern universities shortly after independence, national authorities soon realised how much they lacked necessary resources and infrastructures to achieve their development aims. They needed teachers and professors, along with engineers and doctors, and could not eternally rely on expatriate professors (*coopérants*), for both economic and ideological reasons. Moroccan and Tunisian authorities started to train and support their young nationals who went abroad to acquire important skills. On their return, they were almost guaranteed employment and a decent living standard, because “the diploma acquired a national dimension” and came to “symbolise success”.¹⁸⁴ Professors were also rewarded with social recognition and the satisfaction of playing an instrumental role in favour of national development.

¹⁸³ “Intellectuals” was a broadly used category including professors and teachers, journalists, writers, engineers. This category referred to those who carry out non-manual professional occupations, but increasingly came to refer to those who had a public commitment in favour of modernisation.

¹⁸⁴ Bendana, “Diplôme et université dans les années cinquante” in Geisser (ed.), *Diplômés Maghrébins*, 2004, 66-7.

Yet, Arab intellectuals often decry the sixties as a period of considerable alienation and powerlessness.¹⁸⁵ These actors considered themselves to be “superior” or more “advanced” elements in society, and they resented their ineffectiveness compared to reactionary actors such as the conservative establishment in Morocco or party elites in Tunisia (see section 1). According to Elizabeth Kassab, the reasons why this generation of Arab intellectuals shared a sense of *‘ajz* (powerlessness) were the exclusionary and repressive political systems, misguided state policies, the indigence of cultural activity, and the antagonising nature of public debates.¹⁸⁶ However, these explanations are not sufficient to explain why intellectuals spoke of “alienation”, a term that alluded to something deeper than development challenges and political disagreements. We also need to ask *how* these conditions affected this intellectual generation.

In this chapter, I ground these claims of “alienation” into the social, cultural and political realities of the post-independence intelligentsia to argue that the exclusionary dynamics of the sixties made a generation of young intellectuals feel unwanted and a lack of purpose in the national project. Despite their active professional involvements, their members struggled to reconcile their representations of the intellectual’s public role, as it was passed down from the influential French model of the *intellectuel engagé* (committed public thinker), and Maghribi realities with different possibilities of public participation. I consider two factors that obstructed their adaptation: first, this younger generation was often left to their own designs rather than guided by the previous generation of intellectuals; second, there did not exist a conceptualisation of how intellectuals should carry out their public functions after independence in the Maghrib.¹⁸⁷

This chapter will focus on intellectual conduct as a learning process, all the more because of how political independence transformed the two countries and the perspectives for young intellectuals to take an active part in shaping their countries. Abdallah Laroui, Hichem Djaït and

¹⁸⁵ Khoury, *Tradition et modernité, thèmes et tendances de la pensée arabe contemporaine*, 2013, 81-4.

¹⁸⁶ Kassab and the sense of “powerlessness” or *‘ajz* as intellectuals: Kassab, “Revolution and enlightenment in the Arab world?”, 04.03.2011; Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 20.

¹⁸⁷ One of such conceptualisation of intellectual conduct later emerged with *iltizām* (committed literature under authoritarian or occupation contexts): Badawi, “Commitment in contemporary Arab literature” in *Journal of World History*, 14, 1972; Albers, Khalil, Pannewick, “Tracks and traces of literary commitment – on *iltizām* as an ongoing intellectual project” in *Commitment and Beyond, Reflections on the political since the 1940s*, 2015.

members of their generation had witnessed, but remained uninvolved with the nationalist struggle due to their young age. They reached adulthood after independence, with their diplomas from France in hand and with a readiness to take part in public affairs. In 1962, Djaït began working at the theology faculty of the newly established University of Tunis. After eight years spent abroad, his intention was to settle back home alongside his newly-wed French wife. Two years later, Laroui followed and returned to the humanities faculty of the Muhammad V University in Rabat as an assistant professor of history. He settled in Casablanca with his spouse, Latifa Benjelloun, who was then headmistress of a girls' school, while he commuted to Rabat for work.

These two figures offer two privileged cases for the understanding of national disillusionment as it began to set a decade after independence. In fact, despite their best efforts, despite achieving some recognition for their writings, they never appeared to settle down in their social, cultural and political environments in Rabat and Tunis. Far from being satisfied by their activities and the atmosphere in their respective workplaces on their return, the two withdrew from their departments and academic research. Instead they began writing on broad questions and revisiting the legacy of the Arab Renaissance: namely the quest for modernity, concerns about authentic Arab identity, and how to envisage a religious reform. Laroui had been a dynamic member of the Moroccan Socialist Party, but he withdrew from political engagement altogether and devoted his time to writing his first essay published in 1967 as *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*. Meanwhile, Djaït was as an isolated figure after his return, but he progressively joined the cultural intelligentsia the Tunisian journal *Al-Fikr*. He gained greater public recognition in 1966 when he took part in several high-profile debates on religious reform, while suffering from several polemics and attacks due to his outspoken public positions.

In this chapter, I carry out a reading of their returns in the sixties seeking to understand how they have addressed harrowing questions regarding their place in the national community as intellectuals. Not only do I rely on their texts and biographical elements (Djaït in *Al-Fikr* or Laroui's first essay), I also place Laroui and Djaït in relation to the emergence of new forms of intellectual engagements in Morocco and Tunisia (the *Souffles* and *Perspectives* groups (section

1), and especially these two intellectuals' relationship with a "mentor" or intellectuals of the previous generation: Mehdi Ben Barka, for Laroui, and Mahmoud Messaadi, for Djaït (section 2). These complicated relationships are known and sometimes referred to by today's intelligentsia (especially Laroui and Ben Barka), but they have not yet been studied systematically as a significant factor explaining the challenges of their national re-integration in the sixties. In fact, these complicated relationships explain why Laroui and Djaït turned to the "great questions" of Arab thought (Arab ideology and religious reform (section 3), as a way to revisit the answers already provided. For our purpose, this turn reveals that both figures could not build on their predecessors' intellectual projects. Overall, this reading approach allows to take a great look at the material dimensions of intellectual life in the Maghrib and to explain the difficult transition from the nationalist era to new forms of engagement and self-representation.

1. Intellectuals between powerlessness and national development

After the upheavals of the immediate post-independence years, independent Morocco and Tunisia began to take a more lasting economic, social and political shape by the early sixties. These new realities did not bode well for young modernist intellectuals and their aspirations for great change. The "1930s generation"¹⁸⁸ came of age after independence, only to find the social and political field dominated by elite interests, competing political parties, and unappealing structures of engagement. The inspirational and charismatic intellectuals of the anti-colonial struggle, such as Allal al-Fassi in Morocco, joined the political system eagerly. Communist parties, usually the structures where idealist intellectuals converged, were shunned for being too hierarchical, too dependent on directives from France, not sufficiently aware of domestic realities and operating with out-dated methods. Meanwhile, Baathist groups were banned and harassed by the authorities.

¹⁸⁸ Erlich, "Youth and Arab politics: the political generation of 1935-36" in Meijer (ed.), *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth: Between Family, State and Street*, 2014, 47-70.

Faced with this situation, members of the young Moroccan and Tunisian intelligentsia began to develop their own: for the present discussion, I focus on the *Souffles* groups in Morocco and the GEAST/*Perspectives* movement in Tunisia, not only because of the growing literature on these two groups,¹⁸⁹ but also because they illustrate similar patterns across the two countries. Their members coalesced around a cultural publication expressing hope, renewal, pluralism, equality and change. From a sociological point of view, these groups' membership shared similar traits: younger, highly educated and bi-cultural, working as writers, journalists, professors or other skilled occupation, disillusioned from party politics but still committed to general questions, and critical of the authorities. These new structures and forms of militancy revealed the plight of young modernist intellectuals refusing to give in to national disillusionment; but in so doing, they also revealed the extent of their idealism and the dangers they faced by confronting head on authoritarian and hegemonic states.

Morocco's multipartism did not preclude national disillusionment from setting within the educated elite, especially when violence descended upon the political left. The Socialist Party (UNFP, born from the division of Istiqlal in 1959) ran the Government from 1958 to 1960, but it quickly fell from grace when Hassan II replaced his father in 1961, and as it maintained its outspoken opposition. In July 1963, the authorities carried out mass arrests among its ranks after accusations that party-members were plotting a coup.¹⁹⁰ Those who escaped repression were still distressed by the irruption of violence. The party took a turn for the worse after the Casablanca riots on 22-3 March 1965. A banal administrative note regarding the exclusion of older students who kept failing classes was the spark that set off a combustible situation: student protesters were soon joined by unemployed workers and other dissatisfied Moroccans. The authorities responded with violence, sending in the army and the fearsome General Oufkir, head of the

¹⁸⁹ Chouikha, "Evoquer la mémoire politique dans un contexte autoritaire: 'l'extrême gauche' tunisienne entre mémoire du passé et réalité présente" in *L'Année du Maghreb*, 6, 2010 ; Omri, "The Movement Perspectives: Legacies and representations" in *EurOrient*, 38, 2012; Yazidi, "Les intellectuels tunisiens dans l'opposition durant les années 1960", 96 in Ayari, Bargaoui (ed.), *Après l'indépendance, parcours et discours*, 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Monjib, "Le complot de 1963" in *Ben Barka, une vie, une mort*, 2000.

security apparatus. The city experienced a curfew in the following days, but above all, March 1965 highlighted the blanket of fear that had descended on the country.¹⁹¹

The two following decades became known as the “years of lead” (*sanawāt al-raṣas*) because of the harsh political repression that hit the opposition by an unbridled security apparatus. The political system grew further away from the hopes of a “National Revolution”: it became known for its dislocated and divided political class, economic inequality between the elite and the masses fuelled by rampant corruption and nepotism, a division between the cities and rural areas that was reinforced through local authorities, and a strong security apparatus in charge of liquidating opposition.¹⁹² Theoretically, the monarchy stood on top of everything. In practice, the King settled inter-elite competition and political outcomes.¹⁹³ Hassan II entertained a difficult relationship with other political leaders and tried to rule directly, which made him a direct target for political factions and the population.¹⁹⁴ The country carried out fast, but unequal economic and social transformations, while hanging on to a dangerously precarious equilibrium.¹⁹⁵

Tunisia faced a rocky start after securing independence. The neo-Destour suffered a fratricidal confrontation between Bourguiba’s supporters and the Youssefist camp (1956-8). The Algerian war raged at the borders and frequently threatened to spill over. In July 1961 in Bizerte, Bourguiba engaged a disastrous charge against France, which cost several hundred Tunisian lives, for which he was criticised within his own camp, for the first time. Increasingly, voices were raised against Bourguiba’s authoritarian power: along with the Bizerte crisis, they cited the arbitrariness of Tahar Ben Ammar’s trial,¹⁹⁶ and the treatment of the group of military officers

¹⁹¹ Le Tourneau, “Maroc – Chronique politique” in *AAN*, 1965, 183. French newspaper *L’Express* spoke of 600 dead, 2000 wounded while the official count was 7 casualties, 169 wounded; see “Chronologie 1965”, *AAN*, 412-3.

¹⁹² Miller, *A history of modern Morocco*, 2013, 174.

¹⁹³ Waterbury, *The commander of the faithful. The Moroccan elite*, 1970, 84-8.

¹⁹⁴ Willis, *Politics and power in the Maghreb*, 2012, 41-5, 125-7; Hammoudi, *The cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism*, 1997; Bourqia, Miller (eds.), *In the shadow of the sultan*, 1999.

¹⁹⁵ See analyses published in *Lamalif*, including from Moroccan sociologist Paul Pascon, “La société marocaine face à l’industrialisation” in *Lamalif*, 8, 1966, 27-37.

¹⁹⁶ An important nationalist leader and head of the first independent government who signed the autonomy and independence agreements with France in 1955-6 but who suffered from an orchestrated political campaign by Bourguiba for his refusal to take part in the campaign against the Beylicat. Ben Ammar was arrested and jailed on fabricated corruption charges, and later released.

for plotting to overthrow the President.¹⁹⁷ Salah Ben Youssef, his former opponent, conspired from abroad and was eventually assassinated in 1961, presumably by regime forces. Bourguiba then stabilised the political order and claimed the country's leadership mantle. The new party structure, the *Parti Socialiste Destourien*, adopted a fast left-leaning development and modernising path, under the leadership of Ahmed Ben Salah, a young politician from the Tunisian labour union (UGTT) who benefited from Bourguiba's trust. Ben Salah's vision of development included a stronger economic role for the state, inspired by a moderate form of socialism. Ben Salah gained greater prerogatives within the Government, cumulating ministerial attributions and was even nicknamed the "Super-Minister".¹⁹⁸ The state undertook pioneer modernising social reforms which secured the country's modern elites' support, such as the gender equality law in 1956, the pursuit of universal and bi-lingual education in 1958, and the nationalisation of the religious establishment's lands (*habous*).¹⁹⁹ The extent of these transformations antagonised certain groups: along with the religious establishment, resentment against the regime grew in the countryside, where collectivised farms did not go well with peasants or land owners.²⁰⁰

During these important events and transformations, young modernist intellectuals were seldom sought to have a say in public affairs. In fairness, their jobs kept them busy: professors, especially, often had to teach at university and secondary school level, or even travel to other cities to teach, all while new teachers were trained and as the state tried to keep its commitment for universal education coverage.²⁰¹ Yet, as intellectuals, they expected to be more involved in state policy and shown appreciation for their efforts. In those early years of independence, the

¹⁹⁷ Perkins, *History of Tunisia*, 130-149; Willis, *Politics and power in the Maghreb*, 38-41, 122.

¹⁹⁸ He recently gave a series of interviews over his experience and his reform programme: Ben Salah, *Pour rétablir la vérité, réformes et développement, 1961-1969*, 2008; for other perspectives on cooperatives: Lilia Ben Salem, "Centralization and decentralization of decision making in an experiment in agricultural cooperation in Tunisia" and Ezzedine Maklouf, "Political and technical factors in agricultural collectivization in Tunisia" in Nash, Dandler, Hopkins, *Popular participation in social change*, 1976.

¹⁹⁹ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 2012 (second edition), 238-248.

²⁰⁰ Camau (dir.), *Tunisie au présent: une modernité au-dessus de tout soupçon?*, 1987; Anderson, *The state and social transformation in Tunisia and Libya 1830-1980*, 1987; Salem, *Bourguiba, Islam, and the creation of Tunisia*, 1984.

²⁰¹ See numbers in Vermeren, *Ecole, elite et pouvoir*, 567-571; accounts of Mounira Ramadi-Chapoutot, history agrégé in France who returned in 1963 to Tunis (Interview with author, Tunis, March 2015), or Phillipe Rousset, agrégé in law who was also recruited in 1963 in Rabat and described the same situation; Rousset, *Une vie marocaine, 1963-2013*, 19.

authorities were overwhelmed by the demands of statehood, hence administrative confusion and widespread bad governance. Furthermore, political decision makers were reluctant to accept criticism, and dissenting voices were denounced as those wanting to undermine unity, a point Hassan II and Bourguiba drove regularly in their speeches. The priority, these leaders argued, was to achieve rapid economic and social development, rather than democratisation, which raised a dangerous conflation between elite interests and national interests.²⁰²

Two important intellectual militants from this period left edifying testimonies that flesh out the dilemma between staying safe (and failing their intellectual responsibility) or facing assured repression. Abraham Serfaty and Gilbert Naccache, were both highly skilled young engineers who had radical leftist views, but broke from the communist party out of ideological disagreement.²⁰³ Their accounts highlight the tension between their ambition to play a public role and the threat of punishment. They both chose to stay true to their ideological struggle and eventually suffered from frequent arrests, torture and lengthy jail sentences.

Serfaty, the Moroccan, depicted a worsening atmosphere in the sixties and how the authorities “tried to co-opt us into corrupted structures, easy lives and abandoning the necessity of establishing a modern country”.²⁰⁴ In 1962-3, the “police state” began to take shape and Serfaty recounts an intimidating summoning by General Oufkir.²⁰⁵ Serfaty was admonished for supporting a student protests in December 1962, and Oufkir warned him that because of the Moroccan engineer’s high salary and comfortable living conditions, he had no business in protest movements and would be better off staying silent. It was a clear indication that the security apparatus kept tabs on intellectuals.²⁰⁶ Similarly in Tunisia, Naccache had returned from France as a highly skilled agriculture engineer in 1964, and considering the state’s drive for modernisation, he would have easily been able to enjoy favourable living conditions and climb the social and political ladder. He also refused “to join the system” despite those who argued it

²⁰² Hermassi, *Leadership and national development in North Africa: a comparative study*, 1972.

²⁰³ Both were also of Jewish confession, frequently spoke in favour of the Palestinian cause, and became leading figures of their respective leftist groups.

²⁰⁴ Elbaz, Serfaty, *L’insoumis: juifs, marocains et rebelles*, 2001, 123.

²⁰⁵ Oufkir headed Morocco’s security apparatus, he was known for his involvement in torture and was a close advisor to the Moroccan King.

²⁰⁶ Idem.

would be better to change it “from the inside”.²⁰⁷ Instead, he believed that materialism and privilege had a way of soaking up ideals and activism, which he valued above all.²⁰⁸ In the meantime, he had grown disillusioned by the Tunisian Communist party after being a staunch militant, because, he argued, it did nothing but apply uninformed directives from France. These two figures were instrumental in the launch of two new movements that embodied the feelings of an idealist and politically-conscious intelligentsia.

The *Perspectives* movement in Tunisia, as Nourredine Ben Khidder and other founding members recently discussed, was arguably the strongest manifestation of national disillusionment after independence, incurred by those aware and critical of the gulf that existed between the official narrative and national reality.²⁰⁹ The group’s members also saw themselves as the organic products of “Bourguibism”, or his “natural children” (to borrow Ben Khidder’s expression), adding that Bourguiba was wrong to silence them rather than listen and address their concerns in order to improve the national project. They saw themselves “as the country’s future”.²¹⁰

The movement was created following rigged Tunisian student elections in Paris (UGET) in 1963 by regime-sympathizers, despite the strength of other groups (mainly leftists and Arab nationalists). Frustrated Tunisian students formed their own group, and in the absence of a single ideology or agreements over what this group would consist of, they decided to embrace and institute ideological pluralism by establishing a discussion group which they called: “*Groupe d’Etudes et d’Action Socialiste Tunisien*” (GEAST). They settled on Tunisian “perspectives” (*Afāq*), and they began publishing their analyses in their eponymous publication, embracing a variety of Marxist theoretical frameworks.²¹¹ In 1964 and 1965, their original leaders moved back from Paris to Tunis where they continued their activities while recruiting sympathizers and contributors, who were professors, writers, engineers, or students, and they were able to gain a

²⁰⁷ Naccache, *Qu’as tu fais de ta jeunesse ? Itinéraire d’un opposant politique de Bourguiba*, 2009, 68. Referred to as *entrisme*, in reference to the tactic usually used by Trotskyists.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 86-7.

²⁰⁹ Temimi, *Al-dawr al-siyāsī wa al-thaqāfī li-birsbiktīf wa al-birsbiktīfiyīne fi tounes al-mustaqila*, 2008, 27.

²¹⁰ Mohamed Mahfoudh, Ibid. 28-9.

²¹¹ Ibid. 30.

better understanding of Tunisian realities. They channelled the energies of Tunisian youth, their feelings of revolt and their counter-culture, and notoriously spoke against the Vietnam War, in favour of the Palestinian cause, and denounced imperialism as a whole. As Gilbert Naccache wrote of how Mao's "Cultural Revolution" fascinated them (not least of which because of the pamphlets they received from the Chinese Embassy in Tunis).²¹²

Perspectives went on to enjoy twelve years of exceptionally creative and stimulating intellectual and cultural debates, marred by the frequent waves of arrests, trials and torture their members suffered by the authorities. *Perspectives* published 63 numbers, which reveal the "visionary politics" of the Tunisian intellectual elite and their commitment for a "pluralistic modernisation" that could not be fully applied because of the exclusionary nature of the Bourguibist regime.²¹³ In Mohamed-Salah Omri's words, *Perspectives* worked to establish strong "citizenship and civil society", through political and cultural means, by continuously holding the Bourguibist state accountable to its own self-declared aims. They left a considerable legacy in Tunisia in the political scene, such as the struggle for citizenship, and in the cultural scene by fuelling a literary and theatrical avant-garde.²¹⁴

Over in Morocco, a similarly constituted group of young Moroccan intellectuals fed from the same social revolt and cultural frustration. Abdelatif Laabi, Mostafa Nissabouri, Mohamed Kheirredine and other young novelists, poets and cultural critics decided to create a platform to express themselves and denounce the "cultural slump" in Morocco, (manifested in the poor quality of publications) that contrasted with the considerable creative energies that existed in Moroccan society.²¹⁵ The termly magazine *Souffles* was created in 1966, expressing a yearning for social emancipation through subversive means. The reason, Laabi explained as editor, was the need for "a literature carrying the weight of our current realities, new questions that seize in

²¹² Charfi, *Mon combat pour les lumières*, 2009.

²¹³ Judgement by Abdeljelil Temimi, the illustrious Tunisian historian who convened a wide effort in favour of the preservation of the movement's social history in 2003 and 2004; quoted by Mohamed Salah Omri, "The movement *perspectives*: legacies and representations", *EurOrient*, 28, 2012, 150. See also: Naccache, op. cit. 86-7.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 152-3.

²¹⁵ Varguese, "*Souffles*", MPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2014, 10-7.

us a savage revolt and sense of disarray”.²¹⁶ As Mary Ellen Wolf wrote, these “children of independence” would always be marked by the colonial experience, and furthermore by the difficulties of shaping national culture with “their view of poetic language” and their concepts of literature and culture.²¹⁷ As they were a minority in society, and even in the cultural sphere, they decided to embrace their minority in order to deconstruct the system’s order and logics, in the sense given by Deleuze and Guattari (on “minor literature”).²¹⁸ Overall, *Souffles* and *Perspectives* originated from similar feelings of national disillusionment, and they had similar shaping experiences in Paris. However, the *Souffles* movement devoted a greater place to culture, rather than economic and political change. Its members were spurred by more distinctive political events: the March 1965 riots, and the awareness of being a social minority.

Souffles members shared a strong concern for total liberation and decolonisation under the nation-state. Their project was built on a desire to “reclaim history, culture and national personality”.²¹⁹ They relied on Fanon’s writings regarding the colonial enterprise as domination and “depersonalisation”, the continuation of such domination under the independent state, and the insufficiency of cultural axes such as Arabisation and Islamisation to reclaim the sense of national being. Instead, they embraced cultural pluralism as the only path toward overcoming alienation.²²⁰ They sought to provoke a cultural renewal by “reversing the flow of communication with works from the past” and by abolishing “the era of managers and thought figures” in order to open new and equal spaces of thought.²²¹ They picked up on the air of revolt in their society, especially as it expressed itself against exoticism and folklore. *Souffles* aimed to offer a breath of fresh air to relieve the building pressure and to become “the organ of the new poetic and literary generation”.²²² Laabi argued that poetry and culture was “all that remained for man to proclaim his dignity and to avoid succumbing to “*le nombre*” [the faceless mass], for this

²¹⁶ Laabi, “Prologue” in *Souffles*, 1, 1966, 4.

²¹⁷ Wolf, “Textual politics in contemporary Moroccan francophone literature” *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 1992, 33-4.

²¹⁸ Wolf, *Ibid.* 34-5 on “minor literature” see Deleuze, Guattari, “Qu’est-ce qu’une littérature mineure” in *Kafka, pour une littérature mineure*, 1996, 29-33.

²¹⁹ Sefrioui, *La revue souffles 1966-1973, espoirs de revolution culturelle au Maroc*, 2013, 139.

²²⁰ *Ibid.* 140-2, 164.

²²¹ *Ibid.* 6.

²²² *Idem.*

breath (*souffle*) to remain for ever printed and recognised in the call (*cri*)”.²²³ The second, and ultimate aim was what he called “*atavisme*”, defined as “an organic consciousness of cultural experience, a descent into a history of the body and memory” in order to recover authentic personality.²²⁴ They engaged into a fascinating discussion and appropriation of Moroccan cultural objects and symbols such as the *halqa*, oral poetry, or tapestry, by redefining tradition from social memory rather than a fallacious conservative reconstruction to serve present interests of status quo.²²⁵

As with *Perspectives*, these Moroccan intellectuals believed in the imperative of “achieving genuine citizenship” after independence, by involving the masses and giving the people the ideological weapons they lack, as Abdallah Stouky wrote in 1966 regarding the intellectual and national edification.²²⁶ As a way to operate this education task and struggle, Laabi and others went on to launch the ARC (*Association de Recherche Culturelle*) that organised talks and cultural meetings across Morocco to give a material and social dimension to this call for change.²²⁷ Kenza Sefrioui quotes Laabi as he exposes his (and the group’s) understanding of intellectual praxis: “The objective of total revolutionary action... is to tell the truth and disseminate it everywhere, while denouncing imperialist lies and struggling for the people’s liberation. The intellectual is a dominant feature of the revolutionary masses”.²²⁸ Finally, these intellectuals also carried the cultural legacies of colonialism in the form of bilingualism, the cohabitation of a dual system of thought, and more nefarious legacies, what Mostafa Nissabouri called “the pathological need for recognition from the ‘African-Parisianised’ writer, professing universality by devaluating one’s own culture”, and the problematic situation of rejecting the West by using the very West’s ideas and language.²²⁹

These two groups pursued similar forms of engagement by challenging the states’ political hegemonies and by talking about society and culture. *Souffles* and *Perspectives* both faced

²²³ Idem.

²²⁴ Laabi, “Realités et dilemmes de la culture nationale”, 6, 1967,

²²⁵ Sefrioui, *La revue Souffles*, 154-5; Verghese, op. cit. 54-63.

²²⁶ Stouky, “L’intellectuel du tiers-monde et l’édification nationale”, 4, 1966.

²²⁷ Sefrioui, *La revue Souffles*, 151.

²²⁸ Ibid. 157.

²²⁹ Ibid. 162-3.

reactionary social and political systems geared toward social conservation and inherently reluctant to take heed to such critical voices. They were easily dismissed as young trouble-makers, or denatured Francophones. Furthermore, intellectuals were in a delicate position of being both part of the technocratic establishment and striving to be critical of it, and therefore more likely to be cut from the reality of the dominated masses.²³⁰ Yet, the two regimes were also reluctant to strike down the younger modernist intellectuals, a group that was symbolically essential to preserve and glorify – which may explain why the two regimes were initially tolerant of these groups, as long as they remained in the cultural sphere, bubbling with creativity and frustrated energies.²³¹

Serfaty, Naccache and their companions in *Souffles* and *Perspectives* stood their ground as radical examples of intellectuals who saw their purpose in the struggle. They were not the only ones, but in the meantime, intellectual conducts varied across the board in order to express this willingness for involvement. Laroui and Djaït illustrate this quite well: they may have had similar profiles (young, France-educated and non-coopted), but they had different approaches to the public sphere. Laroui was attracted to politics, and Djaït was not. Yet, both would have wanted to obtain some form of recognition for their skills. While Sefaty, Naccache and many others found solace in the group, Laroui and Djaït remained individualised, which reveals the difficulties of holding strong representations of the intellectual's role, and being unable to reconcile them with national realities on their return home.

²³⁰ Ibid. 158.

²³¹ Laachir, "Mohammed Achaari's The Arch and the Butterfly (2011)" in *JAS*, 25:3, 2013, 298; Massaia, *Essai sur l'action culturelle au Maroc*, 28 ; Henry, *Enjeux culturels au Maghreb*, 11.

2. Aspiring for a place in the national setting

The story of the return of these two brilliant young professors to their home countries in the early sixties did not correspond to the script of two intellectuals who, thanks to their modern education, would fit right into the national setting. Like their contemporaries from the *Perspectives* and *Souffles* movements, Laroui and Djaït were afflicted by the transformations experienced by Morocco and Tunisia after independence and left wondering about their roles. Their difficult integration reveals the challenge of reconciling their expectations and representations of the intellectual's public role, as inherited from the French intelligentsia, with national realities, which they experienced directly. Their cases also reveal the importance of having a guiding figure to provide crucial social knowledge. Unfortunately, Laroui could not rely on his exiled mentor Ben Barka, nor did Djaït strike a close bond with any modern Tunisian intellectual after independence. This problematic mentor-mentee relationship, in both cases, reveals the importance of influence and individual relationships in how intellectuals acquire ideals and shape conducts, and how social knowledge can be as important in determining how a person secured a place in the national community.

The turn towards violence in Morocco in the early sixties had a significant bearing on Abdallah Laroui, who had harboured political ambitions before opting for an academic career. When in France, Laroui had been drawn to Mehdi Ben Barka's radical socialist programme and followed him from Istiqlal to the Socialist party after the 1959 split. Laroui returned to Rabat to work with his mentor as his research assistant and speechwriter, and eventually he became known as "Ben Barka's friend" across the political class.²³² Laroui's relationship with Ben Barka contains two dimensions that require clarification: Ben Barka's attempts to emerge as a theoretician of the national project after independence, and his travails against the Moroccan regime that led, ultimately to his demise in 1965.

²³² Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 2005, 7.

The Moroccan socialist party was initially a political force thanks to the strong backing from the modern and urban section of society. It benefitted from a positive conjuncture in the Arab world where progressive regimes were on the rise, and its call for progress and equality could appeal to the masses. However, as Claude Palazzoli noted, it was less of a party than a federation of different leftist organisations, lacking a clear ideological line or a unified political programme of action.²³³ In 1962, the party was in the opposition and struggled to formulate a counter-project to rival *Istiqlal*'s conservative message. As the party prepared for its second national congress, Mehdi Ben Barka returned from his precautionary exile. Ben Barka illustrates the transformed composition of the Moroccan national movement (Chapter 1): the son of a shop-keeper who studied in French schools and at the French-run University of Algiers and became a mathematics professor (teaching for a time the Royal Family's children). He quickly rose through the national movement (he was the youngest signatory of the 1944 Istiqlal independence Manifesto) and was imprisoned by colonial authorities for his agitation. He broadened his political culture during his time in jail and became known as an intellectual because of his intelligence and vision; in fact, he took the mantle of the national struggle when Allal al-Fassi was exiled in Gabon and Cairo for the following decade.²³⁴ As the Constituent Assembly's President, Ben Barka issued a strong call for institution-building, and emerged the head of a faction that wanted to profoundly reform state and society, appealed to the masses and established ties with the Moroccan Liberation Army.²³⁵

Ben Barka became the "dynamo of modern Morocco": an unstoppable force for some, a troublemaker for others. From 1960, he began experiencing a series of messy assassination attempts intended to look like accidents (being driven off the road by cars on several occasions). He eventually left the country to heal his injuries, which turned into exile after Hassan II came to the throne in 1961.²³⁶ A year later, at the behest of his friends in the party, he returned to Morocco bringing along a report entitled *Option révolutionnaire au Maroc* in which he

²³³ Palazzoli, *Le Maroc politique, de l'indépendance à 1973: textes*, 1974, 229-231.

²³⁴ Daoud, "La vie, l'itinéraire d'un homme" in Gallissot, Kergoat, *Mehdi Ben Barka*, 1996, 15-21.

²³⁵ Ibid. 19.

²³⁶ Ibid. 21-2.

attempted to resolve the absence of a consolidated socialist ideology.²³⁷ The report was internal to the party, but could not be discussed as the authorities launched an arrest campaign following the discovery of a presumed coup in July 1963, supposedly involving members of the party. The report was shelved while Ben Barka left the country again.²³⁸

This report was a significant milestone in Moroccan nationalist thinking, as it was written in response to Allal al-Fassi's *Al-Naqd al-dhāti*, (1952), which had provided the cornerstone of *Istiqlal*'s ideology.²³⁹ Ben Barka's counter-project differed on the identity of the elite that would drive the country forward: either the conservative notability, with its religious and historical legitimacy, or the modern and urban bourgeoisie, closer to the population and its concerns. Rather than "elites" (referring to the notability), these would be "leaders" (in the French meaning of *cadres*) in charge of coordinating and channelling national social forces (*forces vives de la nation*).²⁴⁰

Due to Laroui's proximity with Ben Barka in the period preceding the writing of this report, it is reasonable to assume that he shared those ideas regarding the leadership's role in channelling social forces toward a new "national revolution". In fact, it is widely suspected that Laroui played an instrumental role in preparing this document, as it was prepared during the years Laroui was in Paris and Ben Barka was in Geneva, where they met several times according to the young professor's diary, and the report's style is reminiscent to Laroui's later texts.²⁴¹

In this document, Ben Barka exposed his overall intention to restore the relationship between the Moroccan people and its rulers.²⁴² He took inspiration from the "experience of many anti-imperialist countries such as Algeria and the United Arab Republic [that] has shown that the progressive and non-capitalist path was the only one capable of saving an underdeveloped

²³⁷ Ben Barka was based in Geneva but travelled extensively across the Third World, especially to visit socialist countries: Ben Barka, *Option révolutionnaire au Maroc, suivi de Ecrits politiques 1960-1965*, François Maspéro, 1966.

²³⁸ "Le premier exil" and "Le retour triomphal" in Monjib, Daoud, *Ben Barka, une vie, une mort*, 2000.

²³⁹ El-Bazi, "La révolution par l'élite de l'Etat: de l'auto-critique d'Al Fassi à l'option révolutionnaire de Mehdi Ben Barka" in Gallissot, Kergoat, *Mehdi Ben Barka*, 1997, 75.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 77-9, 87-90.

²⁴¹ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 25-6; several Moroccan academics have corroborated the suspicion of Laroui's authorship of the report.

²⁴² Ibid. 15, 46-9.

country from regression”.²⁴³ Like them, Morocco would need to open up public life, pursue a thorough agrarian reform, and consolidate a socialist Third World front against economic imperialism. It would be UNFP’s responsibility to “translate the people’s revolutionary potential” into forces effectively capable of “sweeping [away] the last remnants of colonial domination and exploitation of our country”, in order to “build a new society in conformity with our revolutionary options”.²⁴⁴ Morocco could rely on the working and middle classes who presented “a potentially revolutionary energy”; it was their mobilisation from 1953 to 1955 that had achieved independence.²⁴⁵ But in the meantime, the country had to face those who would stand to lose from this change: the “Royal palace” and its bases of support (the “forces of imperialism”: administrative elites, the security apparatus, local administrators and corrupt members of parliament).²⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the economic bourgeoisie profited from foreign economic implantation instead of nationalising economic activity.²⁴⁷ Finally, Ben Barka laid out a political programme that the party would implement on coming to power: it involved profound institutional reforms, guaranteeing the masses’ participation and a clean break from colonial economic structures and planning (which, he argued, with good reason, still determined Moroccan economy after independence).²⁴⁸ Only the system’s total transformation, in other words a “revolution”, would ensure genuine liberation.

When came the events of March 1965, Ben Barka decided to release his programme to the wider public, believing the country was ripe for a revolution. His programme intended to provide the spontaneous uprisings a road map towards the consolidation of a new political order.²⁴⁹ In his new introduction, Ben Barka argued that the Casablanca riots “revealed reality” and “where Moroccan society stood” ten years after independence. By taking to the streets in anger, the masses had spoken for themselves and expressed their dire conditions. The middle classes were

²⁴³ Ibid. 6-7.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 18-9.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 14, 22, 35.

²⁴⁶ Idem.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. 34.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 45, 52.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 13. The report was published in Paris with François Maspéro and in Beirut with *Dar al-tali’a*, who would both publish Laroui’s works in the seventies.

exasperated by the turn the country took. The Casablanca riots revealed a profound crisis of governance.²⁵⁰

However, from abroad, Ben Barka's flame had diminished considerably. One barometer, *in lieu* of others, was Laroui's reaction to the March 1965 events and his to his mentor's latest move. Laroui and his generation were initially galvanised by the events because they conformed to revolutionary scenarios of spontaneous, non-partisan social eruption of discontent from the masses that preceded regime changes. Since he lived in Casablanca, he saw traces of the riots and described as such:

Traffic was abnormally weak and shops were closed despite it being well into the afternoon. I did not know that the Ministry of Education's offices were on the same boulevard, close to the flower market, and that it was where earlier that day a protest of high school kids turned into a confrontation with the forces of order.²⁵¹

Shortly afterward, he went to France on academic business and followed the developments as an outsider, far from party politics.²⁵² Laroui evoked the contagious enthusiasm, and how it got to him, despite being usually so reserved. For the first time, he wrote, it was as if it was a "protest movement against the situation as a whole".²⁵³

In the following weeks, the new King failed to bring party leaders around his proposal for a national unity government. Instead, Hassan II declared the state of emergency during a televised address (7 June), which opened a period of political uncertainty and, as we now know, was the start of two decades of repressive authoritarianism.²⁵⁴

That summer went by quietly, as consultations took place in private among political leaders. Eventually, the enthusiasm expressed by the intelligentsia turned into despair when the news of Mehdi Ben Barka's abduction reached Morocco. On 29 October 1965, he was taken by a group of men in broad daylight on one of Paris's main avenues. The identity or motives of the

²⁵⁰ Ben Barka, *Option révolutionnaire*, 16, 31.

²⁵¹ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 29-30.

²⁵² *Idem.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 31.

²⁵⁴ "Maroc – Documents, 6. Proclamation de l'état d'exception" in *AAN*, 1965, 695-6; Le Tourneau, "Maroc – Chronique politique", 1965, 185, 419.

assailants have never been definitely ascertained though very strong suspicions have pointed towards the Moroccan regime's responsibility, thereby provoking a diplomatic crisis with France.²⁵⁵ The "affair", as it was called, was reported in Morocco from 1 November on the front page of UNFP's newspaper, but it raised more questions than it answered. According to Roger Le Tourneau, one of the unspoken surprises was that Ben Barka's demise did not lead to the emotional outcry that would have been expected.²⁵⁶ Did the left turn its back on leaders who chose to leave the country and fight from outside? Or had political apathy already spread in the face of repression and disillusion? According to Abraham Serfaty, the intelligentsia was in shock at the fate of someone they considered the only one who could bring about genuine revolutionary change under the UNFP banner. Hence, no one dared to protest, even before the security apparatus carried out a preventive wave of arrests to deter any reactions.²⁵⁷ For them, the message was clear: the country was turning towards fear, while expressing different political opinions had become a crime.²⁵⁸

This news did not have the devastating impact on Laroui that we could expect, according to his recently published memoirs, but the way this episode is covered appears incomplete and unsatisfying. Laroui admitted that he did not know how to take the information. By the time he learned about the kidnapping, he was not involved in party politics anymore and barely checked the news. He had little time for what was happening to the party and its leaders. It had been a long time since he last saw Ben Barka and when he read the article in *Le Monde*, by chance, sitting in a café in Rabat (rather than hearing it from one of the party members). By that point, he added, he had "embraced his new passion", his new life in academia and his research.²⁵⁹ Ideologically speaking, the two men seemed to have grown apart: Ben Barka was firmly committed to the non-aligned camp, talking about a "revolution" for the Third-World, while Laroui wrote that he was especially dismayed by his disregard for "the role of tradition, Islam and the monarchy in Moroccan politics", and more generally he found the left's political

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 189.

²⁵⁶ Idem.

²⁵⁷ Elbaz, Serfaty, *L'insoumis*, 134.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 136, 140-2.

²⁵⁹ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 43-44.

leadership to be “allergic to history and sociology”, and “[instead] guided by general ideas”.²⁶⁰ It may also have been that Laroui was disavowing in hindsight and in his memoirs the fiery positions he held alongside Ben Barka to better accommodate his subsequent political choices.

Laroui has since resisted calls on him to talk publicly about his relationship with Ben Barka, thus placing a question mark over his true feelings. In fact, his mentor’s tragic fate was an episode that has more than a personal dimension, because it was likely experienced as an unaddressed shock (all the more because Ben Barka’s body was never found) and it determined his subsequent intellectual conduct by highlighting the risks.²⁶¹ In a publication closer to these events (his 1967 essay, written in 1965-6), he dealt with the issue differently. In a passage on Moroccan political life, he discussed the characteristics of the “technophile” Arab political figure, which he considers to be the better suited to present realities than the anachronistic cleric or the weak liberal:

Everything becomes a matter of technology: the economy, politics, and even private life. In a brochure published in 1958 under the title *Toward a new society*, Mehdi Ben Barka wrote: “There exists three fundamental conditions guaranteeing success each time they are fulfilled... a strong and popular leadership, social and economic planning, and the people’s involvement/participation to the elaboration and application of this state policy”. At no time does the matter of [cultural] particularism pose itself.²⁶²

This passage reveals how Laroui still saw Ben Barka as an essential actor in Morocco’s political history around the time of his disappearance. His feelings were further revealed in the footnote to this very passage, giving a note to the leader in an uncharacteristic break from his detached writing style:

This sentence was written before 29 October 1965, and I have not deemed it necessary to change it, because Mehdi, dead or alive, will remain one of the Moroccan people’s purest heroes.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 15-6.

²⁶¹ Up to this day, Laroui avoids answering questions about Ben Barka because “they have little importance today”; see “Abdallah Laroui ‘Le Maghreb est l’idée d’une élite’” in *Zamane*, April 2012.

²⁶² Laroui, *L’idéologie arabe contemporaine*, 1967, 47.

²⁶³ Idem footnote 13.

The sentence is essential in establishing that Ben Barka's demise had a serious impact on Laroui's difficult sixties. It represented the alarming realisation that Morocco's political historical dynamic was under considerable threat, since Ben Barka was the representative of technophile political thought, which Laroui believed was the way forward. Furthermore, it represented the approach of genuine danger and the loss of the hope he felt after the March events, or the loss of a mentor and inspirational figure – neither events were discussed in his recent memoirs, despite their considerable importance in Morocco's post-independence history.

Subsequently, Laroui withdrew from public affairs and turned the page on Morocco's "revolutionary option". The young historian did not believe UNFP's leaders to be capable of addressing the crisis, of imagining an alternative or to defend themselves against state violence. Early 1966, Laroui appeared plagued by difficult and incapacitating questions and lacking an ideology in which to believe, and facing the imperative of self-preservation. The coming years would highlight the tension between his intellectual representation and the changing context, made more difficult to reconcile by his mentor's demise.

Hichem Djaït described the sixties as a period in his life when he was "worried", "dissatisfied", and broadly ill at ease.²⁶⁴ On his return from France with his diploma in 1962, he found a social and political system where logics of power penetrated the intellectual and cultural spheres unlike what he had observed in Paris. Despite viewing himself as a non-political intellectual, he could not escape these "rules of the game": the imperative of securing alliances, belonging to a clan and exchanging favours. Furthermore, Djaït suffered from being the son of a prestigious family from the Tunis notability, a category that did not enjoy the new regime's favours. As a result, I argue that his trajectory around the mid-sixties reveals the characteristics of someone lacking a roadmap to navigate these difficult waters, which I attribute to failing to develop a bond with a more informed and experienced intellectual figure.

When Djaït returned from France, he sought and obtained employment at the University of Tunis. It was more than a place of work: the university was an essential symbol of Bourguiba's

²⁶⁴ Djaït, *La Personnalité Arabo-Islamique*, 1974, 9.

modernist project.²⁶⁵ The President devoted a significant place in his official discourse to the relationship between science, modernity and independence. He believed that the root cause of Tunisia's decadence was intellectual and made education a state priority.²⁶⁶ He wanted to establish a country that achieved the "triumph of reason", and expected the University to be a vehicle for the trickling down of rational values, the same way that Tunisians who studied at French Universities – and Bourguiba was a pioneer Tunisian graduate – returned home to play a leading role for the diffusion of new values.²⁶⁷ The modern university was created in 1961 from a series of schools and structures left by colonial authorities. They privileged natural sciences because of the country's technological delay and the need for economic development, but also because the authorities were wary of the politicisation risks of social sciences that could undermine state legitimacy.²⁶⁸ Along these lines, Djaït's early career was impacted by the state's interventionism: on his return in 1962, despite being the first Tunisian *agrégé* in history, he was not assigned to the history faculty but he was sent instead to the theology faculty, the former Zaytuna mosque integrated to the University in 1961.²⁶⁹ It is unclear why Djaït was sent there in the first place, but considering Bourguiba's modernist discourse and his repeated attacks against ideologies and representations that maintained intellectual decadence, Djaït took this nomination badly.

In the second instance, Djaït had a rocky relationship with his superior, the Minister of Education Mahmoud Messaadi. He was an extremely influential figure who ran the education reform during his tenure from 1958 to 1968, according to Bessis and Belhassen: "one of independent Tunisia's greatest realisations".²⁷⁰ It included the extension of universal education coverage (education cost a third of the state budget), and Messaadi made a firm commitment toward bilingual education while Algerian and Moroccan governments pursued uncertain

²⁶⁵ Siino, *Science et pouvoir dans la Tunisie contemporaine*, 2004, 31, 57.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 72.

²⁶⁷ Ben Achour, "La réforme des mentalités – Bourguiba et le redressement moral" in Camau (ed.), *Tunisie au présent*, 1987, 147.

²⁶⁸ Addi, "Peut-il exister une sociologie politique en Algérie ?" in *Peuples Méditerranéens*, 54-55, 1991, 223.

²⁶⁹ Siino, *Science et pouvoir dans la Tunisie contemporaine*, 91, 114; Lelong, "Chroniques – L'enseignement supérieur Islamique" in *Revue IBLA*, 98, 1962, 181-4.

²⁷⁰ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 2012, 245.

Arabisation. However, Messaadi had an unaccommodating character according to several young *agrégés*. Mounira Ramadi-Chapoutot achieved the same distinction as Djaït a year later, and on her return from Paris to Tunis, the Minister would not let her teach at the faculty, but sent her instead to a girls' secondary school.²⁷¹ Despite feeling slighted, she did not confront the Minister and was later able to join the history faculty; however Djaït was a proud man and would not have an easy relationship with the administration nor the Minister.

One can emit informed guesses as to why Messaadi reserved such a difficult treatment toward these young professors: Messaadi had been one of the very first Tunisians to achieve the *agrégation* in 1947, while Tunisia was still under the protectorate. He was made to suffer and fight hard to achieve teaching duties at the Lycée Carnot in Tunis and the Sorbonne in Paris, and might have been projecting his experience of hardships. Furthermore, Messaadi was soon called to issue public positions and fight restrictive measures imposed by colonial authorities on Tunisian writers, such as the letter he wrote to the newly-appointed Minister of Information and French novelist André Malraux in 1945 to protest against several unfair restrictions.²⁷² Messaadi devoted increasingly amounts of time to the national struggle, especially by formulating national culture by promoting a “narrative of rediscovery, revival and support of the culture” to counter-balance the growing European-settler campaigns to rewrite Tunisian past as a continuity of “Latin Africa”.²⁷³ Messaadi may have expected to have a long academic career, but he joined the national cause instead. While he still devoted time to work on formulating an “Islamic conception of Man” after independence, at UNESCO and during Arab writers conferences,²⁷⁴ his cultural activities were reduced by political demands. Writing was Messaadi’s “escape” from his political functions, according to Omri.²⁷⁵

In light of Messaadi’s difficult beginnings and his curtailed academic career, it is possible he did not want to give younger generation of Tunisian *agrégés* any favours, and ended up instead

²⁷¹ Interview with Mounira Ramadi-Chapputot, Tunis, February 2015.

²⁷² Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and world literature: sites of confluence in the writings of Mahmud al-Mas’adi*, 2006, 21-2.

²⁷³ Ibid. 25, 30, 37.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. 40-2.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. 138.

frustrating think-skinned professors like Djaït, who also felt entitled of some consideration following his *agrégation*. A decade, later, Djaït wrote a passage that was very likely in reference to this difficult relationship:

In order to explain the end of critical thought, there are subtle and historical reasons. In Tunisia, for example, for the past forty years, the greatest minds were absorbed by the tornado of [political] engagement [...] and then the exercise of power. The intellectuals that govern us today have ceased to be [intellectuals]. A number of them keep a regret for a missed vocation. It makes them all the more hostile to the manifestation of new talents.²⁷⁶

Djaït appeared to hold a grudge against Messaadi, which he recently confirmed in an interview.²⁷⁷ Their disagreement went beyond the workplace because it impaired Djaït's ability to settle after his return from France. The two men shared several characteristics and Messaadi could have provided a useful guidance and roadmap, as a respected intellectual and figure of the nationalist movement. At the time, Djaït suffered from solitude, especially because he found his ulema father and uncle's advice misguided, and ended up improvising his public conduct. Similarly to Laroui and Ben Barka, Djaït's fate in the sixties was tied to his (absent) relationship with a mentor.

Mahmoud Messaadi was born in 1911, and he belonged to the generation that preceded Djaït's. The two men shared several similar attributes: they were both bi-cultural Tunisians who had studied at the Sadiqi College (Messaadi from 1921-1932) and had ties with the Zaytuna and Khalduniyya (Messaadi as a student, Djaït through his family), followed by the Sorbonne in Paris (Messaadi from 1933 to 1947), and were influenced by important Arabists (Louis Massignon, Régis Blachère etc.).²⁷⁸ Messaadi oversaw the Tunisian education reform, but he was mostly known as an iconic literary figure: according to Omri, his works were written "in one burst of creativity between 1938 to 1941", including novels such as *al-Sudd* in 1955 (The Dam),

²⁷⁶ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 10.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

²⁷⁸ Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and world literature: sites of confluence in the writings of Mahmud al-Mas'adi*, 2006, 5. Messaadi wrote his doctoral thesis in 1939 on "Essai sur le rythme dans la prose rime en arabe" (An essay on rhythm in Arabic rhymed prose), Omri's translation; Ibid. 6.

and *Haddatha Abū Hurayra Qāl* in 1973 (Thus spoke Abu Hurayra) that have marked Tunisian readers, read as part of school curriculum.²⁷⁹ Finally, as discussed earlier, Messaadi contributed to the nationalist struggle as *al-Mabāḥith*'s editor-in-chief (1943-7) writing influential articles on "Tunisianness" and national culture.²⁸⁰ The two figures had a lot in common as intellectuals, among other things an affinity for European philosophy (especially the German school), and both thought extensively about a satisfying form of "cultural authenticity".

Messaadi successfully negotiated the passage from colonialism to independence, he benefitted from the political leadership's esteem, and continued to write novels and essays. However, Messaadi did not have the expected impact on Djaït, which reveals the failure of some senior figures to usher the next generation into the era of independence, or members of the younger generation who failed to seek out their experienced predecessors.²⁸¹ Instead, the younger thinker eventually entered the public sphere, engaged with Tunisian cultural life, and began grappling with questions that Messaadi had either already provided answers to, or was himself thinking actively about, thus creating duplication.

One of such examples was Djaït's engagement with the question of Arab literary modernity. His isolation at the Theology faculty had a silver lining, as he was able to read to his heart's content from the quiet halls of the old Zaytuna, and stay away from the oppressive world of politics, the "shouting masses" and the "personality cult" that he abhorred.²⁸² The Tunisian intelligentsia was small and eventually word began to circulate about his ideas and activities, as he recounts: "I once gave a presentation about Sartre, and Mzali who was attending liked it and offered to publish it. Since then, every time I wrote a paper about something, I would send it and they would put it [in *Al-Fikr*]."²⁸³ From 1964, Djaït began to be part of the group gravitating around the cultural journal *Al-Fikr*, where he frequently published, and even attended a couple of their editorial meetings. Mohamed Mzali had created this cultural journal in 1955; he was a

²⁷⁹ Ibid. 7-9.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 6-7, 21f.

²⁸¹ Ahmad Ali El Zein, "Interview with Hichem Djaït" *Rawāfed, Al-Arabiyya*, aired 7-8 January 2010; Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

²⁸² Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Djaït", 27-9.

²⁸³ Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

professor of philosophy from Monastir who studied at the Sadiqi College and the Sorbonne. He was also close to Bourguiba and occupied several political posts, such as the Minister of sports, education, and head of the radio and television administrations. He ran the journal as editor in chief, alongside his political functions, with the objective of giving a platform to new writers, and contributing to Tunisian culture in Arabic. In his memoirs, Mzali explained how *Al-Fikr* was intended to be “a link between cultural legacy with modernity in contemporary Tunisian culture”. It was a “middle ground” between those who wanted to “go back” and those who wanted to break with the past; instead, Mzali believed in “conciliating authenticity and history” and instilling an interest in culture to achieve development and modernity.²⁸⁴ It affirmed itself an essential cultural platform and gave a voice to intellectuals and writers who displayed sympathy for Arabic cultural heritage alongside their commitment to modernisation.²⁸⁵

Socially and intellectually, Djaït was among likeminded Tunisians, and his first article conformed with the journal’s ideological parameters: in October 1965, he published an article on the “Crisis of contemporary Islamic thought” that dealt with the “delay” of Arab culture in relation to literature from other parts of the world, and the means through which it could be compensated.²⁸⁶ Djaït believed that Arab culture had failed to engage in a lasting dialogue with other world literatures, and he raised the necessity of opening up.²⁸⁷ He rejected those who pointed to “the underdevelopment and paucity of intellectual audiences”, arguing instead that “intellectuals themselves are responsible for this situation” because of “their lack of ambition and lack of openness to world literature, their laziness, and the loss of higher intellectual models”.²⁸⁸ In fact, there were two reprehensible conducts: first, those who refused to translate and read the important authors of western tradition (and he cited Balzac, Flaubert, Baudelaire or Rimbaud),

²⁸⁴ Mzali, *Un Premier Ministre de Bourguiba témoigne*, 2004, 211-3.

²⁸⁵ Sammoud, “La revue al-fikr” in *revue IBLA*, 113, 1966, 361; Quemeneur, “A travers les revues tunisiennes (1er semestre 1963)” in *Revue IBLA*, 102, 1963, 172.

²⁸⁶ Hishām Ju’ayt, “Azmat al-fikr al-islāmī al-mu’āṣir” in *Al-Fikr*, 11:1, 1965, 115-118.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. 115.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 116.

and penalised the public.²⁸⁹ He identified a second category, the younger intellectual elite in Tunisia, who refused (out of principle) to look carefully at the study of their cultural heritage:

For a great number of *westernised* [Tunisians] have lost the Islamic ‘signification’ [...] and their ambition is to live outside their historical realities and they do not care about Arab intellectual life and identity [*qawmiyya*] and they appear to manifest disdain for everything associated with Islam and the *Orient* and the Arab dimension.²⁹⁰

When Djaït wrote in *Al-Fikr*, he was reiterating common observations about the Arabic novel that Messaadi had addressed more than a decade earlier.²⁹¹ I argue that this article was hardly distinctive or innovative in the discussion on national culture on modernity, not because Djaït had little to contribute on the issue, but because he may have been driven by a desire to fit in such conversations and stake a place within the cultural field. His criticism targeted specifically the “westernised” young intellectuals, rather than interacting with the arguments on the Arab novel as an “entry into western modernity and nationhood”.²⁹² After all, Djaït did not have anxieties regarding Tunisia’s cultural nationhood, nor did he have significant interactions with the Arabic novel. He was, however, in a cultural field surrounded by intellectuals divided by their relationship to language attitudes and cultural representations. In this regard it would be interesting to confront Djaït’s views on bilingualism to how Messaadi called on Tunisians intellectuals from the Sadiqi College or modern graduates of the Zaytuna to act as “mediators” and to lead a renewal of Arabic culture after having “digested” French and western cultural elements, in his *al-Mabāḥith* columns.²⁹³ After independence, Messaadi continued to write on language, national culture and modernity in Tunisia in the essay form, and there could have been an opportunity for a dialogue, with the right conditions and mindsets in place.²⁹⁴ Instead, the young historian continued publishing with *al-Fikr* during the sixties, but never felt entirely at ease in this setting, as he described a decade later:

²⁸⁹ Ibid. 116-7.

²⁹⁰ Idem.

²⁹¹ Also Omri, "Local narrative form and the construction of the Arabic novel" in *Novel*, (41:2-3) 2008, 244.

²⁹² Ibid. 245.

²⁹³ Cited in Omri, *Nationalism, Islam and world literature*, 2006, 38.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. 39; Grandguillaume, *Arabisation et politique linguistique au Maghreb*, 1983, 64; Messaadi, *Ta’sil li-l’Kiyān*, Tunis, 1979.

In Tunisia, I navigated between different worlds where I have been able to observe different points of view on many subjects. I have lived with the issues that were evoked, issues that were mine and that I made mine. However the multiplicity of human relations does not only bring personal enrichment. It draws in confrontation, a challenge to the coherence of the self, leads to the limit of human suffering and solitude. In Tunisia, I was not at ease in any specific environment [...] there was simultaneously a thirst for vast intellectual horizons and a revolt towards constant challenges *against* reason and [...] any shackles and any pre-established visions.²⁹⁵

Djaït was an outsider, having been away for a number of years during which Tunisia experienced significant transformations. He was less than impressed with Tunisian cultural life in the sixties, comparing it instead with what was taking place in Paris at the same time.²⁹⁶ Arguably, Tunis cultural life in the sixties was restricted but it still offered a range of cultural activities, as reported by the *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*'s termly publication, and especially thanks to the multiplication of cultural spaces and role of then-new media.²⁹⁷ The two recently-created *Dar al-Thaqqafa/Maisons de la Culture* in Tunis (Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Rashîq), hosted a variety of meetings and cultural events that attracted interested audiences, and were reported in IBLA. There were lectures from Tunisian or foreign speakers, movies, musical performances or plays, all contributing to cultural life and renewal.²⁹⁸ But despite this buzzing atmosphere and the encouraging dynamic of the sixties, Djaït still felt lacking a drive to engage fully with his surroundings, as did the *Perspectivistes*. Instead, he retreated and adopted the conduct of the withdrawn thinker.

The remaining explanation for his difficult sixties came from his social origins and the pressures with which he had to contend. He belonged to the old bourgeoisie, the Tunis *beldiya* who had a high conception of their social standing but also suffered from social demotion after independence.²⁹⁹ There was resentment against the sons of this group among the new leadership,

²⁹⁵ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 9.

²⁹⁶ Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, January 2014.

²⁹⁷ IBLA was a missionary centre established in Tunisia since the thirties that promoted cultural activities from its building in the old town; Lelong, "Chroniques – L'effort tunisien pour la diffusion de la culture", *Revue IBLA*, 105, 1964, 43-6.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 46-7.

²⁹⁹ Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia*, 116.

considering that the neo-Destour leadership was mostly constituted of urban middle class politicians, and that the traditional urban elite had supported Bourguiba's opponent, Salah Ben Youssef. Several of these individuals managed to make the transition smoothly, such as Ezzedine Chérif, who became an important lawyer, or Béji Caïd Essebssi, who was close to Bourguiba and a Minister at a young age, and they both spoke of the challenges they faced not to let their social origin define them (and weigh on them) in the new social and political context.³⁰⁰ The issue lay in this transition act: Djaït's family pressured him repeatedly to take advantage of his education and profile to "join politics", which meant angling for some political appointment. Having lived abroad for years when the devaluation of the old regime was taking place, he interpreted this pressure as his family's attempt to recover a comfortable lifestyle, and alleviate the group's social demotion.³⁰¹ He did not see it as a way to clear the Djaït family name of suspicion. There was also a clash of values over the prestige of the academic path, and Djaït told how his family "insisted [that I should] leave the education sector and recover social prestige in a world that had none. This was general [sic], but I did not play the game".³⁰² The "game" consisted of bowing down to the party and elites in exchange for favours and promotions, and accepting that social cards had been reshuffled in the others' favour. However, Djaït was a proud man and instead, he was content with his function as an academic; for him, there was enough social prestige, despite the fact that his family "did not believe in the Zaytuna anymore", an institution he had grown to glorify as a symbol of Tunisian specificity, resenting the treatment it was subjected to after independence, rather than the long overdue reform he believed it deserved.³⁰³

Despite joining *Al-Fikr*, where he could express himself and find likeminded bi-cultural intellectuals, Djaït did not successfully integrate the national setting in the mid-sixties. We may point to his family's pressure to join the political elite. Instead, I have argued that he suffered from failing to engage with a mentor figure, someone like Mahmoud Messaadi who had covered (or was actively thinking about) the questions that rattled Djaït on literature, national culture and

³⁰⁰ Essebssi, *Habib Bourguiba: Le bon grain et l'ivraie*, 2009, 60-2; Ben Mahmoud-Chérif, *Ezzedine Chérif, Mémoire d'un beldi*, 1990.

³⁰¹ El Zein, "Interview with Hichem Djaït" *Rawāfed*.

³⁰² Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Djaït", 29. On the decline of the beldiya: Djaït, *Personnalité*, 215.

³⁰³ Idem.

modernity. In the following two years, his lack of social knowledge of Tunisian national realities would be shown when he engaged into the tumultuous and politicised debate on religious reform.

3. Expressing and addressing their disillusionment

Modernist bilingual intellectuals faced competing and often conflicting imperatives when they had to determine their public conduct. Maghribis in the sixties, like their French counterparts, looked up to Jean-Paul Sartre as the modern iteration of the all-knowing and infallible intellectual *savant*, bearer of universal values, “spokesman of truth and justice” through his tribune of *Les Temps Modernes*, the journal where he was editor in chief.³⁰⁴ They were attracted to the *image* of the intellectual, especially its practices of sociability such as the *salon*, *café*, publishing house, congresses and literary reviews.³⁰⁵ As Pierre Bourdieu argued when he investigated the cultural field, intellectuals were engaged in a system of “educational reproduction and symbolic domination”, with a strict system of competition and power relations that regulated who was able to penetrate and join the cultural field.³⁰⁶

On their return to the Maghrib, such young intellectuals faced somewhat different conditions: for starters, a more restricted choice of ideological groups. Very often, they were conflicted between bending their positions to fit in, or remain independent and hold an opposing discourse and risk suffering from marginalisation. Very little is known about Laroui’s disagreements with the socialist party’s ideologues or about Djaït’s relationship with *Al-Fikr*’s editors, but in 1966, both men chose to make their own way, break rank and devise a public intellectual conduct. Laroui withdrew to think about Arab ideology and the deeper questions relating to politics in the Arab world. Meanwhile, Djaït adopted the opposite line by entering the public sphere during a series of debates on religion, reform and modernity.

³⁰⁴ Jennings, *The intellectual in twentieth-century France*, 1993, 4-6.

³⁰⁵ Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: Khagheux et Normaliens dans l’entre-deux-guerres*, 1988.

³⁰⁶ Bourdieu, “Champ du pouvoir, champ intellectuel, et habitus de classe” in *Scolies* (1), 7-86.

The events of 1966 begin to explain why these two individuals felt compelled to rethink their intellectual *praxis*: it was a quieter year than most marred only by troubles relating to education reform. Student protests took place at regular intervals in Rabat and Tunis, but that was not out of the norm. Overall in Tunisia, Ben Salah's modernisation project was gaining ground while Bourguiba pursued institutional reforms to prepare for his succession. Meanwhile Moroccan political life was still reeling from the events of 1965 and the atmosphere was muted, besides disagreements over the issue of Arabisation, and to a lesser extent agrarian reform and compulsory military service. However, there was a perceptible lingering "malaise" in the background, assuredly building up, which Roger Le Tourneau saw in the *Perspectives* movement and the unease they expressed.³⁰⁷ A similar pattern of protests, arrests and stand-offs in Morocco was the expression of similar dissatisfaction - although it was not expressed in a similarly organised manner, it had similar roots: national disillusionment and feeling a lack of direction.

Laroui had failed to make his mark at the history faculty in Rabat. He sought to introduce historiographical revisionism during a time when national historiographies were legitimising the historical continuity of the nation, and refuting colonial historiography by using similarly flawed historiographical approaches.³⁰⁸ In 1965, he wrote a critical review in the faculty's journal *Héspéris* of Mohamed Sahli's essay on "the decolonisation of history", accusing it of not offering anything but the reverse structure of colonial history and a similarly ideological historical narrative.³⁰⁹ Later that year, he wrote in a faculty publication on "positivist history and nationalist ideology", where he exposed the characteristic of Islamic history as a place where one went to find justifications rather than to reconstruct positively on the basis of existing evidence. He went on to contrast this usage of history in the West and concluded that the discipline, as practiced in Morocco, would evolve (understood here as *improve*) along with the modernisation

³⁰⁷ Le Tourneau, "Chronique politique" in *AAN*, 1966, 240-1.

³⁰⁸ El Mansour, "Moroccan historiography since independence" in Le Gall, Perkins, *The Maghrib in question*, 112-116; Ahmida, *Beyond colonialism and nationalism in the Maghrib*, 2000.

³⁰⁹ Laroui, " 'Décoloniser l'histoire' (compte-rendu du livre du même nom de M. Sahli (Maspéro edit. 1965) in *Héspéris*, 1965, 249-242.

of Arab society and the development of a less ideological (understood here as *better*) relationship to its past.³¹⁰

Laroui's position had little chance of making an impact on his colleagues. At that time, the Moroccan state promoted a sense of nationhood by invoking historical continuity with the pre-colonial period, and stretching back several centuries through the central role of the Moroccan Royal dynasty, the institution of the Makhzen, and common cultural elements across history. This nationalist historiography included the works of Abdelaziz Ben Abdallah *Les grands courants de la civilisation du Maghreb* (1958), Mohamed Lahbabi *Le gouvernement Marocain à l'aube du 20e siècle* (1958), Mohamed al-Manouni "*L'apparition à l'époque Merinide et Ouattaside des éléments constitutifs du sentiment marocain*"³¹¹ and Mohamed Hajji "*L'idée de nation au Maroc et quelques uns de ses aspects au XVI et XVII siècles*".³¹² Meanwhile, Laroui was researching his *doctorat d'état* on the social and cultural sources of the awakening of modern nationalism in the 1930s (under Raymond Aron's supervision). He had returned to Rabat to interview actors and consult historical documents. His thesis choice was also teleological in motivation, consciously or not, but he did not find likeminded colleagues working on the modern era, and using a French framework on the history of the "*mentalités*" ("collective representations"), that was representative of the *Annales* school of history in Paris. As a result, Laroui soon withdrew from fully engaging with the history department. Instead, he began reading the material he brought back from his stay in Egypt (1958-1960). In Cairo, Laroui encountered an intelligentsia that was fragmented and marginalised under Nasser regime. He began to investigate the causes of the downfall or hollowness of Arab progressive societies through its manifestation (a stagnating culture).³¹³ During this period, he learned of Ben Barka's tragic fate, which rendered the discussion on the failure of progressive regimes and ideals in the

³¹⁰ Laroui, "Histoire positive et idéologie nationaliste" in *Cahiers de Sociologie*, (1) 1965, 55-65.

³¹¹ *Hesperis*, (9) 1968, 219-27.

³¹² *Ibid.* 109-21.

³¹³ Gallagher, "Life and times of Laroui", 136.

Arab world more urgent, on a personal level. He decided to turn his readings and questions into a book, which he completed between November 1965 and January 1966.³¹⁴

In May 1967, Laroui released *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*, which shared a number of striking similarities to Ben Barka's essay of a year earlier, including its writing style, format and publisher. Laroui's book proved a success with the French intelligentsia: in the preface, Orientalist scholar Maxime Rodinson wrote that audiences had been waiting for such a book for a long time.³¹⁵ Claude Cahen felt the need to defend himself from the young Moroccan's accusations regarding his discipline's nefarious aims, despite Cahen being a senior and respected historian.³¹⁶ Thanks to this essay, Laroui achieved a notoriety that ensured he grew out of Ben Barka's cumbersome shadow – but that could not have been the whole purpose behind the book, since Laroui had cut back on his public writing and was then withdrawn from his historical research. The essay raises questions on the purpose behind its publication, calling for a careful reading of the text using his trajectory and Morocco's contemporary realities to understand his intentions. The interpretation I suggest differs from commentators in Paris at the time, who believed it was merely a book expressing the confused duality of a westernised Arab intellectual, a “guilty” former *indigène* seeking to redeem his self through a harsh study of the Arab world's predicaments.³¹⁷ This interpretation referred to Laroui's claim that the Arab thought had constantly thought itself through the West since the colonial encounter, quite simplistically because these references failed to reconstruct the argumentation where fitted the claim that the West was the “common denominator” of every ideology in the Arab world, as he writes in the opening pages.³¹⁸

This book is about the Arab world's historical evolution since the Arab renaissance from the angle of the relationship between society and Arab political discourse, or its “ideology”. The book starts with the observation that the independent Arab “national” state, in its pursuit of

³¹⁴ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 43.

³¹⁵ Rodinson's Préface *L'idéologie Arabe contemporaine*, VII.

³¹⁶ Cahen, “Abdallah Laroui, *L'idéologie Arabe contemporaine*” in *Revue Historique*, (239:1) 1968, 210; on Claude Cahen, see the special volume of *Arabica*, (43:1) 1996.

³¹⁷ Janous, Review “Abdallah Laroui, Maxime Rodinson (Pref.), *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine: essai critique*, Francois Maspero, 1967” in *L'Homme et la société*, (5) 1967, 218-9.

³¹⁸ Laroui, *L'idéologie Arabe contemporaine*, 1967, 4.

nation-building, promoted an ideology that values “authenticity” (defined as being faithful to a romanticised image of Islamic past, discussed later) while actively seeking modernisation, and he considers the two aims a dangerous contradiction:

This notion of an “ulterior future” – of a future already drawn elsewhere and that we are not at liberty to refuse – explains, in Arab society, the eclectic character of Arab thought, and the rift between social reality and self-consciousness.³¹⁹

Laroui attempts to move beyond surface analysis, of the ideas in the discourse itself, and focus instead on the historical and social underpinnings that led to their development, in order to identify the “objective fact” – therefore, his essay is also an attempt to devise a method of analysis.³²⁰ He argued that the Arab world’s interaction with a much “advanced” West, notably through the colonial experience, impeded the Arab world from engaging on its own historical dynamic.

Laroui breaks down the three “forms” that Arab ideology has taken to understanding “the essential problem of Arab society”, which all reveal a different relationship to the West. The “cleric” draws from religion and seeks “the source of strength and weakness, and naturally only finds words”,³²¹ continues to argue that “reason” is to be found in Islam, that present decadence is due to having forsaken the religious message, but can be recovered (quoting Mohamed Abduh, Allal al-Fassi, Malek Bennabi).³²² Then came the “politician”, inspired by Rousseau, Montesquieu and western political philosophy, arguing that the Arab’s decadence comes from the lack of political institution guaranteeing freedom, and Ottoman control over the Arabs.³²³ Laroui cites Ali Abderaziq or Taha Hussein as those who believe in the liberal way toward recovering past Arab greatness.³²⁴ Finally came the “technophile”, clamouring that strength

³¹⁹ Ibid. 66.

³²⁰ Ibid. 68-9.

³²¹ Ibid. 20.

³²² Ibid. 21.

³²³ Ibid. 24.

³²⁴ Ibid. 25.

comes from progress rather than political freedom, “material strength acquired through work and applied science” and, quoting Salama Musa, “civilisation and industry, culture is science”.³²⁵

Laroui dismisses these three figures as nothing but “three moments of Arab conscience, who have tried, since the last century, to understand themselves and understand the West”.³²⁶ None of which were able to overcome their predicament (“eclectic thought” and inability to inspire Arab reality) because their tools are rigged: the concept of ideology is “a theoretical construction taken from another society that is not entirely inscribed in reality”, and producing as a “system that masks reality because it is difficult or impossible to analyse”.³²⁷ For Laroui, the only way to overcome the loop of ending up talking about the West when Arabs try to talk about themselves is critical thought, and especially inspired by scientific or “objective” Marxism, as contained in the notion of the “dialectic”:

The dialectic, and solely the dialectic can explain and overcome the lasting opposition between the technophile and the call for authenticity. By adopting it [the dialectic] the national state can put an end to the duality of “doing” and “understanding”, it can start to act while understanding.³²⁸

It is quite clear that this essay was written for leftist intellectuals possessing a certain intellectual baggage, seen from his use of concepts such as “class signification”, “class structure”, “ideology”, “colonial”, “liberal” and “national state”.³²⁹ His call for the “dialectic” is linked to Marxist scholarship, but it is not defined in its simplest iteration, meaning that Laroui’s intended readership was already well aware of this term and the debates around it taking place in Paris, academic debates seeking to renew Marxist conceptual toolkits to separate them from the practice of Communist parties; see in particular the works of Gilles Martinet, that he cites,³³⁰ or the highly influential works of Louis Althusser, published the same year also with Maspéro.³³¹

³²⁵ Ibid. 26-7.

³²⁶ Ibid. 28.

³²⁷ Ibid. 8, 219.

³²⁸ Ibid. 158.

³²⁹ Ibid. 7-8, 40-1.

³³⁰ On page 154: Martinet, *Un Marxisme de notre temps*, 1962.

³³¹ Althusser, *Pour Marx*, 1965 and *Lire le Capital*, 1968, and his articles in the journal *La Pensée*.

The new interpretation I put forward locates this book's origins as being profoundly domestic and linked to Laroui's social and political experiences in the previous years, and a continuation and displacement of his failed political engagement. His book, often read by Arab intellectual historians, also represents an attempt to provide a framework that could explain the growing "intellectual malaise", student strife, the monarchy's increasingly authoritarian and repressive turn, and the obstacles on the path towards modernity. His answer ringed throughout the essay: "primacy of action" of thought or self-knowledge, the national state was too busy seeking transformation (usually following imported models), hence the imbalance.³³² He believed that intellectuals, such as himself, should adopt the "dialectic" because it answered the question of "how to study Arab ideology and the society that gave birth to it", expressed in more Marxist terms as asked whether "culture [was] directly determined by its material basis".³³³ Laroui does not spell this out, because of the critical essay's particular style, but the logical outcome of intellectuals adopting the dialectic is their emergence as distinctive actors, which the national state would recognise, and they would be redeemed in the national project. There are echoes of this optimistic expectation in, arguably, the most personal passage of this essay: "admitting universalism, in reality, amounts to self-reconciliation".³³⁴

There remained the question of how the essay related to the cultural and political field in Morocco. On the one hand, the book was a reaction to how the left was unable to explain why their supposedly "superior" modernist ideals failed to convert the masses, who were more attracted to Allal al-Fassi's conservative message and insistence on "authenticity". Al-Fassi dominated the intellectual landscape and most UNFP leaders considered him as something of a father figure, whom they also wanted to oust so they could emerge fully as "adults". According to Laroui, the left's intellectuals were unable to offer a solid alternative, and instead criticised by unfairly simplifying *salafiyya* as conservative backwardness, rather than the more nuanced characterisation of a call for a return to the past as the "authentic" norm of behaviour, which

³³² Ibid. 111.

³³³ Ibid. 10, 157.

³³⁴ "5. Toward the Universal", Ibid. 167-9.

appealed to the masses.³³⁵ Moroccan society's attraction for *authenticity* was especially nerve-wrecking for him, which he defined as the idea that the Arab self would only be saved by the restoration of Arab culture. Not by any culture, but by "classical profane culture... literature, poetry, artistic prose, and manuals of etiquette". He portrayed this as merely another ideological understanding of culture: "an ethnography of Bedouin life with its language, way of life, human ideal, morphology and genealogy", which, on top of it all, relied on a flawed reconstruction of the past.³³⁶ This idea was a paradox because it called for a consistency of social behaviour with the past, but it did not make sense with the rapid social and economic transformations experienced by Morocco, that Laroui referred to as a "a relived past and an anticipated future".³³⁷ It was also impeding the "national state" from pursuing its efforts: in April 1966, Minister of Education, Dr. Mohamed Benhima announced that Arabisation would be halted because of a lack of funds and qualified teachers. The announcement faced social uproar, engineered by *Istiqlal* and its relays in society and forced the King to dismiss Benhima and restore Arabisation.³³⁸ It symbolised for Laroui, how "authenticity" was more than a theoretical notion, but an obstacle to more urgent modernisation policies and rational reforms.³³⁹ On the other hand, Laroui noted how the other groups, committed to modernisation (the urban bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia), failed to provide a counter-weight, especially when it came to define a modern Moroccan culture for a modern state, without incurring additional linguistic alienation (it should be added that his ideas on a cultural counter-project to *turāth* remained underdeveloped in this essay).³⁴⁰

There is no evidence that Laroui's essay had a major impact on the way Moroccan intellectuals approached the domestic social and cultural situation. These questions Laroui highlighted were far from UNFP's urgent issues of concern (they were then calling for a new constitution and elections), while Laroui wanted to address the theoretical foundations of the left's ideology. However, some leftist commentators did speak in favour of his intellectual

³³⁵ Mansouri, "Laroui ou l'obsession de la modernité" in Benaddi, *Penseurs maghrébins contemporains*, 17, and in his essay from pages 51 to 69.

³³⁶ Ibid. 81, 85, 92.

³³⁷ Ibid. 65.

³³⁸ Adam, "Chronique sociale et culturelle Maroc" in AAN, 1966, 323.

³³⁹ Laroui, *Idéologie*, 89.

³⁴⁰ Laroui, *Idéologie Arabe contemporaine*, 87, 93.

project. Under the pen name of “*Al Moarrikh*” (The Historian), Paul Pascon praised its author (“a genuine witness” possessing “considerable erudition”) and that the book “had to be written”, and it was a “call for thought”.³⁴¹ Pascon saw it as the ideological coming together of various tendencies within the Moroccan left.³⁴² However, Laroui’s essay did not interact fully with *Aqlām*, the Moroccan cultural journal that brought together young progressive intellectuals with leftist sensibilities. According to Kamal Abdulatif and Fernandez Parilla, *Aqlām* writers saw their cultural aspirations and socio-political aspirations in conjunction, which also spurred literary experimentation and ideological concerns in Arabic.³⁴³ Laroui did make two references from this journal, to support his claim on the bourgeois state and the ideology of authenticity: first, he cited Moroccan historian Mohamed Zniber’s critique of the national state for putting in place the conditions of an alienating, rather than harmonious modernity.³⁴⁴ Laroui also added a critical remark by an unnamed contributor wondering: “if we should ask ourselves whether scientific truths are consistent with the spirit of Islam and the constituting elements of our personality” or ask instead “whether, once applied, they would improve the lot of the masses”, showing the type of pragmatism and rationality Laroui shared.³⁴⁵ But that was it, and this absent dialogue was probably a missed opportunity.

It is puzzling that *Aqlām* was not an important fixture of Laroui’s life in the sixties or in his intellectual development, especially because of the presence of young progressive thinkers such as Mohamed Abed al-Jabri or Abdelkebir Khatibi. His contribution to the journal amounted to a translation of a French play from 1947 in Arabic in three instalments from 1966 to 1968, but no discussion on Arab ideology or the issues he wrote about in his essay.³⁴⁶ Yet, the journal would have been an ideal location: in its manifesto in 1964, it spoke of “true intellectuals” and their

³⁴¹ Al Moarrikh, “Témoignage – Abdallah Laroui: L’idéologie Arabe contemporaine” in *Lamalif*, (13-4) 1967, 20.

³⁴² Ibid. 21.

³⁴³ Gontard, “Les revues au Maroc et l’activité littéraire depuis 1960”, in *AAN*, 1976, 1380; Abdelatif, “Min Aqlām ilā Fikr wa naqd” in *Fikr wa-naqd* (38) 2001, 19; Parilla, “The challenge of Moroccan cultural journals of the 1960s” in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, (45) 2014, 119-120.

³⁴⁴ Zniber in *Aqlām*, numbers 3 and 5, August and October 1964, cited on page 55 of Laroui’s essay.

³⁴⁵ In *Aqlām* number 4, September 1964, cited in Laroui, *Idéologie*, 48.

³⁴⁶ “Shaikh al-Jam’a” (Translation of *Maitre de Santiago d’Henri de Montherlant*) in *Aqlām* (3) 1966, 69-88; (4-5) 1967, 153-171; (6) 1968, 100-112.

responsibility as an *avant-garde* to shape a new culture in Morocco and these were the same questions Laroui had about his own role in Moroccan society.³⁴⁷

This absent dialogue, I would instead argue, came from Laroui's original motivation of wanting to overcome the left's ideological parameters (and limitations); *Aqlām* belonged to that category. His essay wanted to open new horizons and displace the discussion from the revolutionary struggle to new issues such as the Arab self, modernity and the relationship with the West, where he saw the real obstacles to Morocco's modernity and the left's failures. Whether this was an appropriate approach is a question worth discussing, but it was easily explained: Laroui was a historian, the dominant (conservative) ideology justified itself in the name of historical continuity and therefore, it made sense for him to feel concerned and afflicted, and pushed to pursue the cultural investigation of Arab ideology rather than to write about immediate political issues. However theoretical or abstract his essay might have appeared, it was very much a response to the events of the sixties: in his recent memoirs, Laroui has a particular sentence to describe his intentions in the mid-sixties: when he spoke about Hassan II, he cited the common remark made by foreign journalists who interviewed him and could not help but notice his *double-culture* or *double-personality*. Instead, Laroui wrote: "*What was of interest to us*" was the King's approach towards politics (emphasis in the text). He added that from 1965, Hassan II was acting like a *Za'im*, and therefore Moroccan politics was not as special as initially thought despite being a monarchy attached to its traditions, politically and economically allied with the West, a multiparty system that was a legacy of the nationalist struggle. As with the Arab progressive and republican countries, the regime pursued survival by closing the political system and by ensuring social stability at all costs.³⁴⁸

This interpretation allows us to connect the domestic political struggle and the historical investigation of Arab ideology, and is better suited to explain why Laroui's alienation ran deeper and had to be addressed by publishing a critical essay. On a personal level, despite its success in Paris, it did not provoke the discussion or responses it deserved in Morocco. The publication of

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 120.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 48-50. Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 50.

his essay opened a period of intellectual solitude during which he broadened his concerns to distant issues that allowed him to evade a depressing reality (Chapter 3). After 1966, his memoirs do not have another entry until 1972. This would indicate that after the upheavals, agitations and certainties of his youth, he continued to suffer a difficult national re-integration.

With Tunisia firmly on the modernising path, Hichem Djaït felt left behind at the Zaytuna. Yet, as Michel Lelong argued in 1962, the state's reform of the old Mosque-University was an essential part of its modernisation strategy, because it was a first stage towards the production of a new religious discourse and the change of collective representations (*mentalités*).³⁴⁹ Lelong cited the Tunisian medievalist historian Mohamed Talbi who wrote in 1960 that Islamic studies lacked modern thinkers equipped with critical methodologies, solid training and a strong cultural background to bring in new perspectives and modernise religious thought.³⁵⁰ Whether deliberately or by chance, Djaït's appointment fit into that effort and in 1966 and his public positions in the social and religious debate would bring that spirit of modernity and scholarly legitimacy to the state's reforms.

The relationship between Islam and the state has been covered by a large literature, and Tunisia often comes up as case where secularisation and resistances are discussed.³⁵¹ Despite what his detractors said, Bourguiba was not pursuing Tunisia's de-Islamisation according to Lotfi Hajji who studied his speeches on the issue, and that he was not a non-believer but he shared the ideas of the most radical reformists of his time and pursued their application.³⁵² Given his temperament and his domination of domestic politics, he pursued these reforms with an "obnoxious" political attitude, instead of coaxing public opinion progressively to contain resistances to change.³⁵³ He presented himself as a visionary in a long line of reformists and attacked what had seemed to be untouchable issues such as religious practices and institutions.

³⁴⁹ Lelong, "L'enseignement supérieur islamique", 184.

³⁵⁰ M. Talbi, "L'Islam et le monde moderne" in *Confluent*, 1960, 402-3.

³⁵¹ Jackson, "Islamic reform between Islamic law and the nation-state"; Voll, "Political Islam and the state" in Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Islam and Politics*, 2013.

³⁵² Hajji, *Bourguiba et l'Islam: le politique et le religieux*, 2011; Salem, *Habib Bourguiba, Islam and the creation of Tunisia*, 1984; M. Boulby, "The Islamic challenge: Tunisia since independence" in *TWQ*, 10:2, 1988.

³⁵³ Hajji, *Bourguiba et l'Islam*, 21, 29-31.

The elites believed in these reforms, such as gender equality, the state's authority over religious institutions, and religious rituals and practices in society, and they praised them for allowing Tunisian society to progress.³⁵⁴ Other sectors of society reacted with considerable resistance, criticising these reforms because it clashed with their understanding of religious practices.³⁵⁵

A struggle ensued, the real aim of which was the affirmation of the state's supreme authority on public morals against competing actors, as Bessis and Belhassen argued.³⁵⁶ In the process, Bourguiba undermined opponents to his reform by targeting their source of wealth and their privileged social status. The traditional and religious establishment suffered from the state's nationalisation of *habous* lands, and graduates of the Zaytuna lost their administrative functions to western-trained Tunisians.³⁵⁷ In reaction, they took offense when Bourguiba tried to incite Tunisians not to fast during Ramadan. On 5 February 1960, the President gave a televised speech calling on Tunisians to turn away from this religious practice (or "ritual") – despite it being an essential prescription of the faith. He referred to its impact on productivity and the imperative of fighting against underdevelopment, while calling for a new *ijtihād* by making an analogy between the active *mujahidin* who are dispensed from fasting, and national development being the "greatest jihad" (thus justifying in his reasoning the dispensation).

His call for *ijtihād* was not taken seriously and instead he provoked sharp reactions. The President appealed to religious chiefs to support his call but the traditional and religious establishment took an open stand against the President.³⁵⁸ It proved to be the last straw in a troubled relationship. The religious city of Qayrawan staged several acts of defiance and violence erupted. Later, the country's two highest religious leaders refused to write a religious fatwa backing Bourguiba's call for reform, despite being themselves reformists inclined to a measure of modern consideration in regard to religious practices.³⁵⁹ In response, he brushed them

³⁵⁴ Bessis Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 2012, 238-241.

³⁵⁵ Ibid. 19-20 ; Ben Achour, "La réforme des mentalités: Bourguiba et le redressement moral" in Camau (ed.) *Tunisie au présent*, 145.

³⁵⁶ Bessis Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 238-40, 246; Hajji, *Bourguiba et l'Islam*, 58-9.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. 78-9.

³⁵⁸ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 249.

³⁵⁹ The Grand Mufti Abdelaziz Djaït – Hichem Djaït's uncle – and Tahar Ben Achour, rector of the Zaytuna.

away, dismissing them as “decadent” and “old categories”, and reiterating his call for a modernised and “authentic” reading of the religious message.³⁶⁰

After the confrontation of 1960-2, the state realised that despite its hegemony, it did not stand to gain from alienating a large section of society. The authorities launched a rethought ideological campaign in the following years, but took care to proceed at a more measured pace.³⁶¹ Several research centres played a leading effort in thinking about the reform of religious practices. The Centre for Economic and Social Research in Tunis (CERES) organised a seminar in early February 1965 looking at “transformations of Islam in relation to social structures and concrete historical circumstances”. It brought together a number of academics in Islamic studies from France and Tunisia and opened several perspectives that would be followed in the following years.³⁶² Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, a young professor of philosophy at the University and member of CERES, gave the opening presentation: after offering a topographical and historical review of the religious situation in the Maghrib, he dived into the issue that made the conference topical: the impact of social and economic transformations on religious practices, and the possibility for modernising reforms to overcome reactionary trends in society. Bouhdiba lauded the Tunisian state’s approach on gender rights for example, arguing that Bourguiba and Tahar Haddad had set the country on course to a truly revolutionary reform.³⁶³ However, the conference could not come up with a way to explain social resistances to change (referred to as “enlightened reforms”).³⁶⁴

This ideological effort was one-sided as the religious establishment was mostly kept out of the conversation. Hichem Djaït could claim to be better suited to find a middle ground between both worlds; as a modernist and Francophone historian he had a foot in the modern debates such as the one convened by CERES. Djaït also had a privileged outlook on the other side of this debate, as the son of a family of ulema and nephew of the Grand Mufti working in the Zaytuna.

³⁶⁰ Moore, *Tunisia since independence*, 1964, 57-60; Perkins, *History of modern Tunisia*, 141.

³⁶¹ Bessis Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 252. Ben Achour, “Réforme des mentalités”, 145.

³⁶² Magnin, “Chronique – Séminaire de sociologie religieuse (Tunis les 9, 10 et 11 Février 1965)” in *IBLA*, 112, 1965, 422-4.

³⁶³ Ibid. 422.

³⁶⁴ Ibid. 423-4.

In 1966, he was propelled into the public sphere on this issue through a series of well-timed public interventions.

In February 1966, Djaït took part in a public debate on television on the eve of *Eid*. The discussion topic was “religious practices and rituals in Tunisia, and their role in contemporary life”, and he spoke alongside Abdelwahab Bouhdiba.³⁶⁵ Djaït’s position was reported as having caused a polemic among the Tunisian intelligentsia, but it must have also fascinated others because he was solicited to give a personal interview by the radio to clarify his position on 21 February. The two-page article was entitled “With Professor Hichem Djaït”, next to a large picture of the man: smartly dressed in western clothes, fixed gaze and large framed glasses, and every bit the inspirational modern intellectual. The conversation’s tone was cordial and gave him the opportunity to air his ideas.³⁶⁶

The interview entered into the heart of the polemic on religious rituals and practices. Djaït objected to those who wanted to turn religion into an exclusively personal and spiritual belief in Tunisia (*al-diyāna al-wujdāniyya*). From a sociological standpoint, he argued, Islam was a “historical and communitarian faith”, and not just a set of “symbols”, but practices that played a strong social binding function. On the other hand, he also admitted that there was a need to rethink these practices.³⁶⁷ Therefore, what was required were “religious thinkers capable of digesting “Islamic meaning”, who could also understand “our contemporary sensibilities and understandings in order for this Islam to be of our age that respects history and finds a balance between tradition and renewal”.³⁶⁸ He believed in the need for a new *ijtihad* on practices. This was a polemic claim for those who modelled their behaviour on the accounts of the *sunna* and believed that practices were explicitly passed down in tradition and did not require elaboration or adaptation. He disagreed as a historian, arguing that many of these rituals were set during the two centuries after the *hijra* and after the Prophet’s death, and therefore they were subject to interpretation because they had been decisions of the *umma*. He admitted that this did not mean

³⁶⁵ “Ma’a al-ustād hishām ju’ayt” in *Majalat al-idā’a wa al-tilfāza*, 167, 21 February 1966, 24-5.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. 25.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 24.

³⁶⁸ Idem.

that historical truths should supersede religious truths; rather that criticism and thought should be introduced to religious considerations.

Djaït dismissed the possibility of a quick solution: a task of such magnitude, that no one, himself included, could offer simple solutions, and which “had to be undertaken by the Islamic community as a whole”. He called for a collective debate on practices and rituals, to keep up with changing lifestyles. The aim of such a conversation was the ‘elevation of the religious message’ and the renewal of religious thought, and changing the collective representations of the masses.³⁶⁹ Later in the interview, he elaborated on how the resulting renewal (*tajdīd*) that would be different from the effort of the thinkers of the Arab *Nahda* (Rashid Ridha, Muhammad Abduh etc. that he called “reform on the surface”, or *salāḥiyya al-sathīa*) because it would not rely on copying the outside world, nor returning to the past. The only way would be to “enlarge what we understand by *ijtihād* and develop an “appropriate device” (*jihāz nadhari*) to resolve these issues. He remained vague, adding that it was his intention to write a book about these issues in the near future, to “reconcile Islam and contemporary life”.³⁷⁰

Finally, once the risks and the scope were laid out, he formulated his bold proposal: the creation of a religious institution, a “spiritual authority” (*sulta rūḥiyya*) destined to guide the Islamic community.³⁷¹ The interviewer, unsurprisingly, requested clarifications: Islam needs an institution the same way the Catholic faith has a Church because the body of ulema combined spiritual and social functions, and ended up not giving either the proper attention. This institution would have a say on religious affairs, its head would be an elected *Khalīfa*, surrounded by people specialising in the social dimension of religion. These experts would be selected for their ability to relate to contemporary religious practice rather than merely their conformity with the literal interpretations of religious texts, and their mastery of scholarly discourse (religious or secular). It would also need to be modern and contain new faces because “the older elements within the

³⁶⁹ Idem.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. 25.

³⁷¹ Ibid. 24.

establishment have lost their religious leadership quality”, and only a new generation would be able to conciliate the aim of upholding the *shari‘a* and keeping touch with present realities.³⁷²

This interview was a privileged opportunity for Djaït to air his ideas, but it ended up increasing the polemic that ensued from his first intervention. There was an air of audaciousness, even arrogance in the way he claimed he could judge who was worthy of the ‘the spirit of the faith’, all the more because he targeted the old establishment who were still powerful (as the polemic of 1962 had shown). His proposal was bold, for the secularists and the religious, and showed himself unfazed by the perspective of dismissing the great figures of the Arab renaissance. At the end of the interview, he “smirked” at the question regarding the polemic provoked by his views, according to the interview notes, indicating that he knew very well who objected to his ideas and even to his person in this discussion. Djaït described this issue as one where “we are still in medieval times” and that it was natural for the transition to be painful. He justified these emotional reactions as the product of the topic of these debates that made people adopt “warrior perspectives”, and align themselves in opposing factions, cultivating strong enmity.³⁷³ He added that a lot of people did not understand the ideas he researched, displaying scholarly haughtiness. Djaït’s public conduct and candid assessments reveals he did not take into account the public might react sharply to his views, nearly expecting public consideration by virtue of being an “intellectual” and a scholar. At that stage, neither the modernist nor the conservative establishment recognised his legitimacy.

With the issue still up in the air during the following months, *Al-Fikr* decided to publish a special volume on Islam in June. It covered a variety of topics such as religion and youth (Bechir Ben Slama), the humanist component of the religious message (Bechir al-Mejdoub) or the Islamic legacy in Tunisian culture today (Mohamed Sanoussi). Djaït was also in this volume as author of the final article, offering “Thoughts on contemporary Islam”.³⁷⁴ He discussed the historical causes of the decline of Islamic civilisation and the path towards Islamic reform and its restoration. Building on some of the ideas in his radio interview, he offered more measured

³⁷² Ibid. 25.

³⁷³ Idem.

³⁷⁴ Hishām Ju‘ayt, “Ḥawla al-islām al-mu‘āṣir” in *Al-Fikr*, (11) 1966, 96.

proposals and argued that this decline should not be attributed to Islam, as a spiritual message, but to a set of historical causes common to all other societies, regardless of their faiths, which I now discuss.

As with his other articles, Djaït was interested in the intersection of ideas and practices in a historical perspective. On such a topic, he had to evoke the state's current and recent efforts to introduce reform and the resulting tensions. He began by broadening the question of reform: "Any thinking on religions needs to integrate a philosophical and historical perspective on the role of faiths in social life and its effect on the general condition".³⁷⁵ Once more, he argued that the faith's institutions had not evolved since its early days, as opposed to the Christian faith, arguing that institutional reform was a factor of religion's effect on a civilisation's cultural flourishing, rather than something innate to its spiritual message that promoted decadence.³⁷⁶

He tried to move the discussion beyond mutual accusations and misunderstandings. What this polemic on religious practices showed was that neither the state nor the religious authorities succeeded in dialoguing with the other:

The faithful only cares a little for this earthly existence and the quest for economic development is secondary in his list of concerns compared to saving his soul on the day of judgement...in reference to the [state's] religious project regarding fasting during Ramadan associated to lessening the economic forces... religion was considered to be one among various social factors [for the state], [thus] making it...extremely difficult that one vision would overcome the other.³⁷⁷

Each camp adopted a different rationale on religious practices: a scriptural and scholastic method for one, looking for all the answers in his sacred texts. Meanwhile the other party chose from a selective and targeted reading of *fiqh*, in order to put itself under the authoritative legitimacy of sacred text, but in reality, it fraudulently manipulated its "general religious spirit".³⁷⁸

Djaït used the Ramadan polemic to make an unusual stand in favour of the Islamicisation of the state rather than its secularisation, arguing that it had a responsibility to protect and reform

³⁷⁵ Idem.

³⁷⁶ Idem.

³⁷⁷ Idem.

³⁷⁸ Ibid. 97.

religion in order to lead the country towards modernity. The *contemporaneisation* of Islam under and by the national state would require better knowledge of Islamic history, which was profoundly lacking in the Tunisian population, to acquire an understanding of this “general religious spirit”.³⁷⁹ The state would need to associate the “religious apparatus” by promoting a “particular vision” in conformity with the “religious spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-‘amma, al-mantiq al-dīnī*) and ascertain its position as defender of the faith.³⁸⁰ But he ended on a pessimistic assessment, especially considering the new generation that was “on the path towards secularisation” and “had their eyes closed to religion” in favour of materialism, and who would end up alienated.³⁸¹

Thanks to these articles, Djaït gained notoriety. He demonstrated his erudition among the prestigious likes of Mohamed Fadel Ben Achour and Habib Belkhoja, and prominent academics such as Abdelwahab Bouhdiba and Mohamed Fantar. His ideas were on an ideal platform, and in fact Jean Fontaine, the head of IBLA, read *Al-Fikr*’s volume and had it translated and published alongside Bouhdiba and Fadhel Ben Achour’s texts in the Institute’s publication, which was read in some Parisian circles.³⁸²

While this exposure raised his public profile, it also politicised him unwillingly, especially his television and radio interventions. The “transistor” or the “speaking box” became a crucial tool for the authorities to reach the population directly in their homes in the way the press could not because of illiteracy. The authorities were well aware of the radio’s importance and ensured programmes for 18 hours a day, using it to promote, among other things, social reform.³⁸³ Bourguiba frequently spoke on the radio, when he was not also listening and on several occasions, the President would invite a young author or poet he had heard on the airwaves to the Carthage Presidential Palace to receive a distinction or a prize.³⁸⁴ This allowed him to keep track of public opinion while managing and locating emerging talents. This is what happened to Djaït:

³⁷⁹ Ibid. 98.

³⁸⁰ Idem.

³⁸¹ Ibid. 99.

³⁸² The title of the special volume was “*Documents et notes sur l’Islam d’aujourd’hui*”, and contained the following: Djaït, “*Réflexions sur l’Islam contemporain*”, Sheikh Fadel Ben Achour, “*Volonté de rapprochement historique*”, Karrou, “*L’Islam: une religion qui évolue*”, Bouhdiba, “*La conscience religieuse dans la société d’aujourd’hui*” in IBLA, 114-5, 1966, 217-291.

³⁸³ Kacem, “La production littéraire à la R.T.T.” in *Revue IBLA*, 116, 1966, 429.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. 433.

later, he wrote that he “was brought to Bourguiba’s attention in 1966”, after which his overall condition improved.³⁸⁵ He began his “rehabilitation” and was given a post that corresponded his qualifications, and said, without being specific, that he even “joined a couple of commissions” (without specifying, in the interview, which commissions they were).³⁸⁶

These instances of public exposure had a strong impact on how Djaït conceived of his public conduct. His research was certainly relevant to religious reform and modernity, but he was ill at ease having to make intellectual concessions (such as the imperative of nuance and precision) in order to appeal to a wider public. He even had difficulties with this audience, as he indicated in the *Al-Fikr* article, the “westernised elites” that looked down on Islamic civilisation. Finally, he was suddenly exposed to political games for which he had no interest, or suitability, hence the lingering dissatisfaction. In the sixties, religious reform had become a political rather than an intellectual issue, and he detached himself from the ideological line of *Al-Fikr*, used to promote the state’s ideological view. Djaït had no interest in politics and refused to compete for political influence, but he had ventured into that territory, without the necessary legitimacy or experience to withstand attacks and polemics. His public positions seem to indicate that he was not familiar with its rules, such as the need to moderate his positions, be mindful of different groups and their sensibilities, or ensure he spoke from a safe position.

Laroui and Djaït’s trajectories in relation to the public sphere in the sixties manifest a desire to express their dissatisfaction in public and provoke a discussion. However, in a strongly hierarchical cultural field, they tried to bypass their audience in the intelligentsia and were left nearly to their own devices, without yet having emerging as leading thinkers. Without having an intellectual mentor to guide them through post-independence realities, they tackled major questions of Arab ideology and reform, and ended up instead experiencing solitude and frustration, rather than successfully negotiating their national integration, putting a greater question mark of the place of intellectuals after independence.

³⁸⁵ Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Djaït”, 29.

³⁸⁶ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

Conclusion: nationalism and intellectuals in a loveless marriage

In this chapter, I have attempted to explain why two modern and enthusiastic intellectuals failed to find fulfilment on their return to their home countries, even though Morocco and Tunisia were firmly engaged on the path toward modernisation in the sixties. The “nationalist narrative” gave a generation of intellectuals high expectations as to their future role. At first and despite the spread of authoritarianism, ideological hegemony and development challenges, groups such as *Perspectives* in Tunisia, and *Souffles* in Morocco came together to formulate their visions of the national project, and add their contribution to the emergence of a modern notion of state and citizenship. Yet, as Abdallah Laroui’s and Hichem Djaït’s examples showed, the sources of discontent ran deep, and revolved around their place in the collective project and the national community. Furthermore, neither could rely on a mentor figure to guide them through these difficult and changing socio-political conditions: Ben Barka, Laroui’s mentor, was assassinated in 1965, while Djaït failed to strike a positive bond with Messaadi. Their major interventions in the sixties, Laroui’s essay on Arab ideology and Djaït’s proposals for religious reform, failed to re-assure them of their place in the national setting.

This raises deeper issues with regard to the individual, the group and the national project in formerly colonised countries. While they initially returned home with the impression of being part of the national community, they soon came to the realisation that individuals were part of groups before being part of the national community: the party, the family, the ideological group etc. Sub-national forms of identification were the dominant guides for conduct. This meant that a decade after independence, the two countries’ process of nationalisation was incomplete and worse, it was not on the right path. Within these transforming and re-configuring social dynamics, the young modernist and bi-cultural intellectual could neither identify with his group of origin (the provincial middle class for Laroui, the urban aristocracy for Djaït) nor with the values of the new elite (the urban bourgeoisie), and was therefore unhappy because it a socially (rather than

culturally) uprooted position. This, I would argue, would support the Gramscian perspective that intellectuals need to be organically fixed to a social group to feel accomplished.

In conclusion to this stage of their trajectories, the negative reactions they encountered when acting upon the moral compass of the intellectual in public (of a “Sartrean” inspiration) back in Rabat and Tunis led them to conclude that there was no place for them in the national setting after independence, that intellectuals and nationalism were in a loveless marriage. However, these young intellectuals were miserable because they aspired to speak for everyone, rather than recognise they spoke as a group. In that regard, it was the practice of intellectuals that was evolving, but also their location in the post-independence setting.

Chapter 3 Exile and critical introspection

Arab political exiles crossed the Mediterranean and sometimes the Atlantic to resettle and rebuild their lives after being made to leave because of the political groups they belonged to or the views they espoused. Sometimes, they were targeted merely for what they symbolised in the eyes of the authorities: this was the case for Laroui and Djaït, seen as two unaligned, and therefore problematic intellectuals. After a couple of years of latent malaise, dramatic circumstances made each of them decide to leave the country and seek an academic career abroad. This took place around the same time, when the Moroccan and Tunisian regimes underwent strong crises of legitimacy in the second half of the sixties and turned to violence to deal with rising contestation, (especially student protests). Paradoxically, the authorities wanted to prevent Laroui and Djaït from becoming radicalised, but it was through their awkward and oppressive actions that the two intellectuals chose to leave, and were transformed into the type of political actors that worried the authorities with their critical writings from abroad. The national disillusionment that had been boiling finally turned into open dissatisfaction.

The moment the two figures went into exile opened a fascinating cycle in their respective thought projects when they emerged as individual, distinctive and authoritative voices, and this was when their most noted works were written. Despite what would appear to be a clear historical causality between exile and original intellectual production, those who have looked at their thought routinely overlook this episode.³⁸⁷ This oversight usually relates to exile being a painful and usually taboo experience. The two thinkers have avoided going over this period of their lives or calling it by its name and, in return, the public has also chosen to ignore it. Furthermore, the way exile is studied often overlooks its social dimension at the expense of its

³⁸⁷ There are no chapters dealing with exile in Balqzīz, *Al-tārīkh wa al-taqaddum* (2011) or al-Kurdī, *Muḥāwarat fikr 'Abdallah al-'Arwī* (2000).

political and literary impacts. Exile was above all a displacement from a social setting, a growing distance from friends and family, a change of culture and mode of life, and must be studied as such.

Political exile also had a pejorative connotation: it was seen as the mark of individuals privileging survival over resilience and collective ideals. For each person who chose to leave, pressure would grow stronger on those who remained to uphold the struggle for freedom. In the eyes of the public, militants and the intelligentsia, it was the struggle that shaped and improved individuals rather than leading a 'convenient' life in the West. Furthermore, the distance usually turned important political leaders into irrelevant and increasingly distant voices, out of touch with reality 'on the ground', as Salah Ben Youssef and Mehdi Ben Barka found out, until they were 'dealt with', to some indifference back home.

Then again, the authorities of the two countries still chose to have these two leaders assassinated. And while Ben Barka and Ben Youssef failed to mount a successful political challenge from abroad, Bourguiba and Sultan Muhammad had returned to jubilant populations that had carried them to the head of the state, only a little over a decade previously. Closer to Laroui and Djaït were Allal al-Fassi and Abdelaziz Thaalbi, other exiled thinkers-turned-prophets. As with the last two under colonialism, it could be argued, life at home in the sixties for Laroui and Djaït became unbearable, and exile offered a temporary way out. There was more to exile than widespread devaluing social narratives, and it is worth looking at more closely.

This chapter claims that the act of departure and the experience of exile shaped the two thinkers in a crucial manner because it allowed them to realise that their difficult sixties were caused by their place in the national community. The departure, so soon after what was supposed to be their definitive return, was a traumatic event because it figuratively meant they were ripped from the community, and this act brought to the surface internal ordeals: the alienation they had been ignoring by clinging to the nationalist narrative and carving a place within the Moroccan and Tunisian intelligentsia: for Laroui and the modernist intelligentsia, the claim that Morocco's ills could be blamed on reactionary ideologies or the remnants of colonialism, and for Djaït and

the *beldi* families, the claim that there was a conspiracy against members of the old Tunis aristocracy by “jealous provincials”.

This experience also serves to explain how they were able to take critical distance from social narratives in which they were profoundly embedded. By physically removing themselves from their lives in Rabat and Tunis, that is to say the institutions and settings where ideologies took shape (the family, the university, cultural groups, journals etc.) they were able to start thinking about the meaning of their situation for themselves, rather than let the group decide. Furthermore, they could see the nationalist narrative on intellectuals for what it was: a chimera. How could such a narrative be tenable if they were pushed to leave the country despite their qualifications and willingness to be part of this future? These were painful questions that they were only able to ask because they were outside the community, and that were invisible or unfathomable to those still within it. Instead, the two intellectuals were able to freely explore other ideologies, rather than remain dependent on the state’s ideological hegemony. They benefited from the richness of the cities where they migrated, especially Paris in the late sixties, and the intellectual and cultural renewal in the Arab world where they came in contact with Arab communists and Baathists.

The condition of exile is frequently romanticised as a form of “intellectual orphanhood” with beneficial epistemological impacts, where thinkers embraced their marginality and individuation, to reach new perspectives.³⁸⁸ At first, it allowed them to express themselves freely, but soon enough, this freedom turned into another, more personal alienation: it plunged them into the deep waters where they had to confront the painful trauma that pushed them out of the country.

This chapter will look at this process of loss, recovery and stuttering of meaning in relation to exile. These were psychological (therefore immaterial) transformations that were difficult to locate. The chronology of their movements and publications offer helpful indications on the moment that constituted the turning point in their efforts to recover from the trauma of

³⁸⁸ Pels, “On the strangeness of intellectuals and the intellectuality of strangers” op. cit. 69-70; Chambers, *Migrancy, culture, identity*, 1994, 6-7, 27.

exile, and when they truly recognised its deeper ramifications. This chapter argues that it really took place during the crucial period from 1967 to 1971 for Laroui, and from 1969 to 1972 for Djaït. During this period, the two thinkers began to think critically about their place in society and outside the grand narrative. In 1971 for Laroui and in 1972 for Djaït, their publications evolved from theoretical or distant issues (Palestine and Arab unity) to national realities and the condition of intellectuals. And thus, it set in motion a process that would extend until the late seventies when they would come to terms with Maghribi realities and their place in them, back home.

1. From exile to creation

The West is used to the sad and romanticised figure of the Arab intellectual, solitarily roaming its cold streets or sitting in cafés, with a contemplative gaze or going through a newspaper looking for news about his or her country. After the Second World War and the decolonisation of the Arab world, European capitals became a refuge from persecution for Arab dissidents, be they political opponents or disillusioned academics. Writing about his experience, Lebanese-born intellectual Fouad Ajami contributes to the romanticism of Arab exile:

Arabs were on the move. There were Arabic magazines, newspapers, and publishing houses; there were restaurants that took their old names and recipes of distant places. There were writers and journalists and storytellers who took the memory of simpler times and places and worked over these memories in new, alien settings. The inheritance – the secular political idea and the dream of progress and modernity – had worn thin. [...] [In] the privacy of their own language, when westerners, Israelis, ‘enemies’, and ‘Orientalists’ were not listening in, Arabs spoke with candour.³⁸⁹

Arab exiles joined an existing world of Arabs in the West acting as a bridge between cultures, but these “*marginals* in the centre” were distinctive from the economic migrants and students

³⁸⁹ Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs*, 1998, 6.

because the conditions of their departure and their lives abroad were marked by sadness and nostalgia, which they had the means to express as writers or journalists. Moreover, exiles had a love-hate relationship with this “home” because they could not return without endangering themselves, or they could return but they would experience the same alienation and persecution that made them leave in the first place.

The experience of being uprooted and longing for a return have been expressed in a rich area of literature by people who hoped that sharing these feelings could help alleviate the pain of departure, nostalgia and cultural alienation.³⁹⁰ In this literary genre, Arab writers have made a significant contribution, especially Palestinian writers after 1948 whose home existed in the past rather than in distant physical reality, a home they had a responsibility to carry with them and recreate periodically. As literary critics such as Edward Said point out, the malaise that is expressed by exiles is not merely a reaction to cultural alienation in a new setting, but a crisis of the self, following from the painful removal from the community. Therefore, exile was a traumatic and individual experience.³⁹¹

Said wrote at length on the impact of exile on Arab intellectuals. He spoke from experience as a literary critic who was also a Palestinian exile who spent most of his life in the West. Exiles live a condition of constant estrangement from home, unable to entirely adapt to their new surroundings. In a world where national identification classifies people between ‘us’ and others, exiles find themselves banished and loitering in a space of non-existence, as their condition is not properly recognised and understood.³⁹² Under this alienating condition, culture and creation can bring exiles solace and the means to recover a dignity that was lost with their departure. Through the act of writing, they can explore and cultivate their subjectivity and ‘create’ a new home that would not be determined by their physical location.³⁹³ Some exiles compensate for their estrangement by directing their careers towards the study of what Said calls

³⁹⁰ Coulson, *Exile and migrants*, 1997; Suleiman, *Exile and creativity: signposts, travellers, outsiders, backward glances*, 1998.

³⁹¹ Said, *Reflections on exile: and other literary and cultural essays*, 2001.

³⁹² Ibid. 140.

³⁹³ Ibid. 139, 147.

‘nationalism’, in other words they work and write about the homeland such as has been the case with Middle East studies academics. This way, they can refashion their identity through a strong intellectual relationship with ‘home’ in its social, cultural, economic or political dimensions. In many cases, this salvation can turn into a defensive, jealous and self-centred posture, rejecting criticism with undue violence, such as claiming *de facto* knowledge on the basis of their origin and refusing to be questioned.³⁹⁴

But despite their achievements and the cases of apparent integration, exiles always remain aware of their difference, which, in some cases, they adopt as the main constituting element of the self:

Much of the exile’s life is taken up with compensating for [a] disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals. Each of these occupations requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill...exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference...a kind of orphanhood.³⁹⁵

Ultimately, exiles are bound to stiffen from all this estrangement. They can either openly reject their surroundings and isolate themselves, or consider it all to be temporary and bide their time. This category of exiles appear distant and constantly on the move, cultivating unbridgeable distance, what Said calls ‘narcissistic masochism’. In the best cases, exiles can develop new solidarities with people in the same condition, such as associations or political parties. Often, these reconstituted communities can lead to more myopia rather than a better understanding of their malaise.³⁹⁶ Structurally speaking, the exile cannot escape this feeling of differentiation.

Finally, he concludes, the exile’s condition is a way to think about wider processes of belonging: how they can produce marginal individuals and populations, and how modern culture

³⁹⁴ Ibid. 142.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. 142.

³⁹⁶ Ibid. 145-6.

has largely been a culture of exiles and how this poses the issue of the humanist nature of a civilisation built on the suffering of certain individuals turned into cultural creations.³⁹⁷

Said lived in the United States, where successive waves of migrants and exiles displaced by wars and where persecution had enriched the cultural landscape.³⁹⁸ In America, almost everyone came from somewhere and that society showed a greater readiness to accept new populations with their cultural differences. Europe also had a long history of population movement, but its colonial history introduced a new dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. There already existed migration routes and habits that made these former colonial subjects look towards the French capital in particular. For Maghribis, Paris brought together conflicting feelings of recovering freedom but falling into nostalgia and a convenient idealised past, while history was taking place elsewhere, and while they had deep wounds to heal. Therefore, Paris was more than a location for Arab exiles: a crucial, some would say cruel, choice these exiles had to make.

2. The Arab Paris

In the story of Arab exile, the space in which they have arrived has often had a telling impact and determined how they have dealt with the experience.

From the early 20th century, intellectuals who went to Paris discovered a particular atmosphere prone to cultural creativity and renewal. In this cultural centre, universal philosophies were enriched by intellectuals from different parts of the world, especially from the fifties and the disintegration of the French colonial empire, when its former subjects joined the capital as free individuals. Africans, Arabs and Asians came to study, to live or to evade repression, and they benefitted from the cultural renewal and enriched it in return with their concerns.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. 138, 146; Featherstone, "The spatial politics of the past unbound: transnational networks and the making of political identities" in *Global Networks*, 7:4, 2007.

³⁹⁸ Said, *Reflection on exile*, 138.

In this regard, Paris was more than France's imperial history, and there was something in the capital that made exiles drawn to it and in return, these exiles contributed to the emergence of radical ideologies of emancipation. This was, for example, where the movement of *Négritude* and Maghribi francophone literature had their shaping experiences, where the Iranian intellectual and ideologue Ali Shariati studied, met Algerian leaders of the FLN, and discovered Frantz Fanon's texts that inspired his opposition to the Shah's regime.³⁹⁹

Around this time, Paris also emerged as a large centre for Arab culture. Maud Leonhardt Santini focused on the trajectory of 'migrant-intellectuals' from the Mashriq to France where they marked their presence by opening of bookstores and publishing houses, and launching journals. The Lebanese civil war was a turning point, but it was a process that had begun earlier.⁴⁰⁰ The rise of political oppression in the Arab world turned the usually temporary migration into more extended stays: Syrian immigration to France increased about 69% from 1968 to 1975, which Santini attributes to Hafez al-Asad coming to power in November 1970.⁴⁰¹ From the French capital, these opponents would often try to maintain the struggle such as the Egyptian Marxists or opposition strands of Baathism.⁴⁰²

While Arab intellectuals appear to leave in response to political threats, another category chose to leave because of a 'suffocating atmosphere' back home. Novelists usually complained about the state, the family and religion as elements that stifled their artistic creativity.⁴⁰³ In Paris, they found the opposite: freedom of speech and a hospitable setting to explore their artistic persuasions. They could also quite easily find jobs in newspapers, which granted them a salary and an occupation similar to the field they occupied back home.⁴⁰⁴ In that regard, the weekly magazine *Jeune Afrique*'s list of contributors reads as a list of exiles at any given time, such as the Moroccan Hamid Berrada, or the Lebanese Amin Maalouf.

³⁹⁹ Wilder, *The imperial nation-state: negritude and colonial humanism between the two world wars*, 2005, 9-18, 44; Goebel, *Anti-imperial metropolis: Interwar Paris and the seeds of Third World nationalism*, 2015.

⁴⁰⁰ Santini, *Paris, Librairie Arabe*, 2003, 8-9, 12, 53-4.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. 50.

⁴⁰² Idem. See also Beinin, "exile and political activism: the Egyptian-communists in Paris" in *Diaspora*, 2:1, 1992.

⁴⁰³ Attar, "Translating the exiled self: reflections on the relationship between translation and censorship", in *Translation review*, 65:1, 2003.

⁴⁰⁴ Santini, *Paris Librairie Arabe*, 51.

The Arab Paris that Santini describes was Levantine, especially marked by a strong Lebanese presence, and many Egyptians and Syrians from the upper-middle classes who spoke French fluently and had strong bonds with the French capital. Yet in terms of numbers after the Second World War, Paris could claim to be more of a Maghribi city. For Maghribi exiles the city was just far enough to feel secure from their states' security services, but not enough to feel culturally alienated: they often already spoke the language and had lived there during their studies, and the city already contained such a large variety of Maghribi social and cultural spaces to alleviate estrangement.⁴⁰⁵

The experience of Paris was also something that a generation of younger Maghribi novelists had in common, providing the material for the emerging francophone Maghribi literature according to Najib Redouane.⁴⁰⁶ These novelists were fascinated by its cultural wealth and the freedom from social pressure that allowed them to pursue their individual sensibilities and a path towards better self-understanding.⁴⁰⁷ Exile, in this case, was not a longing for a home where the conditions of oppression would have disappeared, but a voluntary quest for differentiation from compatriots back home, as well as from people in Paris. The capital was also a dangerous place, or experience, for Maghribis. During Algeria's war of independence, the police frequently rounded up young men on the basis of their appearance and according to Jim House and Neil McMaster, this was not an isolated incident but a central element of the new strategy seeking to install a climate of fear.⁴⁰⁸ The more frequent danger they faced was the experience of racism and exclusion: however well Maghribis believe they had adapted to their Parisian life, they were eventually reminded of their difference by the unspoken obstacles for true communication with France. This was destined to provoke "malaise in the face of the oppression of the other's gaze and the anxiety faced with total indifference", all of which would breed suffering, fear, violence and hate, and turning inwards.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁵ See Blanchard, *Le Paris Arabe*, 2003; Beau, *Paris capitale arabe*, 1995.

⁴⁰⁶ Redouane, "Regards Maghrébins sur Paris" in *The French Review*, 73:6, 2000, 1079.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. 1083, referring to Abdelwahab Meddeb, *Talismano* (1979).

⁴⁰⁸ House, McMaster, *Paris 1961, Algerians, state terror and memory*, 2009.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. 1080-1. A similar process for Algerian workers migrating to France: Sayyad, *La double absence, des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*, 1999.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Paris experienced another type of Arab exile: academics who came to travel and settle in the capital and according to Thomas Brisson, Maghribis overtook their Levantine counterparts in the early sixties, working in the loosely termed discipline of ‘Orientalism’ which included literature (French or Arabic), theology, history or politics.⁴¹⁰ Several factors encouraged them to move to Paris: political oppression, censorship, poor working conditions at home, and the attractive intellectual and cultural conditions in France. At this stage, the discipline was undergoing an internal transformation as questions began to be asked about the strangeness of a discipline about the Arab world without Arab counterparts taking an active part in the production of knowledge.⁴¹¹ This appears to have favoured a recruitment drive of Arab academics who brought their concerns with them, and in the course of the next decades, the discipline’s main interests moved from philology to the humanities and social sciences.⁴¹²

Jacques Berque was himself a Maghribi in Paris, a nomadic intellectual who constantly moved between spaces and cultures. He offered a perspective on the Parisian intellectual environment from the prestigious College de France where he taught from 1956 to 1981, and where he found an intellectual community marred by rules and games. He described how he constantly felt like an outsider because he was interested in contemporary culture rather than distant and theoretical issues relating to the Islamic world. Instead of texts and philology, Berque went to the field to encounter living societies, and also became publicly engaged in the causes he felt compelled to defend: the Algerian war of independence, the deterioration of relationships with the Arab world and the Palestinian cause.⁴¹³

He wrote about the “fashionable transformations” of the intellectual circles of the Left Bank, but was left unimpressed. Paris was enthralled by the renewal of ideologies after the War, but Berque criticised structuralism for introducing doubt everywhere.⁴¹⁴ He was more interested

⁴¹⁰ Brisson, *Les intellectuels arabes en France: migrations et échanges intellectuels*, 2008, 38.

⁴¹¹ Ibid. 10.

⁴¹² Idem.

⁴¹³ Berque, *Mémoires des deux rives*, 1999, 173, 181.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. 177.

in the post-War renewal and reinterpretation of French humanism, and especially the concern for the individual as the basis of morality, rather than group institutions. It included three groups and ideologies: Marxism, Catholic Personalism and Existentialism.⁴¹⁵ Berque describe the intellectual salons that multiplied and the newfound notoriety of public thinkers, especially Jean-Paul Sartre and the group around journal *Les Temps Modernes* (“Sartre was at the centre of virtually all the major political and cultural debates, giving his forthright views on everything”).⁴¹⁶ In addition, Emmanuel Mounier’s journal *Esprit* appealed to another readership but it also contributed to this buzzing atmosphere of renewal. Foucault, Althusser and Levi-Strauss all made telling contributions to the study of human societies and in their aftermath, intellectuals of the left bank could only speak of “total hegemony”, the “alienation of modern society”, and formulate “ethnographies of daily life” and “the ordinary”.⁴¹⁷

Decolonisation and former imperial subjects brought another dimension to these debates. In Berque’s words, French intellectuals were excited and agitated by this environment in which coexisted “decolonisation, controversies on ‘ascending dialectic’ and the fashion of structuralism”.⁴¹⁸ In return, intellectuals from these regions fed on this environment and brought their aspiration for liberty.⁴¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre’s support for noble causes inspired Third World critics such as Frantz Fanon or Albert Memmi.⁴²⁰ Francois Maspero turned his publishing house into a tribune for these radical ideals where one could find side by side the books of public figures such as Malcom X and Che Guevara, academics texts from noted figures such as Pierre Vidal-Nacquet or Paul Nizan, and new voices emerging from the Third World. The famously militant publisher had a keen interest for the Maghrib, denouncing torture during the Algerian

⁴¹⁵ Forbes, Kelly, *French cultural studies: an introduction*, 1995, 110.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. 117; also Sirinelli, *Deux intellectuels dans le siècle, Sartre et Aron*, 1995.

⁴¹⁷ Wolin, *The wind from the East: French intellectuals, the cultural revolution and the legacy of the 1960s*, 2010.

⁴¹⁸ Berque, *Mémoire des deux rives*, 175.

⁴¹⁹ Di-Capua, “Arab existentialism: an invisible chapter in the intellectual history of decolonisation” op. cit. 1061.

⁴²⁰ Etherington, “An answer to the question: what is decolonisation? Frantz Fanon’s *The wretched of the earth* and Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Critique of dialectical reason*” in *Modern Intellectual History*, December 2014, 1-28.

War, but also giving Maghribi authors a chance to speak about and for their independent societies.⁴²¹

Among this constellation of intellectuals and new ideas, Abdallah Laroui and Hichem Djaït were part of a trend of disillusioned Arab intellectuals who went into a somewhat voluntary exile to find refuge from an oppressive climate and carry out their academic research. For example, the Egyptian Marxist economist Samir Amin wrote about the Third World and development from Paris and West Africa. Anouar Abdel Malek had a complicated relationship with Nasser's regime and ended up working on Arab political thought and Arab culture from Paris.⁴²² The Algerian historian Mohamed Harbi escaped from his country after 1973, following his imprisonment and house arrest by Boumedienne after the 1965 coup that deposed Ahmed Ben Bella, whose political counsellor Harbi had been. Harbi reached Paris and has since taught and written extensively on Algerian history at Parisian universities, showing that academic production can sometimes be a very personal catharsis. Meanwhile, the Berber Algerian scholar of Islamic thought Mohamed Arkoun was turned away by the authorities when he tried to return, hoping to play a role after independence, and had to fall back on the French capital. From there and other European cities, he led his reform of Islamic studies and remained estranged from his home country, until a later stage of his life. These examples, who were precursors, reveal a type of exile that was similarly motivated by academic and political concerns (and probably also a social dimension) in response to national disillusionment.

⁴²¹ Mostefa Lacheraf, *Algérie: nation et société*, 1965; Abdallah Mazouni, *Culture et enseignement en Algérie et au Maghreb*, 1969.

⁴²² Amin, *Itinéraire intellectuel*, 1990; Arkoun, *Humanisme et islam: combats et propositions*, 2005.

3. Deciding to leave into the unknown

Laroui's and Djaït's exiles placed them in the camp of undesirables: those who were accused of leaving the country while others worked for the national community and suffered from oppressive living conditions. This devaluating social narrative neglects the emotional strain and repression that predated departure. Considering the strength of the nationalist narrative, Laroui's and Djaït's decision to leave the country so shortly after their return would have been a shock and seen as a personal failure: it would neither have been simple nor spontaneous. Instead, it was a combination of factors in these perilous late sixties that convinced them that it was time to take flight.

Djaït's return to Tunisia appeared to have taken a turn for the better when he achieved notoriety and when he became known to Bourguiba in 1966; it was alluded to in an interview to Hassan Arfaoui in 1996, but the following is from Djaït's recent testimony.⁴²³ Paradoxically, this encounter with the President was also the start of his political difficulties. Djaït indicates that he wrote an extremely critical article in *Jeune Afrique* about "personalised political power" (*le pouvoir personnel*), on the excesses of Arab leaders in the Arab world. It was reminiscent of Béchir Ben Yahmed and Mohamed Masmoudi's article in 1961 after the Bizerte crisis, when the two younger collaborators publicly criticised Bourguiba's reckless decision making during the crisis, which led to the two having to leave the country.⁴²⁴ Bourguiba, and the Tunisian elites were avid readers of *Jeune Afrique* and unsurprisingly, Bourguiba summoned Djaït. The young historian defended himself by explaining how the article was about Mashriqi republics and not Tunisia. Later after the air was cleared, Djaït was again summoned to the Presidential palace but this time, he was offered the position of official historiographer and tasked with writing the history of the national movement. In reality, this meant that Djaït would have to write a legitimising historian's narrative for Bourguiba and the neo-Destour, and he would have been, of course,

⁴²³ Arfaoui, "Entretien avec Hichem Djaït", 1997, 29.

⁴²⁴ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 265-271, 275-6.

handsomely rewarded (both materially speaking and with public recognition). Against all odds, he decided to decline this offer because he felt that “it was not compatible with the strong conception of the historian’s function” and the notion of academic independence from politics. He was still disinterested in political favours, but the young historian did not realise how insensitive it would be to refuse such an *honour* from the President, which was in fact an attempt at co-opting a young historian who had proved he could write to foreign audiences and potentially damage Tunisia’s image.⁴²⁵

The article that Djaït referred is essential in corroborating this version of his difficulty, but it could not be located in *Jeune Afrique* (nor in the bibliography of *L’Annuaire de l’Afrique du Nord*). Instead, another one was found, a couple of months later, that was just as virulent and indicative of Djaït’s state of mind and difficult integration, but it was directed at the Tunisian elite: “*les arrivistes sont arrivés*”, he wrote, as he went to depict the new rules of social behaviour and power that were rampant across Africa and the Arab world. The newly independent societies were full of obscene sights: “the rat race for positions and favours, for example, attest to a strangely virulent form of careerism”; but the word Djaït used (*arrivisme*) was violent and degrading and contrasted with Djaït’s view of the pride of the Arab in the past: “ambition has overcome self-esteem... this change is a reflection of spinelessness, cowardice and rot”. Instead, one had to be careful “not to parade one’s university degrees in order to appease sensitivities”, and instead “be moderately intelligent and quite docile” to hope to be promoted or respected. If the personal nature of these descriptions had not been clear enough, Djaït closed his article by indicating that he was faced with “a genuine malaise because of the infantilisation of minds [...] the authentic intellectual in the Third World cannot avoid solitude, anger and suffering”, and insisted on the need to be critical in order to support the positive transformations the national project was having on Tunisia, namely its modernisation and the emergence of a strong national consciousness.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ Interview, February 2015. Djaït used the word *takrim*. Eventually, the task was given to Ahmed Kassab, an academic who was not a historian: Ahmed Kassab, *L’époque contemporaine*, Tunis, 1976.

⁴²⁶ Djaït, “Tiers Monde: les arrivistes sont arrivés” in *JA*, 30 April 1967, 57.

The following months would show what poor strategic planning Djaït had made by refusing to carry out Bourguiba's request, and then, openly shaming the Tunisian elite in Paris. Soon after these events, the regime repressed students and intellectual movements in a hard a swift move, especially targeting *Perspectives* members and Baathist groups. Urban agitation had reached new heights, first after the 1967 riots in Tunis: after the Arab defeat in June 1967, scores of protesters descended on Tunis downtown that quickly escalated and overwhelmed security forces. It spread across town to Jewish quarters and caused damage to western diplomatic missions.⁴²⁷ Bourguiba was angered and ordered the dismissal of the chief of police and a crackdown against protesters. Resentment had been building up in student quarters against poor education provisions and the impression that state authorities had little regard for the younger generation. State officials were often found saying that students were privileged to study for free and receive stipends, and therefore should not be critical or cause any trouble. Ahmed Ben Salah replaced Messaadi as the new Minister of Education due to student troubles. He tried to calm things down by speaking directly to student organisations, and portrayed himself to be different from the gerontocracy and sensitive to their feelings, but he was also constrained by tight budgets and a long list of necessary reforms.⁴²⁸

The climate of urban agitation maintained by *Perspectives* members had been broadly tolerated, but in 1968, according to then Head of National Security Tahar Belkhodja, they decided these "kids had to be disciplined" because of how badly it reflected on Tunisia rather than because these "idealists" posed any real danger.⁴²⁹ In a virulent public speech on television, Bourguiba ordered these "kids" to be disciplined, and so they were. The authorities launched a large arrest-campaign, especially among the academic and student population. Mass trials were organised and the accused received arbitrary and lengthy sentences in a blatantly political

⁴²⁷ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 2012, 317.

⁴²⁸ Adam, "Chronique sociale et culturelle Tunisie" in *AAN*, 1968, 293-6.

⁴²⁹ Belkhodja, *Les trois décennies Bourguiba*, 2010, 98-9 ; it contradicts other accounts that protesters left considerable physical damage to properties and public spaces, raising the possibility that the state might be seen as incapable of keeping order.

affair.⁴³⁰ As Omri argues, the arrests and trials of 1968 left a lasting impact on social memory and fuelled later cultural creation: in the novel *Zahrat al-Sabbar* (published in 1991, but written in 1984-5), the account of the 1968 reveals the growing rift between members of a single family. According to the father, these were “a bunch of kids whom we teach and spend money on only to see them bite the hands that fed them”; whereas the uncle justifies the demands made by students: “A seeker of knowledge. Demanding a fight. Demanding the release of Ben Jannet who was sentenced to 20 years of hard labour. Demand that Mr Humphrey [American Secretary of State] leaves the Tunisian soil immediately...”.⁴³¹

When Bourguiba went on television to admonish the protesters in 1968, he named Hichem Djaït as the movement’s leader. The young historian denies having been implicated with these protests nor involved with this movement. There is little evidence that he was a member of the movement, let alone its leader, because he is not mentioned by *Perspectivistes* in their memoirs, nor was he part of the same generation and he did not share the same ideological leanings. Later, Djaït suspected that Bourguiba saw these protests as a movement of disaffected and unaligned academics, and naturally lumped them all together: “He did not know them, but he knew me, so automatically in his mind, he thought I was their leader”.⁴³² However, these complaints fell on deaf ears: once Bourguiba had publicly named him, members of the regime went after him. Eventually, they came up with a fabricated sex scandal, for which he was tried and shamed publicly. According to Djaït, the aim was to soil his family name rather than to send him to jail, because Tunisian society’s interest in rumours and scandals would put a perpetual stigma on him, and by extension on the *beldi* and religious aristocracy as a whole. After a painful and disheartening trial, he was declared innocent but the experience left him profoundly hurt, especially by the fact that the authorities would stoop so low.⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Comité international pour la sauvegarde des droits de l’homme en Tunisie, *Liberté pour les condamnés de Tunis: vérité sur la répression en Tunisie*, Maspéro, 1969.

⁴³¹ Translated by Omri in “The movement Perspectives : legacies and representations” in *EurOrient*, (38) 2012, 155.

⁴³² Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

⁴³³ *Idem*.

In the meantime, the atmosphere in Tunis had worsened considerably. News of the arrests and accounts of torture were spoken about, while police surveillance became part of everyday life, especially on University campuses. No one felt entirely immune from denunciation; after all, many *Perspectivistes* had family members in the regime, and they were still arrested and tried with the rest.⁴³⁴ Life worsened for these academics who saw their friends in jail and who began to question the purpose of their efforts as the state turned on them. With those feelings in mind, during the summer of 1969, four young historians decided to leave the country, including Hichem Djaït (the others were Hamadi Cherif, Khalid Belkhouja and Mounira Ramadi-Chapputot). In one go, the country lost some of its brightest elements.⁴³⁵ Djaït decided to return to Paris, his wife's hometown, where she could easily find a job as an *agrégé* in modern languages. There, he expected to spend some time and maybe find a short-term teaching job thanks to his old professors, but he mostly thought he would leave the country for a while, waiting for the storm to pass. While the decision appeared to be voluntary, he was pushed towards the exit by the deteriorating climate and fears of retribution. And while he did not intend to leave for so long, in 1969, there was no telling what his departure would bring.

The circumstances of Laroui's departure in 1967 have more to do with his inability to find his place in Morocco during the sixties and a sudden opportunity to explore a new part of the world, rather than being pushed out of the country like Djaït. He was indeed disheartened by the deteriorating political climate and the events of 1965, and failed continuously to acclimate to the humanities faculty, and remained withdrawn that time. The Arab defeat in 1967 proved a game changer and a wake-up call to deep personal issues he had to investigate.

Less than a month after his book's release in May 1967, Israel made a surprise attack against neighbouring Arab armies, scored a resounding victory, and turned the Palestinian issue into a greater tragedy by capturing more lands and creating more refugees. Laroui was devastated by these events. His entries during the war carried an emotionally distressed tone, and Laroui

⁴³⁴ Chouikha, "Evoquer la mémoire politique dans un contexte autoritaire: 'l'extrême gauche' tunisienne entre mémoire du passé et identité présente" in *L'Année du Maghreb*, (VI) 2010.

⁴³⁵ Mohamed Talbi, the most senior historian stayed in Tunis.

depicted the defeat as an Arab catastrophe with existentialist repercussions. His first entry on the 8 June from Casablanca depicts the dramatic risks faced by the Arab world of the return of western imperialism, with Egypt and Israel acting as American satellites.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, the defeat uncovered the sham of Arab unity, and Laroui was critical of Nasser, judging him to have placed Egyptian interests over the Arabs'.⁴³⁷ He also reserved several passages for the West's posture (complicity with the Israeli aggression), and French media bias.⁴³⁸ On a personal level, this war and its political repercussions came at a particularly opportune time, validating his thesis on the tragic state of Arab ideology as expressed in his essay *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine* (1967). He came to be seen as one of the most lucid commentators of the Arab world's reality and was invited to take part in a special number of *Les Temps Modernes* on the Arab-Israeli conflict, in the part reserved for 'Arab contributions'. One observer described him in the following (somewhat patronising) terms: "Abdallah Laroui, a young professor at the humanities faculty in Rabat who became known with a smart essay, illustrating the inner rift experienced by westernised Arab intellectuals."⁴³⁹ Despite this kind of portrayal, Laroui's name had become famous in a short span of time, and opportunities began to open up for him. Thanks to such positive reviews and word to mouth, Gustav Von Grunebaum, who was head of the Near Eastern department at UCLA, learned of his existence and decided to offer him a post as an assistant professor; Laroui tentatively accepted. He speculated that the Austrian orientalist would have heard of his work from many sources since "he knew everything and everybody, from Cairo to Paris, from Vienna to New York".⁴⁴⁰

But all of this probably happened before the war, because the Arab defeat and the following political developments made him reconsider the offer. On the 11 June, barely a day after the end of the Six Days war, he registered two entries in his diary: first, a critical and lengthy letter to Jean-Paul Sartre, where he denounced the French intellectual's support for the Zionist cause, a

⁴³⁶ Laroui, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ* (1967-1973), 8.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. 7.

⁴³⁸ Ibid. 10-11, 19-20.

⁴³⁹ Feuer, Review "Sartre (Jean-Paul) ed. – Le conflit israélo-arabe. Dossier" in *Revue Française de science politique*, (18:1) 1968, 153.

⁴⁴⁰ Gallagher, "Life and times of Laroui", 139.

few months after touring the Arab world with Simone de Beauvoir, and receiving a statesman-like welcome and visit in Egypt.⁴⁴¹ He also wrote a shorter message to Von Grunebaum:

To Von Grunebaum

Politics is our destiny. It controls us but we have no effect on it. I see myself forced not to travel. I am aware that the atmosphere in America is dark from what I read in the newspapers. Considering my opinions I do not see it as appropriate for me to be in the United States a few weeks after [the war], considering the current atmosphere!⁴⁴²

This was a dramatic U-turn. Impulsively, Laroui threw away his ticket to Parisian fame, and was ready to turn his back on his Californian opportunity, in a manner that is difficult to understand outside of emotion having taken over his judgement. Later, he said that he had been “on the verge of refusing the invitation” and had eventually accepted, and his diary entries barely explain what made him reconsider.⁴⁴³

In the following weeks of July and August, he reported very little or nothing at all, and this is surely when the emotional temperature fell. What took place in the following weeks? The absence of entries in his diary on the domestic situation certainly makes it harder to trace his chain of thought, but was most likely the stark reminder of the situation in Morocco that tipped the balance, along with his wife’s encouragements to accept the offer in order to explore this exciting new life in America.

The intensity of his reaction on Palestine was perhaps a displacement of engagement, conscious or unconscious, from domestic politics and the expression of another type of malaise. The summer break turned Rabat into an artificially calm city, after the capital had seen long months of student protests on campuses. Under the state of emergency, the security apparatus “ensured” peace and quiet in the cities, while targeting the very few remaining outspoken opposition figures, such as syndicalist leader Mahjoub Ben Seddiq.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, he would

⁴⁴¹ “A few weeks before the 1967 War, Sartre signed a pro-Israeli manifesto denouncing Arab aggression” in Di-Capua, “Arab existentialism” op. cit. 1088.

⁴⁴² Laroui, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ* (1967-1973), 17

⁴⁴³ Gallagher, “Life and times of Laroui”, 139.

⁴⁴⁴ Le Tourneau, “Chronique politique”, *AAN*, 1967, 302.

have realised that Morocco's conduct towards the Arab defeat of 1967 was far below what he expected. At first, the authorities declared their full support for the Arab cause, but Arab countries quickly split along ideological lines and Morocco was among the conservatives.⁴⁴⁵ Istiqlal used this opportunity to fire up its supporters and denounced Zionism with such vigour that anti-Jewish riots took place across the country, even leading to assassinations of Moroccan Jews. The Council of Ministers met on the 15 June calling for calm and measures to protect the integrity of all its nationals, and sanctioned the seizing of Istiqlal's newspapers for inciting riots. The council added that collusion with Zionism would lead to deprivation of nationality. On television, Hassan II declared that "the best help we can give them is to remain a country where order and stability are in place, a country that has adopted its positions as it should and assumed its responsibilities, a country where the state and the population are aware of their duties to maintain order and the state's task to run public affairs".⁴⁴⁶ These reactions would have been depressing and contrasting with his earlier passions.

After the interruption of July and August, Laroui returned to his diary with a single line, with no specific date and just the following: "Travel to Tunisia... grief and pain".⁴⁴⁷

In Tunisia, he met with his fellow academics, old friends from Paris, lectured to Tunisian students, and travelled around the country; it felt like a goodbye tour. Suddenly, on 10 October, Laroui described in minute detail his arrival in Los Angeles with his wife, his encounter with the welcoming party and his amazed first impressions. The writing tone was stunningly different.⁴⁴⁸

Everything from the sudden recovered optimism to the broken stream of reporting between Casablanca, Tunis and Los Angeles raises questions, especially on the reasons for the sudden reversal of his stance on relocating to the United States. Did impulse decision-making give way to a more measured stance? What seemed to have tipped the balance, on the basis of his entries and blanks during the summer, was the combination of dismay at the June *naksa*, along with the deteriorating political situation at home that showed no prospect of improvement. With work at

⁴⁴⁵ Bahri, "Le conflit israélo-arabe vu du Maghreb" in *Revue Française de Sciences Politiques*, (16:4) 1966.

⁴⁴⁶ Cited in: Chagnollaude, *Maghreb et Palestine*, 1977, 142.

⁴⁴⁷ Laroui, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ* (1967-1973), 23: Laroui uses the powerful words of *Ġam* and *'alam*.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. 25.

University at a standstill because of incessant strikes, the opportunity to collect the fruits of his successful essay and go work in California was too good to let pass. What he did not appear to realise or openly admit to himself in October 1967 was that this was not just a move for academic purposes, but also an exile to a distant place. In October 1967, Laroui found himself in California as an Arab exile exploring a new frontier.

4. Life in exile: from idleness to self-criticism

Exile was neither the end of the story, nor a clean start to another for Laroui and Djaït. During the first period of their new lives, their writings did not address the effects of the painful departure. The unspoken, or even dormant trauma they carried in their suitcases from Rabat and Tunis to California and Paris grew heavier the more it was ignored. In this section, I consider their conditions of life in exile until the moment they confronted this trauma.

In California, Laroui was taken under Von Grunebaum's wing and introduced to Middle Eastern studies that he found strangely lacking in an 'Arab' presence, by which he meant Muslim Arabs, considering he encountered mostly Iranians, Jews and Christian Arabs. Furthermore, he did not find a tangible effect from the Arab defeat, or the political upheavals that ensued in Rabat and the rest of the Arab world.⁴⁴⁹ During his first months, he was busy settling in and was fascinated by his surroundings, which he described in detail. He was particularly struck by America's material modernity (cars, roads, buildings etc.) and the racial element of its society's organisation. He began noting the characteristics of the American political system under the Johnson and Nixon presidencies, the war in Vietnam, the inter-generational fracture of American society and the rise of counter-culture. On campus, he witnessed student activism against the interventions in Vietnam and Cambodia, and Robert Kennedy's assassination. He began teaching in a new language and a different academic tradition, finding it interesting how many of his

⁴⁴⁹ 16 October 1967. Ibid. 26-27.

students had personal reasons to want to study the Arab world. At UCLA, Laroui taught the Maghrib's history and the history of Arab-European relations to American students. His narrative also contains a variety of entries on the people in his department, in professional or social settings. From his new life, the Arab world began to disappear from his diary and from his concerns, at least on the surface. In fact, the 'old world' and its concerns were physically and emotionally far away, as shown by the way he learned with indifference about the May 1968 student protests in Paris from a two day old *Le Monde* article.

Laroui's new life was largely uneventful. It contrasted with the storm of his departure, and the one taking place in the Arab world. In California, Laroui became a father, and became the Jean-Jacques Rousseau of *Réveries du promeneur solitaire*, mellowing in an artificial idleness masking a violent, repressed and internal commotion. The following passage is from early 1970:

I spent the morning visiting Berkeley's campus. I saw the famous tower, the Greek theatre built by William Randolph Hearst, a model of Orson Welles's citizen Kane [...] from the outside, nothing distinguishes this campus from that of UCLA [...] Nikki Keddie, who teaches Iran's modern history in Los Angeles, assured me that southern California's climate is not conducive to intellectual labour, and that it is rare for a professor to produce something of any value, unless if it has been prepared elsewhere and for a long time.⁴⁵⁰

Such passages from his diary in exile reveal that Laroui might have been avoiding a painful confrontation with the traumatic experience of departure and its meaning: first, the pain of being uprooted, and also what it meant for him as a Moroccan in relation to Moroccan society. The avoidance may have been involuntary, but it was certainly a consequence of his decision to dive into his work and start assimilating to his Californian surroundings.

But his experience of exile began to change when his wife went back to live in Paris with their son, and Laroui was confronted with his solitude and the realisation that despite this new life and academic success, he was still dissatisfied. Suddenly, in May 1970, his diary announces he made a drastic decision: it was time to leave California. His decision appeared set in stone,

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. 81-3.

and he began to detach himself from the life he had spent the past three years building. The personal and the professional were intertwined: during one of his wife and son's visits, he told them about his decision, and despite Von Grunebaum's protestation, he was resolved to leave:

7th of May: Latifa left Los Angeles for New York and then Paris. Did she consent or get angry? She saw this reality and realised it was not what she had imagined. It had been possible, a very likely possibility, for us to settle and live a very ordinary existence [...] however, the decision to return was made and there is no need for procrastination. I know one day she will ask: who did you consult with?⁴⁵¹

He formalised his departure as quickly and seamlessly as he had prepared for his arrival in the first place. On the 18 June he flew back to Morocco and immediately went to work, translating his essay on Arab ideology into Arabic and supervising the publication of *L'histoire du Maghreb*, his second book. He also attended the important conference on Arab renaissance that was held in the Louvain University in Belgium that summer, organised by Anouar Abdelmalek, Hassan Hanafi and Abdelaziz Belal.⁴⁵² This was a significant event, in great part because of the composition of its attendees: there were around fifty Arab scholars or intellectuals, many living in the region, and three years after the Arab defeat this was a golden opportunity to start thinking critically about the state of the Arab world and promote the emergence of new fields of thought and research. Laroui spoke about tradition and traditionalisation in Morocco, announcing his future area of interest.

After that initial flurry of events, it was quiet again in Rabat. It was so quiet that six months after his return, Laroui eventually began to think about the reasons and circumstances of his departure:

20 January, Rabat: Why did I leave America? I ask this question because over here, work is at a standstill. Student protests are nearly constant [...] So I ask again: why did I leave America? Why was I not able to stay in California? To stay in California meant not returning. There are, of course frequent charter flights carrying academics every summer to Europe. However, I have witnessed what happens to Copts, Baha'is and Jews who

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. 88.

⁴⁵² Ibid. 90-6.

turned California into their nation and forgot their country of origin. I left in order not to cut the cord with Morocco... to stay there, one would have to change lifestyles, to change language, mentality and, unconsciously, to end up saying: “We, Americans”.⁴⁵³

Closing on a self-humouring note, Laroui wrote that constant student protests had a silver lining, because it meant he never had any students to teach and could spend that time in the archives.⁴⁵⁴

Despite having returned to Morocco, Laroui was still not at ease with his condition, which would indicate he still had to resolve the issues that made him leave the country three years earlier. The difference, this time was that he appeared ready to confront the sources of his predicament rather than displace them onto distant concerns. The answers to this puzzle are found in his novel *al-Ghurba* published in 1971 and presumably written during that first year after his return and around that earlier-cited entry from 20 January 1971. This was his first major publication in Arabic, and therefore of a more personal nature than his previous publications with Maspéro. Also, this was the first time he wrote something that directly addressed his condition as an exile.

Djaït went into exile two years after Laroui, and chose Paris for several practical reasons, but nostalgia also played a part. The French capital appealed to him as a city of intellectual freedom, cultural richness but also anonymity. He soon realised that returning to Paris was a step into the unknown, and that the reality of exile proved different to his expectations.

His wife quickly found a teaching job, and Djaït’s plan was to teach Medieval Islamic history:

Where I wanted to land, considering my past as a *normalien*, was there [*Ecole Normale Supérieure*]: there were my former teachers, and LeGoff in particular who at the time directed the EHESS; but I think that LeGoff was not really interested in my [works of] thought. He was a solid and real academic who did not leave that “arena”.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Ibid. 99-100.

⁴⁵⁴ Idem.

⁴⁵⁵ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

As had been his habit in Tunis, Djaït was reading and thinking about issues that interested him, and in this case the idea of Arab unity. He presented his critical ideas at the Louvain conference on Arab renaissance, formulating a “critique of Arab unity”, reaching the important conclusion that:

The current issue Arab political thought faces today is how to conciliate the restricted national form and the aspiration for unity. Otherwise, and if the current situation persists, we will enter a prolonged period of mediocrity and regression, where our leaders might still brandish “Arab unity” as a ghost, to feed a dream that is equally useful and unachievable.⁴⁵⁶

He published the text of that intervention in the prestigious journal *Esprit* in 1971 (and also in 1972 in the collected volume from the conference). In the margins, he explained that in Louvain, he was met with sharp reactions, presumably from the audience of Arab nationalists, and globally “the quality of discussion did not measure up to written contributions”; he described the atmosphere as such:

A revolutionary conformism reigned over the assembly from the start that one should not disagree with... I did it, not out of hostility toward these ideas but as a duty for truth and lucidity. I must admit that the *committed* and non-academic of the event did not displease me... but Arab intellectuals still have a lot to learn, and that also applies to me.⁴⁵⁷

In the process, he took stock of the way Arab authoritarian regimes stifle intellectuals and their difference of opinion (most young Arab scholars in attendance came from the region and repeated the same modes of thought), imposing unanimity and “mediocrity”, and appear content with being in the West, where such an event was able to take place.⁴⁵⁸ Yet, despite his participation and high-level publication, it still did not help him secure a post.

⁴⁵⁶ Djaït, “Problématique et critique de l’idée d’unité arabe” in Abdelmalek, Belal, Hanafi, *Renaissance du monde arabe*, 1972, 398.

⁴⁵⁷ Djaït, “Problématique et critique de l’idée d’unité arabe” in *Esprit*, 1971. At Louvain, he spoke in a panel alongside Boutros Boutros Ghali who went on to become United Nations Secretary General in the 1990s.

⁴⁵⁸ *Idem*.

Rather than settling in seamlessly, Djaït ended up moving between small teaching assignments and research jobs, and he lived in straitened material circumstances. He “pestered Claude Cahen” to the point that he was given a one-year lectureship at the Sorbonne. Then, Fernand Braudel hired him as associate-researcher at the CNRS, France’s state research institution. Occasionally, he carried out paid research assignments for UNESCO, thanks to his contacts within the organisation. None of this was what he expected, and he was left frustrated by this precariousness.

As for the reasons behind his failure to secure a lasting job, Djaït could only venture a guess:

I had abandoned my thesis ... and the thesis was the key to entering the University. And you should keep in mind that I am Tunisian, and at the time it was unlikely that a Tunisian would become a professor or a director of studies at EHESS.⁴⁵⁹

Djaït referred to the institutional prejudice against Maghribis from those who were born and lived with French empire in the Arab world and still considered these populations to be inferior despite their equal qualifications and brilliance. Even with his *agrégation*, Djaït was a Tunisian and could not teach in the *grandes écoles*. There were several instructors from the Arab world in the capital at the time, but they were language instructors, and the Sorbonne and ENS were bastions of conservatism in the academic world.

When it came to his merit, Djaït believed he had done enough to secure some form of academic recognition as a young historian following the publication in 1967 and 1968 of an extensive two-part study of the governorate of Ifriqiya in the 8th century, in the prestigious journal *Studia Islamica*.⁴⁶⁰ The research on Tunisian medieval history began back in Tunis, and he contributed to the foundational volume *Histoire de la Tunisie: Le Moyen Age*, published in 1970 and coordinated by Mohamed Talbi. His article argued for the need to write this province’s history as its own entity rather than dependent on the Caliph’s decisions from the Egyptian Wilaya, since it was autonomous in several political and social matters in exchange for a regular

⁴⁵⁹ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

⁴⁶⁰ Djaït, “La wilaya d’Ifriqiya au IIe/VIIIe siècle: étude institutionnelle” in *Studia Islamica*, 27, 1967, and 28, 1968.

tax payment, and arguing that the Arab factor of influence on the state structure was greater than the Byzantine, thus challenging a precept of orientalist scholarship.⁴⁶¹

His proposal was an innovative approach but it would have antagonised the establishment by changing the way the region was seen and because he was a newcomer with no credentials who made such big claims with a daring attitude. He also challenged the interpretation of sources on this issue, and found proof of Ifriqiya's autonomy in the correspondence between its Wali and the Caliph.⁴⁶² While such a daring approach had served him well in Tunis, where his French qualifications meant he was listened to, in this new environment it merely provoked antagonism from the rigid community of scholars. With the failure to secure a long-term appointment, he put his research on medieval history on hold.

Djaït's inability to succeed in his efforts to gain scholarly recognition was the final straw, and it forced him to question the deeper causes behind his failure to join the circle of medievalist historians in Paris. He encountered a hierarchical and patriarchal setting that he knew and understood, he spoke the best French possible, studied in the best schools, married a French spouse and even lived like a Frenchman. That was still not enough, and he was unable to feel properly at home in an environment that made him feel like a foreigner. He left Tunis to improve his condition, but back there, he had a stable and respectable job, and a symbolic status in society. Instead, in Paris his life was one of precariousness and he faced institutional discrimination. He was forced to reconsider the deeper causes that led to his exile. That was when, I believe, he began to let go of the myth he carried with him from Tunisia. People from his social group believed in a conspiracy orchestrated by the country's new rulers that targeted the sons of the old bourgeoisie out of jealousy and spite. In Paris, such a narrative would have become untenable, and he would have realised that the world of his father and of his family was passing away: the world in which this social group had an expectation of entitlement. It took the pain of being in exile to come to terms with this situation.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. 105-6.

⁴⁶² Ibid. 80-82, 85-6.

At this point, Djaït dropped his social belonging as the aspect of self-definition, and began a quest for another aspect of self-definition from the intellectual climate in the capital. For him, being an intellectual was more than an occupation but a matter of self-identification. While he read extensively from the moment he arrived in Paris, it now became his purpose rather than something he did to occupy himself:

I was only interested in just that: reading and writing. I got rid of everything relating to Tunisia... in its closed and restricted dimensions, and the family pressure lying at the back, not only my father's. I was able to blossom intellectually, that I can say.⁴⁶³

He took advantage of the cultural atmosphere in the capital by exploring the various ideological groups, and through that, the exploration of the contours of his personality in an exile that now had a purpose. As he later affirmed, this rich intellectual atmosphere was instrumental in what he wrote and the confrontation of his exilic malaise.⁴⁶⁴

His first circle was the group of the journal *Esprit*, to which he had access through his friendship with Jean-Marie Domenach, its editor in chief.⁴⁶⁵ *Esprit* was one of the two best-known journals of philosophy and culture in post-war France, and it was the tribune for the “Catholic personalism” ideology, a dimension of social Catholicism, but not a confessional publication. Djaït came to Domenach’s attention in 1966 when he wrote his short article about the modernisation of Islamic thought in *Al-Fikr* and through IBLA’s director, Jean Fontaine, who knew both men.

When Djaït arrived in Paris, he began to follow what this group did and joined it “not only in writing” but also during editorial meetings and on social occasions. At that point, Domenach was “the one who asked me to write a book”, on the basis of that article from 1966, and offered to publish it with the prestigious Le Seuil. It is no wonder the group’s philosophy attracted Djaït the most, since he came from a family of religious scholars, and he was a philosophy student. Domenach also became something of a mentor for Djaït, after he had been disappointed by his

⁴⁶³ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

⁴⁶⁴ Idem.

⁴⁶⁵ Domenach was the journal’s editor since 1956, and a director at the Le Seuil publishing house.

former professors' lack of support. They both shared a similar profile: Domenach was a fellow *normalien* from Lyon (therefore from the province, and not the secluded social circles of the capital) and someone willing to speak up for his ideals (he fought in the French *Resistance* and spoke against torture in Algeria). He defended a balanced and rigorous type of thought, while also staying away from the siren calls of the more fashionable movements of the Left Bank.

His second important circle consisted of orientalist and historians, though his relationship with these people was more hierarchical and resentful. He considered them to be his colleagues who worked on the same issues and whom he encountered or read regularly: Jacques Berque, who was cited earlier; Jean Lacouture who wrote about the Maghrib's decolonisation; Claude Cahen, the medieval Orientalist historian who trained many Tunisian historians; Jacques LeGoff, the noted medievalist from the *Annales* school; Fernand Braudel, another founder of the *Annales* school who wrote about Mediterranean history, and many others. There was another figure which Djaït barely evokes despite the similarity of their concerns and profiles: Mohamed Arkoun, who was an Algerian academic trained in French schools and universities and who managed to penetrate this closed environment and gain recognition in the French capital: he lectured at the Sorbonne from 1961 to 1969, and became editor in chief of *Arabica* in 1980; Arkoun was a brilliant Algerian Berber who stayed in France after his *agrégation* and slowly climbed the different steps, and his fate contrasts with Djaït's struggles to secure academic appointment.⁴⁶⁶ Djaït remained more of an outsider in this circle that was more of a loose collection of individuals rather than a tight unit.

The Tunisian also evokes his compatriots in Paris, though he was keen to emphasise that it was not any kind of Tunisians, but the advanced students who studied philosophy. His selectiveness also led him to steer clear of Tunisians who might be linked to the regime, though he did have a close relationship with Ahmed Ounaies, a young diplomat from the embassy in Paris with whom he spoke regularly about politics and whom he considered to be a friend (which does not entirely discount the possibility of the state keeping soft tabs on him). Finally, Djaït

⁴⁶⁶ It is said there was animosity between the two individuals, and considering the small environment of *Islamisant* scholars, their paths would have crossed repeatedly.

maintained some friendships with a variety of people who shared a similar profile and condition: Arabs or people from the Islamic world who were either in exile or working in Paris. He developed a close friendship with two people from UNESCO, an Afghan and an Iranian he described as very cultured people. He met with Baathists from Iraq and Syria, but he claims not to have been particularly endeared to them on a personal level.

There are two striking characteristics in the company that Djaït kept: first, he avoided restricting himself to the group of disillusioned exiles (as many Arabs in Paris did) to avoid an inward-looking perspective and the inability to get over the trauma and nostalgia. Secondly, his circle of acquaintance was mostly apolitical and he steered clear of Tunisian politics.

But there was one exception. At the Louvain conference Hichem Djaït and Abdallah Laroui met for the first time. And from then onwards, the Tunisian and the Moroccan met each time Laroui was in town for lengthy and fascinating discussions that Djaït later evoked fondly. Laroui's wife had relocated to Paris and the outskirts of Geneva in the early seventies because of sickness, so these conversations were probably regular occurrences.

These Parisian meetings were when the two mirrored historical trajectories intersected and as luck would have it, it was at a turning point in both their lives just as they were about to confront the deeper trauma of exile, and the risks of being left without another narrative to fill the void. Laroui was in Morocco, while Djaït finally came to terms with his condition. From then, both thinkers found in the act of writing a constitutive action for the self, and a way to address the disillusion of independence.

5. The text and the trauma

After the turn to violence in 1965 in Morocco and 1968 in Tunisia, the situation looked dire with the risk being that discontent would spread and the country descend into chaos. In Tunisia, shortly after student repression, reports of peasant protests reached the capital against Ben Salah's land collectivisation. Inside the regime, a group of 'liberals' began to oppose the powers of the 'super-Minister' and Bourguiba's absolute trust in him; Ahmed Mestiri became the figurehead of this movement against Ben Salah. Mestiri and all those critical of the President were excluded from the PSD but, soon enough, Bourguiba decided to cease the socialist experiment. Ben Salah was first dismissed from his posts, and then tried for having "deceived the President". The whole affair was a great debacle and it worsened his health issues, after which he left for lengthy medical treatments abroad.⁴⁶⁷

These conditions could have had dramatic consequences for the country, but instead, the authorities took control over the situation by releasing some pressure. Similarly in Morocco, the increasing tension that rose from the closure of the political system, rampant repression and corruption scandals had worsened the atmosphere until the King narrowly escaped two assassination attempts in 1971 and 1972. Again, the situation did not degenerate and the regime slowly recovered full control using a combination of repression, tighter control of the public sphere, and astute statesmanship. In the seventies, the economy even began to improve significantly and the regimes found they still had the support of the majority.⁴⁶⁸

For the two exiles looking at how their countries continued to function despite these dangers, the repercussions would have been difficult to accept: despite the absence of democracy life went ahead ordinarily to the point that it became harder for intellectuals to believe that their countries needed them. On the other hand, this was probably one of the push factors that was needed to envisage the deep sources of their condition.

⁴⁶⁷ Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia*, 155, 157-8.

⁴⁶⁸ Pennell, *History of Morocco since 1830*, 331-3.

Each intellectual adopted a different strategy, but in both cases it was turning point because they realised that what had made them miserable was their place in the national community. Laroui confronted his national disillusion in his writing by recognising how he felt he had missed a historic chance to be part of independent Morocco. Meanwhile, in his exploration of new readings, Djaït discovered Michel Aflaq's writings on Arab renaissance, and they gave him a greater utopia that he could believe in, despite this ideology being on the wane in the Mashriq. Each in their own way, they resolved their trauma they carried since the late sixties.

In 1971, a large book was published with a telling title: *Rêver de la Tunisie*. It was part of a collection by Vilo, a publishing house specialised in travel books and photography; a year earlier, they published the equivalent on Morocco by Moroccan novelist Ahmed Sefrioui. The book contained pictures and descriptive text, and it was destined for French audiences by showing them a combination of the timeless character of this country while also showcasing its modern transformations that made it an ideal tourist destination. What was particular about this book was that Hichem Djaït put it together: an academic who was estranged from Tunisia. Considering when it was published, the likeliest explanation was that he took this assignment for financial reasons rather than the intellectual challenge. From another perspective, and going back to what Edward Said wrote about estrangement, writing such a book should be seen as a way to reconcile with Tunisia and by discovering another reality outside of the authoritarian politics and the toxic social dimensions. Thanks to this convenient marker, we can pinpoint the moment Djaït reignited his interest in Tunisia, and began to return from exile.

From 1972, his daily routine had changed especially when he interrupted his historical research. He addressed the void differently: "I began to write and I already had in mind what I wanted to say. I was already reading a lot, but it was in Paris that I plunged into it wholly, and did nothing else".⁴⁶⁹ His readings at the time may have seemed scattered and they included Freud, Adler, Jung and Kardiner; but there was a purpose for them:

⁴⁶⁹ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

It was probably also a form of self-analysis. I did not believe in western type of psychoanalysis and I defined the mental portrait of Arab personality essentially from my Tunisian 'personality'. I wanted to open a field that would enrich psychoanalysis by demonstrating how there were different values in cultures that needed to be taken into account.⁴⁷⁰

In the seventies, as Djaït recently wrote, he moved away from being a disillusioned Tunisian exiled intellectual, and instead became a *qawmi* Arab intellectual, that he later defined as "an Arab nationalist pursuing unification", believing that the Arab world's "shared cultural elements... should constitute a common project of existence, strength and modernity."⁴⁷¹ For the first time, he began to experience the fervour of political engagement and the passion that came from believing in an ideological cause, having been kept from the neo-Dustur in his teenage years. For someone as well-read as Djaït, the fact that he only discovered Michel Aflaq and Arab nationalism in the early seventies is surprising, especially considering the ideology was on the decline by then. In his interviews, he explained how such books did not enter Tunisia because of the antagonism between Bourguiba and Nasser, leading the first to fear the destabilising effect of Mashriqi propaganda and to order an embargo on literature and publications.⁴⁷² However, it is doubtful that these ideas did not circulate in Tunisia, especially considering the return of Tunisian students from their studies in Damascus and the development of modern means of communication. Instead, it is more likely that even had he come in contact with such books in the sixties, he would not have given them much thought because he was not in the right mindframe yet.

After discovering Aflaq's texts in Paris, Djaït subscribed to pan-Arabism. The reasons are understandable: it gave him a great ideal to aspire for, as opposed to the Tunisian elite's 'small-minded patriotism' (which he often decried). In the sixties, he had found that the elite, whatever its persuasion, did not think seriously about Arabism and Islam: "They all felt Tunisian [...]"

⁴⁷⁰ Arfaoui, "Entretien Djaït", 30. For a discussion of transcultural psychoanalysis between the Arab world and the West: Al Shakry, "The Arabic Freud: the unconscious and the modern subject" in *MIH*, (11:1) 2014, 89.

⁴⁷¹ Djaït, *Crise de la culture islamique*, 2004, 215.

⁴⁷² Arfaoui, "Entretien Djaït", 30.

which then meant a rupture with the Orient”.⁴⁷³ Despite the excessive generalisation, his statement was indicative of how pan-Arabism gave him reasons to be proud of his cultural heritage at a time when it was put down as a source of decadence. And as opposed to the many books and ideologies he discovered in Paris, this one concerned him directly: as an intellectual Arab living a malaise born from cultural estrangement, and as a medieval historian who could appreciate what past Arab grandeur meant. He began to see himself as a member of the ‘pan-Arab intelligentsia’, and he discovered the cultural renewal they had been leading elsewhere, such as the Iraqi intellectuals of the cultural journal *Al-Thaqqāfa al-jadida* in the fifties.⁴⁷⁴ Like a number of Arab exiles before him, such as Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar in Paris, or Maghribi nationalists in Cairo, Djaït came to grips with his Arab identity outside the Arab world, in contact with cultural difference and as a refugee from an alienating political environment.⁴⁷⁵

Behind this conversion was Michel Aflaq’s *Fī sabīl al-ba‘th* (1959), and Djaït was marked by its message and its delivery. Aflaq envisaged the Arab world’s common destiny and renaissance as a tangible political project and he defined Arab nationalism as a total feeling similar to love.⁴⁷⁶ In order to achieve Arab destiny, he advocated the necessity of a revolution, a transformation that went beyond politics and was instead a “true awakening, no longer possible to deny or question... the awakening of Arab spirit at an important time in history”.⁴⁷⁷ Furthermore, Baathism was an aspiration for modernity that did not turn away from the Arab past, and this ideology claimed that the Arab world still contained within it the seeds of its past greatness that should be reactivated thanks to a significant effort of ideology and action.

Aflaq’s writing style was modern and lucid, albeit under a thick layer of ideological verbiage, but it served to demonstrate that Arab thinkers could write something similar to European thinkers. His incisive arguments were meant to restore the Arabs from their endless divisions:

⁴⁷³ Ibid. 31.

⁴⁷⁴ Rossi, “la culture nouvelle” mouvement révolutionnaire des intellectuels irakiens, in *Orient*, (8) 1958, 61-4.

⁴⁷⁵ Chater, “Pensée en exil et décolonisation: le cas Maghrébin” in *CdM*, (82) 2011, 101.

⁴⁷⁶ Aflaq, *Fī sabīl al-ba‘th*, 1959, 29-30.

⁴⁷⁷ Idem.

What is revolution? Shall we stop at political definitions? Shall our understanding be limited to political programs, and the schemes and suggestions they contain for organising public life in its different aspects? Or are we to understand by revolution something deeper? By revolution we understand that true awakening that is no longer possible to deny or to doubt, the awakening of the Arab spirit at a decisive stage of human history. The reality of the revolution lies in this awakening, the awakening of the spirit that had been weighed down by stationary and vitiated conditions, which, for a long time, prevented it from rising and radiating its influence. This spirit at last senses great danger, fateful danger, and rises up decisively.⁴⁷⁸

Aflaq emphasised in the fifties how, in this crucial time, the Arab nation has been weakened and divided. Ten years after he wrote these lines, the Arab defeat of 1967 was an even greater setback for the dream of Arab unity. As Olivier Carré commented, Arab political thought developed in three directions between 1967 and 1973: the Arab left began to find themselves in the ideology of the Palestinian revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamist political ideology began to gather pace and wider recognition, and a third development among radical critics demanding the right to more freedom of expression and a wider effort of self-critique after the defeat. These developments often took place at the expense of pan-Arabism;⁴⁷⁹ but this ideological decline did not deter Djaït.

The Tunisian felt he had been “asleep to his Arab identity” and “contaminated” by “small-minded” Tunisian nationalism.⁴⁸⁰ He discovered that that he could identify with a wider whole outside of his country's borders. What made this ideology so attractive, as opposed to Marxism, was its emphasis on the revolution as a “recovery of the Arab personality”, and the importance of thought and intellectuals for that process. If the revolution was a process of recovery of the past and remembrance, it required the efforts of those who would be able to lead it on the basis of their knowledge. The first step for this “liberation of the intellectual” would require moving away from territorial-national identification while bringing back the legacy of the Arab past in order to envisage a better future. However, the adoption of this ideology might not entirely have been about coming to terms with the reasons for his exile, and still finding another way to avoid

⁴⁷⁸ Idem.

⁴⁷⁹ Carré, *Le Nationalisme arabe*, 1993, 120-2.

⁴⁸⁰ Arfaoui, “Entretien Djaït”, 30.

thinking about his place in Tunisia. This ideological utopia was clearly of use because it gave him purpose at a time of doubt and validated his own identity as an intellectual, while enabling him to circumvent the Tunisian issues with which he had so many problems. However, in the early seventies, the Tunisian state made a turn to the right, which meant there was no chance the regime would subscribe to Arab nationalism. This did not bode well for Djaït's perspectives of return from exile. It is easily said that Djaït lacked foresight in joining Baathism during its period of decline, but these are judgements made in hindsight. Instead, the Tunisian was less attracted to the political coordination aspect of the organisation, and more into what it meant for him as a thinker, appealing to his malaise in the sixties.

The Baath party was recovering from the ideological repercussions of the 1967 defeat, and was recalibrating the terms of the struggle, especially by securing its position in Syria and Iraq, where it ruled, rather than expanding to other countries.⁴⁸¹ It held its 10th Congress in Baghdad in March 1970, and the final report shows the existing tension between the grand aim of provoking a general awareness of the Arab destiny and pursuing the great objectives of “unity, liberty and socialism in a complete historical phase” and, the more pressing objective of surviving as an organisation and facing imminent threats such as “the Palestinian question, the struggle against permanent invasion in the Arab Gulf, and the suppression of military bases” and issues of national development.⁴⁸² The Congress report acknowledged some aspects of Aflaq's ideology that attracted Djaït in the first place, the recovery of Arab personality, but it also introduced the coordination of the collective struggle as an objective of equal weight, especially the creation of “a revolutionary movement, that connects authenticity of thought with organisation and seriousness of strategy”.⁴⁸³ Djaït was not a man of action nor did he have much patience for hollow ideological tirades, and in that regard the difference of style between Michel Aflaq's essays compared to the party's official documentation was striking: all that was rich and evocative in the first was lost under the simplification of the second.

⁴⁸¹ Abu Jaber, *The Ba'ath socialist party: history, ideology and organization*, 1966; Dam, *The struggle for power in Syria: politics and society under Asad and the Ba'ath party*, 1996.

⁴⁸² *Rapport politique du 10e congrès national du parti Arabe socialiste du Baath*, Baghdad, March 1970, 5-6, 15.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.* 7, 10-13.

Therefore Djaït joined the movement at a crucial time of its history that did not necessarily suit his profile, since Aflaq's theoretical discourse was better suited for the movement's genesis and his concern with personality was lost against the priority of coordinating the struggle. This ideology filled up the void left by the already-lacking nationalist narrative, which is why he did not join Baathist networks in Paris, indicating that he "frequented them a bit, but they did not interest me so much".⁴⁸⁴ But it is certain that from then onwards, his increasing frequentation of Arabs allowed him to overcome a number of issues he carried from Tunisia: he was less a bi-cultural Tunisian suffering from the weight of family expectations and oppressive small-minded elites. Instead he felt part of the Arab intelligentsia, fighting collectively for a common aim with ideas. This period of his life reads as a series of individual awakenings, such as the shock he felt in Paris towards "the great joy following the Arab defeat", and 'remembering' that the Palestine tragedy also affected him as a Tunisian.⁴⁸⁵ He could now let go of the *beldiya*'s sense of conduct, realising that this social ideology was not an appropriate guide for the present nor the future; he finally had an alternative with which to fill the void.

During the second phase of his exile, he had a new purpose: to think and write about the philosophical and cultural contradictions of his society, and draw a path for an Arab renaissance. These were not new ideas, considering his texts in the sixties, but Aflaq gave him the sense of grandeur and the confidence to overcome his writer's block and turn vague ideas into text. Over the next years, he would continuously point out the impossibility of imagining a Tunisian modernity without integrating the Arab and Islamic cultural legacy: "I said to myself, we cut ourselves from the Arab world and we became too westernised, and so did I. There was a need to rebuild [this] identity".⁴⁸⁶ He seemed to have overcome the hardest point of his exile, and was ready to envisage his return from disillusionment.

⁴⁸⁴ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

⁴⁸⁵ Arfaoui, "Entretien Djaït", 31.

⁴⁸⁶ Idem.

Laroui flew back to Morocco and spent the first months after his return cautiously withdrawn from the public eye and writing with assiduity. And then, in early 1971, he published *al-Ghurba*, a novel that was unlike anything he had written before. It was his attempt to confront his ‘inner demons’ and, like Abdelkebir Khatibi’s autobiography *La memoire tatouée* (also released in 1971), Laroui’s novel expressed the anguish of a generation of Moroccan intellectuals after independence.

The novel’s fragmented style reflected the author’s own lack of clarity about his life. The narrative is disjointed, and the story can be hard to follow.⁴⁸⁷ At first, the novel appears ‘plotless’ and the reader is immediately placed into ongoing scenes that alternate between slow paced dialogues or rapid and confusing action. There is practically no introduction to characters and instead, the reader is given a direct line to their subjectivity. Gradually, all these elements are enriched with background information. This is the story of five young Moroccans who fought together for the country’s independence. The story takes place at two periods of time: right before independence and five years later. The story is set off by the main protagonist’s return to the country after five years in exile, following which emerges a collective act of remembrance between the five characters, in their meetings and conversations about each other. Each protagonist has had a tragic reaction to independence: despair, bitterness, self-imposed exile in Europe or retreat into mysticism.⁴⁸⁸

Laroui introduced a new way of looking at exile from a *temporal* rather than *spatial* perspective, which he reconstructs from the effect of trauma on the individual as a delayed phenomenon in time.⁴⁸⁹ This trauma becomes clearer as the story constantly moves between two periods of time, the past and the present, in the interaction between characters, illustrating how these characters carry their past with them and are unable to move on. And then, without announcement, a character describes the threshold moment between idealism and despair: when a random street merchant was murdered of the street. More details are provided from another

⁴⁸⁷ Hassan, *Le roman Arabe 1834-2004*, 2006, 321.

⁴⁸⁸ Campbell, *Labyrinth, intellectuals and the revolution: the Arabic-language Moroccan novel, 1957-1972*, 2013, 162.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 161.

account: the victim sold lemons and oranges, and he was connected with the nationalist struggle (maybe as an informant, the text is unclear). The act of remembrance taking place five years later, spells the start of the crisis for the five protagonists, because it was also when violence began in their country.⁴⁹⁰ The way this murder is recounted also expresses the sense of frustration and powerlessness that gripped these young nationalists because they each recount their perspective on the murder, which none of them could prevent, and it symbolised.

The greater tragedy of *al-Ghurba* is that not all of its characters are aware of the trauma and the way they carry it in their daily lives, because it has become multi-layered. The first layer is a result of the spread of violence, which is obvious to most protagonists. Maria left for Paris, and Idris left for an unnamed far destination. The police have become a constant fixture in their lives. However, this level of awareness is not enough for Idris, portrayed as the most aware of the five. In his attempt to rekindle his love with Maria during a retreat at the beach, he uncovers several other layers. At the beach they find the small city under curfew and are unable to eat or drink anything except a bottle of Coca-Cola. Idris cannot stand Maria's constant and playful reminders that she is hungry. Meanwhile, military patrols roam the streets and induce a sense of fear and urgency, rather than security. They are there to remind everyone of the state's crushing hold on society, and the constant possibility of abuse.⁴⁹¹

The tension between the two boiled up eventually. Idris's return has unsettled everyone, especially Maria who feels the need to explain why she decided to leave the country years ago:

The time has yet to arrive, the doors of the sky are still tightly shut and no angel has made the call... you, pure soul that calls us and then moves away from reality! Have you forgotten the time when they killed us at each instant of our lives, in the schools, in the streets, in the cafes? Death stood in front of us as if someone took away hope from us, while they then went to enjoy a delicious meal and sleep in a comfortable bed. Would you have preferred that we commit suicide, and thus fill endless cemeteries that would turn forty years later into fertile lands? Did we kill? We only committed a different type of violence. If you would say that children of hate are always thinner and stupider, we would answer that we aspire to nothing else but life.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. 165.

⁴⁹¹ Laroui, *al-Ghurba*, 1971, 102

⁴⁹² Ibid. 29.

Not only was this trauma difficult to accept, Maria avoided even thinking about it until Idris brought it up, thus unsettling her state of denial. What he appears to have realised (the reason why he decided to return), was that it was impossible to move on without addressing the pain of the 'missed encounter', the failure to take the opportunity to be part of those who would shape the country's future. This is the second layer of trauma, a deeper one that Idris figured out during his exile, and that his former friends are not even thinking about, because they were too embedded in these conditions.⁴⁹³ Therefore, this generation's trauma came from being excluded from their own future, rather than being disillusioned at what the country has become. Idris, Maria, Shu'ayb, Omar and the others cannot forgive themselves for the missed encounter:

Look at this city, what type of events has it witnessed in five years? He is going to arrive tomorrow and he will find it as when he left: sleeping, insignificant. It was not so long ago that we sat in a circle around the radio, hungry for information, while today we wait for those outside the country to return in order to interrogate them. Not so long ago, we showed ourselves incapable of taking matters in our own hands, to take part in events, and today the police is playing cards while when the night comes, we hit the streets while party members bicker and while the *bacha* lays in the midst of his women and those who ask for favours...will Idris be of any help in all this?⁴⁹⁴

The third tragedy is these characters' powerlessness to address the causes of their trauma, and their sad resignation. Each one carried his or her burden in a different manner but is equally unable to liberate themselves as the country continues to be transformed into a police state.⁴⁹⁵ Their reactions are indicative of their pathological state: depression, partial or total inability to remember events, flashbacks and dreams, and a compulsion to leave, such as Maria's sudden and unannounced departure from the beach house that spelt the end of their efforts at reconciliation.

Idris appears alone on his path towards recovery. His insistent efforts to understand the failure of his romantic relationship with Maria illustrate his efforts to understand the failure of national independence. In both cases, no one else wanted to talk about it. For the main

⁴⁹³ Campbell, *Labyrinth, intellectuals and the revolution*, 161.

⁴⁹⁴ Laroui, *al-Ghurba*, 15-6.

⁴⁹⁵ Campbell, *Labyrinth, intellectuals and the revolution*, 161.

protagonist, one remembrance led to another: the two former lovers came to terms with the impossibility of their love. In the process, Idris nearly achieved reconciliation with his past which allowed him to envisage his integration in the present:

Idris knew this beach before the road [leading to it] was built, when people had to go on donkeys' backs... the authorities had been inspired the day they opened this road to the public. While groups of children and young people were getting ready to leave the beach, now that the sun was about to set, Idris whispered: "Everyone ends up reaching the shore of his dreams and if it is not today, it will be tomorrow, and if it is not him, it will be his brother or his son". And then he turned towards the city.⁴⁹⁶

There was even a third temporal moment, on the same beach, after Laroui began to resolve the deeper layers of his historical trauma, as he was remembering the events of the lemon seller and the trip to the beach with Maria. On this third moment, he walks back to town with a child he met on the beach, that was maybe with him all along as he relived his past, listening to the next generation's candid hopes and plans, thus putting his fate in the present. He also learned how to cope with violence, by recognising how it had become part of daily life, such as when he had to remain cool headed and steadfast when the inquisitive military patrol showed up on the deserted beach while Maria was swimming naked, and when Idris would have been powerless to prevent a tragic outcome.⁴⁹⁷

After these two episodes, Idris was ready to rejoin the stream of history. In the penultimate chapter, the author emerged from the character. Laroui acknowledges the journey made by Idris that led him to his father's house from his symbolic return journey from the beach, and therefore the return journey from an obstructed and fictional past. He arrived to a space where it all came together: his childhood bedroom, long walks and discussions with his father, his childhood friends, and other similar memories. He was able, at this point, to re-invest his history: when the narrator looked at his reflection in the mirror, he found himself smiling and uttered " thus, my philosophy is an autopsy".⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ Laroui, *al-Ghurba*, 104-5.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid. 99-100.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. 108.

The novel shows how an individual could move back from a self-imposed marginality, and back into the main stream. As Campbell writes, Laroui was able to re-insert the traumatic event into a now-complete narrative of life, and “begin once again to direct his own story”.⁴⁹⁹ The author and the main protagonist clung to this hope, and it was by no means the end of the wider story, but merely the start of another struggle: life in Morocco. Only this time, as opposed to the sixties, he would not be held back by a traumatic past and an incapacitating legacy.

The reception and interpretation of the book was a source of contention, and Laroui complained in his diary that reactions had misjudged the personal dimension behind this novel, especially a review by Abdallah Stouky in *Maroc-Hebdo* that considered the novel to be a sad story of the loss of hope.⁵⁰⁰ And as sharp as is the literary analysis of the novel that Campbell provides, it lacks the historical setting and the awareness of where this novel fit in the author’s life, especially because the period during which it was written says a lot about the author’s intentions. Laroui composed the text during those months after his return, which meant that it was more than a novel loosely inspired by life events and emotions, but instead an act intended to have an impact on his future. 1971 was turning point of his life: Laroui wrote a novel called “exile” while he had only just come back from one, yet at no point in the text does it evoke California. He too lived an unspoken trauma after the disappearance of his mentor, especially because the body was never found, and his death was never processed. By omitting this biographical element, Campbell only interprets the novel from the angle of national disillusionment, and the anguish of the educated generation of young Moroccans.⁵⁰¹ In other words, it is an interpretation that looks to the past, rather than to the future. Instead, I have argued that Laroui’s literary choices have been about settling his place in the community and from this perspective, Laroui showed he was ready to confront his past, and move forward, as opposed to the other four characters, each stuck in different iterations of the trauma. Finally, Campbell argued that the author throws a veil on the story, built as a labyrinth to evade

⁴⁹⁹ Campbell, *Labyrinth, intellectuals and the revolution*, 173.

⁵⁰⁰ 12 November 1971, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ (1967-1973)*, 131.

⁵⁰¹ Campbell, *Labyrinth, intellectuals and the revolution*, 172.

censorship and repression, when it contained a strongly subversive element depicting the authoritarian state in the beach scene with Maria and the soldiers.

After unlocking his past, Laroui had to take care of his present. He had to familiarise himself with Morocco's realities and its historical dynamics, and after years spent clinging on to the left's ideological visions, he had found himself unable to link the rapid changes affecting the country and how the country remained 'backwards', clinging to violence and tradition instead of democracy and modernity. If Laroui was serious about resolving the issue of his place in Moroccan society, he had to start by coming to terms with where the country was heading in the seventies. The intellectual had to show he was not afraid to uncover his own lack of knowledge, before he could formulate a critique. Therefore, *al-Ghurba* was not only about the exile but also about the *stranger*, someone who is different and unaware, but makes efforts to redress the situation without losing his post as a critical observer. If the five characters were different stages of recovery from trauma, and if Idris was the most advanced stage when he began to let go of the past, there needed to be a sixth stage: for Abdallah to find himself.

Conclusion: the changing self and the changing public sphere

Exile was an extended, lonely and sometimes painful journey from the moment Laroui and Djaït left their countries as disheartened young intellectuals, dejected by the crumbling of the nationalist narrative they could not entirely identify with, to the moment they confronted the deeper source of their predicament. Because of that, exile was the turning point in their acquisition of a 'culture of critical discourse'.⁵⁰² It allowed them to take a critical look at what had caused their predicament in the sixties and once that was achieved, they could envisage the terms of their re-involvement by throwing a more informed critical glance at their societies and work towards the improvement of their individual conditions. The challenge they faced in the

⁵⁰² Gouldner, *The future of intellectuals and the rise of new class*, 1979, 28-31; Boltanski, *On critique*, 18-9.

early seventies was to build a holistic vision of reform and not one that only explained their respective individual malaise.

However, they faced another significant challenge: while the two intellectuals were away, they changed significantly, but so did their societies. Morocco and Tunisia did not remain static, and that was probably another surprise, as both had stayed relatively shielded from news from back home. Moroccan and Tunisian publics would not have been impressed with critical voices coming from abroad. Laroui and Djaït faced another sizeable obstacle: gaining acceptance from domestic audiences, and hoping to achieve better luck than their fateful attempts in the sixties. The opening of avenues of criticism and expression after the crises of legitimacy in Morocco and Tunisia opened some space for criticism but it also undermined the authoritative figure of the mandarin intellectual, throwing moralising glances at society.

The risk of antagonism between writer and audience in Arab thought was noted by Louis Gardet, who cited “the Moroccan Abdallah Laroui or the Tunisian Hichem Djaït” as the most interesting emerging Muslim thinkers of his time on questions of “modernity and decolonisation”.⁵⁰³ Through these authors, who wrote in European languages, “the western public will start to envisage contemporary Islam”. He also added that these new thinkers were not really speaking to “the Muslim public”, but rather to “the intelligentsia whose language is not *really* Arabic”.⁵⁰⁴ This was a patronising passage because Gardet determined from the outset readership dynamics in the contemporary Maghrib, denying agency to these societies or that these texts carried a strong message in itself (rather than only for certain groups sharing the same historical experience), and affirming unequivocally that social classes were determined by language of writing. In the meantime, the passage does reveal the difficulty and slippery nature of rapidly moving categories such as intellectuals and audiences that Laroui and Djaït would have to confront to ensure the success of their re-engagement as social critics, after their return to the national setting.

⁵⁰³ Gardet, *Les Hommes de l'Islam*, 1977, 330.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid. 330-1.

Chapter 4 Engagement, disengagement and the Revolution

After Laroui and Djaït appeared to work through the deeper cause of their malaise during the second part of their exiles, they were ready to resume their engagement with domestic realities and recover their public role as intellectuals. However, exile was a physical *and* an intellectual removal they had carried out years earlier, and from which they had to devise a way to return, while presenting to their readers a grand utopia to challenge nationalism.

In this next step of their intellectual trajectories, they tried to turn from a disengaged posture into a committed stance, while forming (and formulating) their respective critical intellectual projects. This process took place from 1970 to 1974 for Laroui, when he began to write about historical delay and society's increasing embrace of traditionalism and from 1972 to 1976 for Djaït, when he expressed the dangers of turning one's back on the cultural and Islamic historical legacy. In both cases, I argue that the intellectual project had revolutionary characteristics because it called for a radical change as part of an elaborate system of thought that split from existing ways of looking at their societies.

Revolution has had a strong appeal in the Arab world's political history and throughout the twentieth century. *Al-thawra* became an essential feature of leaders' discourse, and it struck a chord with their populations. Along with its increased usage, its meaning began to lose focus. In its most simplified meaning, revolution was a radical form of change. According to Reinhard Koselleck, revolutions were not only about political change but also about the social order and a total rupture that opened a new realm of possibilities.⁵⁰⁵ There was a difference between political changes on the surface (such as regime changes following uprisings), and genuine transformations of the social order, and only the second category corresponded to a revolution because it sent these polities on a different historical trajectory. The transformations the Middle East experienced in the 19th and 20th centuries (industrialisation, development of communications,

⁵⁰⁵ Koselleck, *Futures past*, 43, 51.

increasing urbanisation etc.) induced a change of social structure that had the potential for producing such political revolutions. However, as P. J. Vatikiotis noted in 1972 these social transformations had yet to produce political revolutions, despite the considerable upheaval the region was experiencing.⁵⁰⁶ Vatikiotis noted the prevalence of revolutionary ‘attitudes’ in the Middle East (rather than political action), which has often been used by political elites to justify their political take-overs; but he still doubted the extent of revolutionary commitment in the region.⁵⁰⁷

The Arab defeat of 1967 brought to the forefront another type of call for revolution. The movement of young critical intellectuals Suzanne Kassab discussed have produced a wide-ranging critique of society, political systems and the sources of knowledge. Their intention was to provoke a ‘second Arab awakening’ building on the theorisation of their cultural malaise. This common ideological aim was not so different from the genesis of Arab nationalism in Syria, as Rashid Khalidi argued: these young critics in the seventies were trying to make their voices heard in an exclusionary system, the same way new forces had tried to enter politics in the Ottoman empire’s Syrian provinces.⁵⁰⁸ Similarly, these young critics were ill at ease and strained by their failure to have a bearing on their countries’ affairs, and they felt alienated by what they perceived to be continued “backwardness”. As the authorities took over intellectuals’ tasks (such as providing moral guidance and authority), young modernist intellectuals faced a crisis as to what their public function would be.

Laroui and Djaït were part of this movement of critical thinkers, but the story of their return to the public sphere and their call for revolution illustrates the intricacies of a social and cultural critique when it is read alongside the domestic transformations in each country. They faced difficult conditions: the Moroccan and Tunisian turn towards authoritarianism in the late sixties had put a great amount of danger on critical intellectuals who realised that they risked being denounced as being unpatriotic and divisive, with all that this entailed. The state and its

⁵⁰⁶ Vatikiotis, *Revolution in the Middle East and other case studies*, 1972, 11.

⁵⁰⁷ Idem.

⁵⁰⁸ Khalidi, “The rise of the Arab movement in Syria” in Arjomand (ed.), *From nationalism to revolutionary Islam*, 1984, 54-5.

elites proved too strong a force for intellectuals while fear, self-preservation and abandonment took over for the majority. In fact, the early seventies was a dangerous time for anyone suspected of conspiring against the leadership, especially following the Ben Salah crisis in 1969 in Tunisia, and after the foiled military coups in 1971 and 1972 in Morocco. The few remaining intellectuals who dared to fight for free thought were marginalised from the public sphere, silenced or went into clandestine opposition. Despite the regimes' continued popular legitimacy, they observed powerlessly how the authorities were out of their depth and lacking imagination to re-energise the national project from the slump it had been in (that led to the crises of legitimacy), while intellectuals complained among themselves (and in private) that they would do a better job.

In the story of the two intellectuals' call for a revolutionary change, another story can be discerned. The causes intellectuals give for their alienation appear quite straightforward (mostly revolving around oppression from the authorities). But these explanations given by Arab intellectuals should not be reified, as Christoph Schumann wrote, but instead, they should be confronted to their social and cultural realities.⁵⁰⁹ It then appears that there was a third reason behind critical intellectuals' disengagement from the public sphere which did not have to do with the state or authoritarianism, and it was usually left unspoken by 'alienated' intellectuals because of its damning implications for the image of the intelligentsia as a social group pursuing progress: audiences and other intellectuals also had a significant constraining impact on critical intellectuals. During the difficult sixties, these characteristics had shown when they tried to formulate their positions and had to conform to the ideological line of the groups in place, the ones they spoke through, for their audiences and through their publications. In fact, this third obstacle challenges the understanding that the state imposed an ideological hegemony that alienated intellectuals, or rather forces us to nuance this assessment by including broader forces which also played a part in the stagnation of the intellectual field. The call for revolution was probably directed at their peers as much as to the authorities or the masses, if not more.

⁵⁰⁹ Schumann, "The 'failure' of radical nationalism and the 'silence' of liberal thought in the Arab world" in *CSAAME*, (28:3) 2008, 406.

In this chapter, I address these two intellectuals' return to the public sphere, their accommodation strategies and how they addressed the challenge of speaking to a difficult audience about adopting revolutionary modes of thought. Laroui achieved greater success in this because he returned to Morocco and gradually built up his ideas in a steady interaction with his country's audience, with whom he managed to consolidate an intellectual bond. He began the conversation on the issue of Palestine, and gradually enlarged his ideas on Arabs and their relation to history, until the notion of historical delay and the adoption of tradition in Moroccan society, which provided the basis of his important 1974 essay on the crisis of intellectuals. Djaït on the other hand had a difficult time returning to the public sphere, which was in large part due to his still being in exile. He returned to the public sphere in one sudden move with the publication of his significant book on the Tunisian personality in 1974, which rushed out his total criticism of the approach towards the Arab and Islamic legacy that he saw as being adopted by state, elites and intellectuals. The modernist intelligentsia did not initially know how to take this, which allowed other ideological groups to react with virulence and prevent his book from opening a space for critical discussion. Djaït, once more, failed to reach out significantly to the Tunisian intelligentsia. Therefore, the characteristics of Laroui's respective returns to the public sphere in Morocco, and Djaït in Tunisia have played a significant part in explaining their legacy and those of their ideas in the following years.

In this chapter, I look at how the two figures tackled the multiple dynamics of ideological hegemony in the cultural field, as they faced a decade earlier (Chapter 2). While these elements were essential aspects of thought production, they are often neglected. Competitions and resistances often impeded the emergence of new ideas, and could have a similar restraining impact to that of the authorities who portrayed such thinkers as seditious when they asked unsettling questions about social and cultural change. This chapter thus inscribes intellectuals and their strategies in relation to the set of constraints they faced, recreating the "problem-space" of these two emerging critiques in a diachronic perspective. It also offers a more satisfying approach to the question of how intellectuals managed to return to the public sphere despite the existence of various ideological hegemons.

1. Laroui and the path from Palestine to Arab historical delay

Abdallah Laroui came back to Morocco in 1970 to find a suffocating and oppressive atmosphere. Opposition was met with violence and there did not seem to be a place for the critical and measured intellectual to make a meaningful contribution. The country's ills were also quite straightforward to external observers: economic nepotism, the Makhzen's refusal to share power with political parties, and persisting economic and social inequalities.⁵¹⁰ This was a difficult time in the country's history, all the more so for intellectuals who first had to ensure their physical security. Writing critically about political issues could only be done from outside the country, unless one was willing to take the risk of being arrested and "disciplined".⁵¹¹

Academics who were suspected of being Marxists walked a tight rope. Abdelaziz Belal for example, an important economist who was also a member of the Moroccan communist party, had several brushes with the authorities.⁵¹² Laroui was more inconspicuous than his colleague and he separated the theoretical from the practical adhesion to Marxist ideology, but he was still on the watch list and was eventually suspended from teaching and transferred to the country's research institute (IURS). This was a common administrative punishment: when University campuses were at their most volatile period, the authorities believed that they had to isolate those suspected of introducing radical ideas and fanning the flames of discontent. Administrative suspensions were *light* punishment compared to what was in store for communist militants (especially members of 23 March and *Ila al-Amām*, (Chapter 5). Laroui made the most of his suspension and lack of teaching assignments by devoting his time to research. He is said to have kept a regular routine with fixed working hours at the library, rather than succumbing to depression following his isolation. He also travelled extensively during this period to present his ideas to the Arab intelligentsia in Algiers, Tunis and Beirut, and to academics in the West. His frequent travels

⁵¹⁰ Christophel, "Chronique politique – Maroc" in AAN, 1970, 246-251; Pennell, *Morocco since 1830*, 319-333.

⁵¹¹ For example: Moumen Diouri, *Réquisitoire contre un despote, pour une république au Maroc*, 1972. Diouri was a political exile in France where he published a series of virulent attacks on the Moroccan regime and the monarchy.

⁵¹² Bourquie, *Essais sur l'histoire du Parti communiste Marocain*, 1973.

dissociated him from any political group. He was also protected from retribution thanks to his celebrity in France, considering the negative press Morocco to which would be subject if a young modern intellectual of his stature were to be jailed or tortured, especially after the Ben Barka diplomatic “debacle” in France.

On his return in October 1970, Laroui had a desire to take part in public debates. In fact, a month later, he took part in the Louvain conference on Arab renaissance, in November 1970 where he spoke about tradition and traditionalisation of Moroccan society. This was a new way of framing his ideas, but rather than leading to a reorientation of his thought project, he would not express this line of argument again with the same straightforwardness for a couple of years. There is no indication that he encountered setbacks or faced risks in articulating this social and cultural critique. But the text of his lecture was published without modification in *La crise des intellectuels*, four years later, indicating that he stalled for some reason, rather than simply having taken time to shape his ideas. Instead, he dealt with this topic in stages and through a regular conversation with the Moroccan intelligentsia (despite his seeming distaste for this group, as later claimed by Bensalem Himmich⁵¹³). As a scholar, he considered tradition as a topic of historical and sociological investigation using scientific frameworks. But as an intellectual, he had to investigate how it contributed to domination and social oppression.

Laroui’s conversation with the Moroccan intelligentsia took place through the monthly magazine *Lamalif*, created and run by Zakya Daoud from 1966 (and which lasted until 1988). It brought together intellectuals, academics and an educated audience to discuss current issues in Morocco from a left-leaning position, and it became known as the Moroccan intelligentsia’s journal.⁵¹⁴ In her memoirs, Daoud describes this collaboration with Laroui, whom she describes as “a young historian, Professor in Rabat...a smart and cultivated researcher who made us proud”.⁵¹⁵ Over the following years, *Lamalif* would become a primary sounding board for his ideas, which he published in increments. He also contributed to one of the few alternative publications, the cultural journal *Souffles* (see chapters 2 and 5).

⁵¹³ Himmich, *Au pays de nos crises: essai sur le mal marocain*, 1997, 121.

⁵¹⁴ Schlemmer, “Une analyse des articles publiés par la revue *Lamalif*”, 57-60.

⁵¹⁵ Daoud, *Les années de plomb, chroniques d’une résistance, 1958-1988*, 2007, 37.

Laroui left Morocco shortly after the publication of *L'idéologie Arabe contemporaine* in May 1967, when he would have emerged as an important figure in the cultural sphere. Instead, he left others to talk about his ideas: Zakya Daoud called it “a powerful essay”, the kind of “important testimony” the Moroccan intelligentsia needed. But this event was overshadowed by the Arab defeat against Israel and its impact. She wanted to go beyond the “disaster”, *al-naksa*, and the defeatist discourse that came with it and saw a silver lining: it could be a wake up call, provided Arabs could accept some responsibility and make “deep changes in [their societies’ and political systems’] internal structures” and make a lasting commitment towards democratisation.⁵¹⁶

Laroui shared this critical assessment when he wrote about Palestine after the defeat. But while he could have been part of this critical discourse, he was on the other side of the world. Eventually, more than a year after his departure Laroui wrote a lengthy article in *Souffles*, on “The logic of political Zionism and peace”, which came out in early 1969.⁵¹⁷ According to Kenza Sefrioui, this special number was one year in the making and launched a wide call to “personalities with known progressive views and concrete participation for the [Palestinian] struggle”.⁵¹⁸ The journal received three external contributions from young figures that would become regulars on the Palestinian question in the following years: Omar Benjelloun, Abdelaziz Belal and Abdallah Laroui. All three were younger academics with leftist views and a strong political consciousness. This special number was a turning point in *Souffles*’s history, after which it became fully politicised and assumed the role of the Marxist organisation *Ila al-Amām*’s official paper.⁵¹⁹ But for a number of Moroccans, talking about Palestine was a ‘detour’: a way of talking about their own political situation but without facing the dangers of political activism.

Laroui wrote that his intention was to deconstruct the “logic of Zionism”: its thinking, its justifications, its historical claim over Palestine, and its approach to the conflict with Arab countries. By thinking about Israel, he called on Arabs to take a critical look at themselves:

⁵¹⁶“Editorial – La guerre, la paix et le reste” in *Lamalif*, 13-14, 1967, 18.

⁵¹⁷ Laroui, “La logique du sionisme politique et la paix” in *Souffles*, 15, 1969.

⁵¹⁸ Sefrioui, *La revue Souffles*, 90 quoting the editorial in *Souffles*, 15. Two years later, Laroui gave an interview in *Anfās: Muqābala ma’a ‘abdallah al-‘arwi* in *Anfas*, 8-7, 1971-2, 89-98.

⁵¹⁹ Sefrioui, 92, 100. In August 1970, both Laabi and Sefaty broke away from the Communist Party.

Affirming the Palestinian nation and weakening political Zionism are intimately linked, and it is on them that our future condition will depend... the duty of Arabs is clear: to reinforce ourselves by all means to force Israelis to limit their appetite.⁵²⁰

But in reality, this was an article about the future of the Arabs, and especially the possibility that the defeat spelled the end of the modernist Arab intelligentsia: increasingly, this group was “witnessing with concern the gradual isolation of Arab society and calling for dialogue with the Other, and opening up on the outside world”.⁵²¹ Even as far as Morocco, the Arab defeat was a considerable shock for its intelligentsia, and Laroui was still coming to terms with it: after all, his first reference in the article was Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azm’s landmark essay *Al-Naqd al-dhāti ba’d al-hazīma* (1968), and other intellectual trends in the Arab world, as Frangie demonstrated with regard to Al-Hafiz.⁵²²

In Morocco, according to Zakya Daoud, “the Palestinian struggle became a national political topic” and there was a shared belief that this country could play a meaningful role in resolving this issue.⁵²³ But this also meant that in the absence of an open domestic political debate, and considering the mobilisation potential of the Palestinian question, different political actors competed to appear the most engaged on this issue. Those who were normally silenced took it as an opportunity to recover their voice. In the early summer of 1969, *Lamalif* brought together the usual protagonists – Laroui, Benjelloun and Belal, and Mohamed Tahiri – to discuss the current situation in the Middle East. Compared to his first article (discussed earlier) Laroui’s position evolved towards a greater focus on history as the source of Arab woes.⁵²⁴ The journalist conducting the interview invited the four intellectuals to think about the effects of these crises for the rest of the Arab world, and implicitly on Morocco. At first, Laroui acknowledged the link by identifying “the following contradiction: should the feeling of Arab unity be mobilised to liberate

⁵²⁰ Idem.

⁵²¹ Laroui, “La logique du sionisme politique et la paix”, 51.

⁵²² Frangie, “On the political thought of Yasin al-Hafiz” in *MIH* (12:2) 2015.

⁵²³ Daoud, *Mémoire des années de plomb*, 159.

⁵²⁴ “Moyen-Orient Réflexion au delà du conflit, des interviews de Abdallah Laroui, Omar Benjelloun, Mohamed Tahiri, Abdelazi Belal” in *Lamalif* (30) 1969, 8-19.

Palestine or, on the contrary, use the Palestinian issue to unify the Arabs?”⁵²⁵ However, he refused to give in on whether the Palestinian revolution could become a revolution for the Arabs as a whole arguing that “the Palestinian revolution will remain Palestinian” and adding that “only those lacking political information could believe that a group of individuals can make a revolution”, by pointing to the situation in Algeria, and the specific historical circumstances that turned an uprising into a full-fledged revolution.⁵²⁶ Instead, Laroui claimed that the transformations the Palestine revolution could provoke were deeper because they touched on “the very sources of our conception of politics, or our conception of history and our relationship with the outside world”.⁵²⁷

From these two passages, Laroui’s position emerges as measured and pragmatic, while inviting readers to adopt a more “serious approach” and “to become aware of all its implications and historical signification”, with a perceptible sense of frustration at the prevalent idealism.⁵²⁸ Despite calling for a revolutionary change of perspective on the Arabs’ condition, Laroui’s notion of revolution appeared mild and measured compared to the type of fiery transformations in political thought taking place at the time, and especially the emergence of armed Palestinian groups.⁵²⁹ After all, Laroui was writing from his Californian exile, far from the revolutionary fever of the Arab world.

But in the meantime, a change of perspective was taking place regarding the source of the Arabs’ current crisis. In February 1969, Laroui shared *Lamalif*’s front page with the two towering figures of domestic politics: Abderrahim Bouabid (USFP) and Reda Guedira (FDIC and adviser to Hassan II), squaring off on the essential question of the European common market and the Moroccan economy. Half the cover read: “*Les Arabes et l’histoire par Abdallah Laroui*”, indicating how he had grown in importance and stature.⁵³⁰ The article was the text of a talk he gave in Rabat and it was published without changes despite its scholarly nature. But in this dense

⁵²⁵ Ibid. 13.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. 15.

⁵²⁷ Ibid. 15.

⁵²⁸ Idem.

⁵²⁹ Carré, *Le Mouvement national Palestinien*, 1977.

⁵³⁰ “Conférence – Les Arabes et l’Histoire” in *Lamalif*, 27, 1969, 20-27.

article, Laroui was able to bring the discussion back to an area that would interest a greater audience: “the study of events [...] and the global attitude a society has in relation to the whole of its lived events” in other words “the place that this society devotes to the past in the perspective of its present and its future, therefore of its action [sic]”.⁵³¹ As a critical thinker, he was especially interested in the way “history is integrated to daily life” and the “intellectual and socio-political problems” this integration posed.⁵³² This article also shows the change of perspective that was taking place and could very well explain his sudden and still unexplained decision to leave California in May 1970 (Chapter 3). After the summer and his return, Laroui began to build the relationship between Arabs and their historical trajectory, and the need to identify and make a clean break with what caused their historical delay.

2. Historical delay and the Moroccan intelligentsia

In the second phase of Laroui’s intellectual re-engagement, his rate of publications with *Lamalif* increased quite notably and his intellectual project settled on the notion of ‘historical delay’. It began with the publication of *L’histoire du Maghreb: un essai de synthèse* with Francois Maspéro, which was the content of the course he gave at UCLA. While it shared some attributes with the critical essay genre he had previously used, this book aspired to be more of an academic study, presenting a new reading of the region’s history from the classical period until independence, on the basis of his critical reading of the secondary literature on the Maghrib’s history. This pitted him mostly against French orientalist historiography that he portrayed as being built on prejudices, in that it argued that the Maghrib’s continued civilisational delay justified the French colonial enterprise.⁵³³ But he also went against a strong (sometimes, unassumed) opinion held by scholars and thinkers in the Maghrib: Malek Bennabi’s notion of

⁵³¹ Ibid. 20.

⁵³² Idem.

⁵³³ Wansbrough, “The decolonization of North African history” in *Journal of African History*, (9:4) 1968, 643-650.

colonisabilité, or that the region was intrinsically “colonisable” which justified its self-representation of inferiority and backwardness.⁵³⁴

Despite not being a specialist of distant periods of the Maghrib’s history, such as the Roman period, he still considered them with one significant aim: ascribing another meaning to this past. Instead of a narrative of historical delay, he insisted on describing the policies that successive invading powers imposed on the region’s populations that prevented the emergence of technological innovations, and that maintained the Maghrib in a “delayed” state. According to Youssef Choueiri, instead of *colonisabilité* and inherent civilizational delay, Laroui’s reading of the region’s past made him reach the conclusion that there had been a constant, even obstinate aspiration for liberation running through these societies.⁵³⁵

This essay was a daring act of *engagé* scholarship that he justified with an epistemological argument: in history, meaning is produced in the interpretative act rather than historical sources having a single signification. Furthermore, the ‘meaning of history’ takes place between these sources, and Laroui produced a new commentary and a new narrative. These were, by no means, ground-breaking claims but it ensured that he could dispute existing scholarship without bringing new material to the book. And in the first few pages, he announced he was exercising a “deliberate act of intellectual freedom” by revisiting this past; others before him did not hesitate to pass judgement on the Maghreb’s history, he wrote, despite the issue meaning so little to them, as opposed to him, a Maghribi intellectual with concerning, even existential questions about his region’s chances for modernity. In the absence of a centralised historical institution or even a similar effort from other historians “it is not forbidden to question the past to conceive of an image of a possible future”.⁵³⁶ He was taking a swipe at his department in Rabat that he found not pro-active enough in building an independent and non-ideological historiography, and where he had found it so hard to find interlocutors for his radical approach to the study of the genesis of nationalism in Morocco; only this time, he formulated this criticism in what would become an acclaimed book rather than in a restricted lecture room.

⁵³⁴ Bennabi, *Vocation de l’Islam*, 1954, 82-95.

⁵³⁵ Choueiri, *Modern Arab historiography*, 1989, 182-5.

⁵³⁶ Laroui, *L’histoire du Maghreb, un essai de synthèse*, 1970, 11-13.

Laroui's relationship to other historians in his department showed no signs of improvement: in December 1970, the Moroccan Society for Philosophy (attached to the Rabat humanities faculty) organised a colloquium in Mohammedia on "Arab and French cultures around the Mediterranean". Several high profile Moroccan and French scholars attended the event, which began with an extended homage to Louis Massignon, portraying him as a pioneer of inter-faith understanding, a great scholar of Morocco and other flattering depictions that did not correspond to the ideological mood regarding orientalist scholarship in Morocco. It became clear that the event catered more to French interests than the Arab world's ones: four panels were held: the study of the Islamic world in France, the state and future of French in the Maghrib, Francophone literature in the Maghrib, and a last panel on "Tradition and change in the Islamic world". The last panel was, arguably, the only one that responded to this new critical intelligentsia's concerns and that gave a speaking platform to new ideas: and in fact, Hichem Djaït spoke about a "dialectic of the future" between change and continuity.⁵³⁷ Despite how important this issue was for Laroui, and especially his essay on *Contemporary Arab ideology* (1967) and the relationship with the West, Laroui did not speak. However, he was in attendance throughout the event and, according to Djaït, did not speak at all, not even in the discussions or with his colleagues outside of sessions (which Djaït found very strange).⁵³⁸

This impossible dialogue with his academic peers was another reason for Laroui to continue working on his critique and his intellectual project outside of academic circles. In fact, his second essay's conclusion was published as an article in *Lamalif*, shortly after the conference in December 1970: "*La pire des politiques est celle de la tradition*".⁵³⁹ One reading of this article's aims was to raise awareness of the ongoing traditionalisation of Moroccan society and politics and offering a historical explanation as to why Moroccans had a tendency to adopt "tradition" (a term he did not explain). It was a social reaction of rejection and withdrawal (*repli*) in response to conditions perceived to be threatening. He believed that faced with the frightful perspective of

⁵³⁷ Djaït, "Continuité et mutation: pour une dialectique du futur" in Actes du Colloque de Mohammedia, 3-5 December 1970, 153-161.

⁵³⁸ Interview with Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

⁵³⁹ Laroui, "La pire des politiques est celle de la tradition" in *Lamalif*, 1970, 18-22.

having to adapt to historical change, Moroccan society had continuously found refuge in tradition. The problem emerged when tradition was used to devise an approach to the country's realities and challenges. In fact, tradition as a state policy was a quasi-criminal approach because it justified colonialism and "maintains structures of decadence... killing the very sprouts of evolution the outside world has, despite itself, introduced".⁵⁴⁰

However, this article (and conclusion to *L'histoire du Maghreb*) reveals more about the notion of *Revolution*, despite a multitude of metaphors and confusing references: Revolution was the necessary response to the "social mechanism" that had stopped evolving throughout the Maghrib's history and that was producing endless layers of unresolved contradictions. These contradictions lead to French colonial control over Morocco (in 1912), and they had to be addressed before leading to another "tragedy". In fact, according to Laroui, despite a decade of formal political independence "the problem is still political and cultural", and "economic underdevelopment will never be overcome if social and cultural underdevelopment is not first diagnosed and fought, and this implies questioning the past".⁵⁴¹

The specific *act* that he referred to, when he spoke of the Revolution contained two dimensions: confronting the past, and working towards a reform of the current system towards the politicisation of Moroccans. His book wanted to be a first step towards the first aim (or on some ambitious level, the whole first aim). But the second aim would require a larger effort to break from colonial practices (maintained under the independent state), and Laroui spelled out these requirements: the adoption of new policies to fight backwardness (such as industrialisation, urbanisation and job creation) and the promotion of Moroccans' politicisation in order to "make them feel part of a single community".⁵⁴² In the meantime, Moroccan society's determinism and historical fatalism ran deep, and had to be overcome.⁵⁴³ Laroui called for a genuine rupture with the past so that Moroccans might liberate themselves from this tragic internalisation.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid. 20.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. 19.

⁵⁴² Ibid. 21.

⁵⁴³ Ibid. 19.

How to get out of oneself, of one's mountains and dunes, how to define the self and not in relation to the other, how to stop being an exile in spirit? Only this is the Revolution, and it remains to be made.⁵⁴⁴

In the conclusion, Laroui reveals how his committed historical revisionist effort was in fact a way to talk about current political realities, and especially the current crisis of legitimacy in the early seventies. He had to mobilise the powerful notion of 'Revolution' to appeal to his readership, but he also surrounded it with confused and unclear metaphors, which was his way of treading carefully. He sometimes ventured by called out "*le pouvoir personnel*" in the Maghrib, and by referring to the notion of "enlightened despotism". This was enough to set the discussion in place for his readers to reach his own conclusion without having to spell them out (and calling for trouble), namely that the current authorities were as illegitimate as colonial authorities for maintaining structures of oppression.⁵⁴⁵

Laroui's call for a Marxist Arab revolution, in this article was unconvincing, among other reasons because the tribal element of Arab societies did not entirely correspond to the feudal structure that determined where the economic means of production were located and he did not address this limitation. However, his call for revolution as an effort of critical introspection had powerful implications. His intellectual project insisted on the need for Maghribis to take a look at themselves and confront their history, in order to "reconcile oneself with one's time and land, with oneself and especially with one's brother" and then put their energies to go forward.⁵⁴⁶ In the text, he presented himself as a critical voice unafraid to lead this effort and lead the way for others. After his recent return from exile, this sentence had a strongly biographical value and signalled his readiness to return to the public sphere and public affairs.

Laroui's call for a revolution consisted of a cultural and intellectual decolonisation and it had to be heard and adopted by others around that time. Thanks to his article in *Lamalif*, which was

⁵⁴⁴ Idem.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid. 21.

⁵⁴⁶ Idem.

widely read by the intelligentsia, he hoped others would carry out the painful but necessary effort of critical introspection he had called for in the book's conclusion.⁵⁴⁷

In the next edition of *Lamalif*, Zakya Daoud reviewed his book, calling it a 'claim for liberty' and democracy, an "unfulfilled demand" in the region.⁵⁴⁸ Democracy was hindered by the repetitive pattern of withdrawal and isolation into "their land, their religion, their language" following repeated foreign aggression.⁵⁴⁹ While political independence was the opportunity to break this eternal cycle, Daoud noted that the book ended on the tragic observation that the Maghrib was still trying to conceive or imagine the post-colonial future, and was therefore reproducing colonial frameworks.⁵⁵⁰ In fact, she remarked that even Laroui could not explain why nationalism as an ideology had not liberated the Maghrib from its endless cycle of domination and regression. Despite her positive review, her article ended by remarking how Laroui had raised more questions than he had provided answers.

The following article was another critical discussion by regular contributor Samira Mounir (presumably a pen name). She qualified Laroui's work as expressing a "catastrophic optimism" because the only way how he envisaged the Maghrib's liberation was through "a rupture that is Revolution".⁵⁵¹ She also highlighted some of Laroui's assumptions with which she did not fully agree, such as the supposition that it would suffice for Maghribi societies to subscribe to rationality and democracy to 'return to the path of history' and compensate their historical delay.⁵⁵² But she recognised that Laroui came up with a new philosophy of history, different to the Marxist perspective, one that sought to provoke new energies and a new confidence in the national project.⁵⁵³ Therefore, these two articles indicate how Laroui's articles provoked a debate on the notion of historical delay.

There were other Moroccan intellectuals who integrated Laroui's ideas in their own analyses on society and culture. For example, in November 1972, Moroccan journalist Abdellah Stouky

⁵⁴⁷ Idem.

⁵⁴⁸ Daoud, "L'histoire du Maghreb ou l'histoire de la revendication de la liberté" in *Lamalif*, (45) 1971, 31-34.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. 34.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. 35.

⁵⁵¹ Mounir, "Laroui ou l'optimisme catastrophique" in *Lamalif*, 45, 1971, 35-40.

⁵⁵² Ibid. 36, 40.

⁵⁵³ Ibid. 36.

wrote a fascinating critique of the dominant artistic trends in Morocco by identifying their philosophical underpinnings and their relation to the “tradition/modernity dialectic”.⁵⁵⁴ He called on Moroccan artists to reject cultural legacies of colonialism and the West’s legitimising gaze that forced Moroccan artists to mobilise folklore and call it ‘heritage’; instead, he recommended that such artists “return to the past to take possession of it is a fertile political and cultural attitude... placed in a modern dynamic”.⁵⁵⁵ Laroui’s influence was particularly visible when Stouky referred to the need to “reject domination, meaning to give a coherence to history and through it to project (ourselves) in the future” and “to give a sense to one’s destiny, and to prepare by re-appropriating the past and the mastery of one’s personality”.⁵⁵⁶ Stouky also cited relevant passages from Laroui’s *L’idéologie arabe contemporaine* (1967) on cultural expression and on the power relation that existed between the centre and the periphery.⁵⁵⁷

The intellectual renewal of which these articles are merely a sample also corresponded to some of the most difficult years in Moroccan history, when one could easily and arbitrarily be accused of plotting against the regime and be jailed for it. Even *Lamalif* and the feisty character of its editor’s had to keep a low profile. Instead, the publication began giving more coverage to cultural and social issues. For example, Abdelkebir Khatibi expressed his call for a “double-critique” for the first time in *Lamalif* in February 1973 (issue 57). Two months later, the magazine released a lengthy special issue on Arabisation policies in comparison across the Arab world, along with a lengthy discussion of “Islam and sexuality” (issue 58), later followed by an investigation into alcohol in Morocco (issue 60). Interestingly, the 1973 war did not warrant as much coverage as the 1967 defeat. Coverage of all these issues was broadly tolerated because they did not sound too political, although they were probably more important to understanding the country’s realities. This was the type of intellectual space thinkers like Laroui aimed to occupy.

⁵⁵⁴ Souky, “Réflexions sur la dialectique de la modernité et de la tradition” in *Lamalif*, (55) 1972, 40.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid. 38.

⁵⁵⁶ Idem.

⁵⁵⁷ Laroui, *L’idéologie*, 40.

The fruition of these initial discussions came in 1974 when Laroui published his third essay, *La crise des intellectuels arabes*. For two years, he did not publish with *Lamalif* and the journal's readers would have been expecting the next instalment of his ideas (which, in the event, was an article on Arabisation campaigns that was censored by the authorities, see Chapter 5). Eventually in the spring of 1974, *Lamalif* published an extract of his essay and a brief discussion of Laroui's (and Djaït's) book by Ahmed Lamghili: "Thoughts on the renewal of Arab thought".⁵⁵⁸ This was such an important cultural event that it shared the front page alongside the announcement of Allal al-Fassi's sudden passing away in Romania.⁵⁵⁹

The book was a collection of studies that dealt with the notion of the historical delay of Arab culture and the means to address it, and it was also his response to the questions posed to him by the Moroccan intelligentsia on the rough edges of his historical model. He investigated the relationship between Arab cultural "historical delay" and the interaction between hegemony and alienation.⁵⁶⁰ Laroui wrote that alongside "westernisation", which was a manner of "becoming another, to double oneself", there was a neglected alienation which was "forced 'medievalisation' obtained with the quasi-magical identification with the great era of classical Arab culture".⁵⁶¹ This 'medievalisation' was an outcome of historical delay, which he defined as a social attitude consisting of the voluntary refusal to adapt behaviours to material changes.⁵⁶² The starting position of his argument was that the Arab world was historically delayed because of the prevalence of this irrationality across society, but especially because of the co-existence of traditional (*salafi*) and "eclectic" modes of thought within the Arab intelligentsia (See Chapter 5).⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁸ Lamghili, "Reflexions sur le renouveau de la pensée Arabe contemporaine: échec ou crise des intellectuels?" in *Lamalif*, (63) 1974, 48-53.

⁵⁵⁹ The Nationalist leader and head of Istiqlal died on an official trip of illness. The way the front page artwork was designed could also mean that this new thinker and type of thought had contributed the passing of al Fassi, and the overcoming of his legacy (salafi thought). "Laroui, Belal et Guessous face au retard historique et à la tradition" and "L'Istiqlal après Si Allal" in *Lamalif*, (64) 1974.

⁵⁶⁰ Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels arabes*, 8, 18.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 192-3.

⁵⁶² Ibid. 8-9.

⁵⁶³ Ibid. 190-191.

Finally, Laroui wrote on the situation of tradition in post-independence Morocco, by elaborating on some points from the conclusion of *L'histoire du Maghreb*. He found that the political actors who advocated social conservatism did so because they had an interest in the status quo, regardless of the contradictions provoked by a simultaneously conservative social order alongside a modernisation of the economy and importance of technological advances.⁵⁶⁴ He was, of course, pointing to the notability and other landed elites that continued to benefit from political and material influence after independence.

Laroui then presented his solution to the crisis: Arab intellectuals had to adopt “historicism”, a different way of looking at society and change outside of ideology that would then serve to renew political action and contribute to resolving the elements that made the current Arab regimes illegitimate.⁵⁶⁵ Thanks to this notion, Laroui addressed one of the shortcomings of his previous interventions in *Lamalif*: by adopting historicism, Moroccan intellectuals (and by extension, Moroccan culture) would re-integrate the flow of history (See Chapter 5).⁵⁶⁶

Despite Samira Mounir’s writing that Laroui was optimistic, the implications of his essay on Morocco’s chances of embracing ‘modernity’ could not be anything but pessimistic. His romantic call for revolution was moderated by a sobering assessment of the social configuration in Morocco, and the observation that none of the dominant groups “wishes or seriously considers the possibility of modern thought prevailing over traditional thought”.⁵⁶⁷ Furthermore, the “chances for rationality” to prevail lay in the revolutionary intellectual’s ability to overcome his or her social attachments (the materialist petty bourgeoisie) and fulfil this role out of an empowering nationalist sentiment of responsibility.⁵⁶⁸ But as he acknowledges, this relies on a strong assumption of the ability for this *dépassement*, or *tajāwuz*, to take place, and the reality was that it was a step too far for intellectuals because there was an “immediate price to pay”.⁵⁶⁹ There was no alternative: to overcome the malaise of living in a society that “evolves at an infra-

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. 46, 50-2, 55.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. 137-8.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. 14-8.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. 205. P

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. 208-9.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. 217.

historical pace”, the progressive Arab intellectual had to become a fearless critic of every issue of importance, despite having to go about it through intellectual strategies.⁵⁷⁰

Of particular interest for this discussion is the fact that the first chapter of *La crise des intellectuels* consisted, as noted earlier, of the text of the talk that he had given at the Louvain conference on Arab Renaissance in November 1970. It begs the question of why Laroui did not publish the text to Moroccan audiences earlier and spark an awareness of the rampant re-traditionalisation that was taking place since independence. On the basis of the previous discussion, and to the extent that Laroui’s approach to the public sphere and Moroccan intelligentsia can be gleaned from it, it is possible that he avoided putting his critique from the outset to gradually acclimatise his readers and slowly test the authorities’ red lines. This might be why he published the book a year earlier in Beirut and in Arabic as *Al-‘arab wa al-fikr al-tārīkhī*, expecting a better reception in the Arab world’s most progressive city.

From his return in 1970 until the publication of his essay in 1974, Laroui realised two things: there was a part of the intelligentsia (his departmental colleagues) that would not be attracted to his idea of revolution regardless of his critical demonstration. On the other hand, it appeared that through a progressive and patient dialogue, other intellectual might appeal to his system of thought. This intellectual journey toward these realisations showed that working under an authoritarian setting undoubtedly brought intellectual challenges, but these constraints had a silver lining because they forced him to look at deeper transformations in society and come up with a larger explanatory framework of the national crisis.

Laroui is often cited as a leading light and an inspiration for Arab intellectuals, from none other than Hichem Djaït who wrote that he found in him a similar dissatisfied intellectual of a deep erudition, just as comfortable with the ancient Arab cultural heritage as modern western scholarship. He added that he found Laroui’s writing “balanced” and “powerful” and it encouraged him to adopt an ambitious scope on the Arab world as a whole – which was another way of saying leaving the safer setting of academic erudition and going instead for his own ideas, which was a great (intellectual) risk. After its publication, Djaït reviewed Laroui’s book for

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. 219.

L'Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord, in what was a genuine intellectual conversation of the highest order.⁵⁷¹

The two thinkers agreed on the Arab world's urgent need for their critical perspectives, but each had different views on the Arab renaissance: the first advocated a revolutionary clean break, the second believed in a more progressive evolution, arguing that the Arab world contained what it needed to realise its potential for greatness. Beyond their ideological opposing views, it would be interesting to confront their arguments inter-textually to establish the traits of the modernity they envisaged for the region. What also differentiated them from each other was the Tunisian thinker's approach to the public sphere with his call for an Arab renaissance in the seventies.

3. The Arab past in the Arab future in Tunisia

Hichem Djaït was still living in France when his essay came out in 1974, and he only returned from exile in 1976. *La Personnalité Arabo-Islamique* came out at Le Seuil in its prestigious "Esprit" collection, the fruit of a collaboration with the journal of the same name. From the outset it appeared destined for a Parisian audience rather than the Tunisian intelligentsia, with whom the author had fundamental disagreements. This book was a long time in the making, from the moment *Esprit's* Editor Jean-Marie Domenach learned about Djaït in 1966 when the Tunisian wrote about religious reform and modernity. During Djaït's difficult years in exile, he found comfort by joining the group of scholars and thinkers gravitating around the journal and he was strongly influenced by the personalist school of thought.⁵⁷²

The title and the approach were obvious references to Bourguiba's and the neo-Destour's nationalist narrative against France in the forties and fifties. The book discussed the relationship between state-led reform in Tunisia and the possibility for renaissance. But it was first and

⁵⁷¹ Djaït, "Compte rendu critique de Laroui (Abdallah). – 'La Crise des intellectuels arabes. Traditionalisme ou historicisme ?'" in *AAN*, 1975.

⁵⁷² Filloux, *La personnalité*, 1976; Mounier, *Qu'est-ce que le personnalisme*, 1947; Ehrenreich, "personality theory: a case of intellectual and social isolation?" in *The Journal of Psychology*, (131:1) 1997.

foremost a critique of the way this reform neglected to take into account what he called Tunisia's "historical personality" and by blindly attempting to replicate European modernisation. What made this essay and Djaït's argument so compelling was that he took a seemingly cultural object ('personality') and identified the shortcomings of its usage in the collective political project. Furthermore, this critique was formulated in an erudite discourse, in order to make a powerful statement with strong political repercussions.

This idea drew large inspiration from Michel Aflaq, who in 1972 had called on Arabs to study the past and its achievements to be convinced of their possibility for greatness, instead of blindly replicating the past. Aflaq argued that "Arab personality was a unified whole, there was no difference between its spirit and thought, its words and action". The difference between past greatness and present weakness were not a normal state of affairs, hence Aflaq argued there was a need to "restore unity to our personality and wholeness to our Arab life".⁵⁷³ Aflaq went on to describe how the essence of this greatness was deeply rooted in what it meant to be Arab, complemented by the Islamic message and the Prophet's journey – which was a major statement from Aflaq, who was a Christian Arab:

Islam is the vibrant convulsion which shook the forces latent in the Arab *umma* and mobilised them in a surge of life which rocked the barriers of tradition and the bonds of convention to re-establish its connection with the profound sense of being [...] before the Arabs conquered the earth, they conquered themselves; they sounded their depths and tested their inner self. Before they ruled nations, they ruled themselves; they dominated their passions and mastered their will [...] the sciences they developed, the arts they created, the civilization (*'umrān*) they raised up were nothing but the partial and limited realisation of the powerful dream they lived in those years.⁵⁷⁴

Djaït had been thrilled by this message and wanted to transmit this idea of hope and greatness to his compatriots. A large part of Djaït's essay was an exposition and a development of this position, though with less of Aflaq's dramatic and passionate language, and a greater attempt to place it in a more rigorous historical methodological framework.

⁵⁷³ Aflāq, "Dikrate al-Rasūl al-'Arabī" in *Fi sabīl al-ba'th*, 1972, 5-7.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. 10.

Djaït essay, read as a primary source, offers a privileged testimony of his generation's concerns in the seventies, as Abdou Filali-Ansary noted.⁵⁷⁵ Among these concerns was the stagnating Tunisian national project, the rising contestation it provoked, and how the regime ignored these calls for change. When Djaït wrote that he feared the general situation in Tunisia risked escalating into chaos, he was referring to the 1968 protests and the subsequent disturbances on student campuses, along with the deterioration of the atmosphere he witnessed before he decided to leave for Paris. In the absence of a genuine dialogue, his generation was growing increasingly antagonised and disillusioned at the state's ability to lead Tunisia toward modernity. For these reasons, Djaït felt it was necessary to address the issue of renaissance and modernity in a historical perspective; however, he had to convince his readership of this approach.

Djaït's book contains three stages. First, he criticises the main strands of pan-Arab ideology and its failed attempts to pursue a collective Arab renaissance because of the unavoidable reality of each nation-state pursuing more limited aims and here, he republished the content of his 1971 article in *Esprit* on the idea of Arab unity.⁵⁷⁶ It appeared as if Djaït wanted to 'liquidate' or dismiss pan-Arab ideologies by demonstrating that progressive Arab regimes had said one thing and pursued another, in this case a strictly territorial form of nationalism. This part of the essay served to make his Arab readers acknowledge the failure of rhetorical pan-Arabism in order to revive a more effective or 'authentic' Arab national project. This explains why he reserved harsh criticism against the *practice* of Nasserism and Baathism, rather than its original inspiration. Secondly, he historically and critically reviews state reform across the Arab world to identify the continued spoliation of the Arab and Islamic components of their 'personality'. Finally, Djaït offers a vision for reform that addressed the individual's place in society, the state and its relationship with religious practices, and the establishment of a democratic political system. On that basis, he was able to draw the portrait of an Arab modernity that respected Arab cultural

⁵⁷⁵ Filali-Ansary, "Djaït ou la tyrannie du paradigme", 103.

⁵⁷⁶ Djaït, "Problématique et critique de l'idée d'unité arabe" in *Esprit*, 1971.

specificities and that would be culturally appropriate for Tunisian society.⁵⁷⁷ With this third part, he put himself in the long line of reformist thinkers by bringing something concrete to the discussion, the legacy of which he wanted to rekindle and go beyond, by arguing that the Arab world contained within it the energies, models and components to compensate its historical delay and shape its own modernity.⁵⁷⁸

The issue boiled down to the choices made by the national authorities after independence. According to Djaït, they chose to build up a sense of national identity that willingly omitted Arab and Islamic references and aspirations because they associated its legacy with decadence.⁵⁷⁹ As a result, this ‘national identity’ was a source of division and strife and caused dangerous dualities “between the structure of state, society and the economy, and on the other hand, cultural, ideological and political consciousness”.⁵⁸⁰ He set out to depict a path for modernity and cultural legacy to be integrated in a dialectic relationship, in order to shape a more robust and accurate national project. It would ultimately serve to re-acquaint significant sections of the population with politics.⁵⁸¹

This project relied on the notion of ‘historical personality’ but this was an unsatisfying conceptual tool, despite its popularity in the theoretical debates of the seventies. Taking inspiration from Abram Kardiner’s model of a ‘basic personality’, Djaït calibrated it to the Tunisian cultural setting and defined it as “the ideological and cultural framework, made of the imbrication of an ideology (religion) and a cultural tradition”.⁵⁸² But his later usages of it reflected its tedious and unclear nature:

It is more than a consciousness: it is an identity. It is more than a cultural legacy and faithfulness to our religious practice, showing itself in the horizon of our history. But it is less than the founding and final principle of our social existence. It is only ideological to the extent that it contains within it the ideology of the masses, that is to say ‘*islamness*’ [islamité], rather than because it will be able to organise and structure society and the future.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁷ Filali-Ansary, “Hichem Djaït ou la tyrannie du paradigme”, 113.

⁵⁷⁸ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 101.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. 59.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. 63.

⁵⁸¹ Idem.

⁵⁸² Ibid. 40.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. 64.

These difficulties continued when he talked about it in relation to the current crisis: it would be “synthesised with national existence” in order to “breathe in a new spirit to the whole conceptual universe of Arab political thought”.⁵⁸⁴ But in the meantime, he added that it could “never be brought to the arena of political contingency”, and instead it is as a ‘force of the past’, useful only because it offered ‘eternal values’ rather than pushing individuals towards nostalgia. This passage reveals a possible confused conceptual usage over whether it was meant as a tool for understanding or for political action.⁵⁸⁵ The two ideas risked contradicting one another and Djaït found a way out by arguing that this ‘historical personality’ should be “a source of energy for the reconstruction of a political and historical destiny”, and for the galvanisation of “all the forces of renewal or creation in society, the state and culture”.⁵⁸⁶ Once ‘historical personality’ was restored to the centre of the national edifice, the state would be able to fulfil its historic role by promoting a different type of reform. Modernity would not be associated with the profoundly unsettling perspective of denaturation, as Djaït acknowledged when he quoted the famous concern: “how to remain oneself while becoming another?”; also known as the dilemma between “backwardness” and “denaturation”.⁵⁸⁷

Ultimately, he believed there was a chance for rationality if a new collective “project for civilisation” was pursued that would really benefit the masses.⁵⁸⁸ It would require a new type of leaders that could ensure the state played its role in the pursuit of modernity. Djaït’s call for a return to the past might not have fit the mould of the “call for revolution” but in fact, he was using another and usually omitted meaning: before it meant “rupture”, revolutions referred to “a return, a rotation of movement back to a point of departure”, or effectively, a “re-evolution”, because of the understanding that politics had a way of starting in an ideal setting and drifting into oppression and alienations until being made to return, sometimes at the price of civil wars.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁴ Idem.

⁵⁸⁵ Idem.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid. 15.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. 21.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Koselleck, *Futures past*, 45-7.

Therefore, his call for revolution was laced with subtlety. For starters, he was not calling for a return to the past but for the uncovering of its spirit, and integrating it to current realities, and this distinguished him from the Salafi ideological movement: Hichem Djaït was a committed modernist intellectual. Secondly, he called for a rupture that was also a return to the spirit of the past, challenging the existing notions of time and linearity, which was bound to provoke misunderstandings. These were the characteristics of his “third way” for the Arab world, and the unfinished project of the first Nahda, with which he identified strongly.⁵⁹⁰

But as he formulated this call, Djaït positioned himself as a modern-day prophet, passing judgement from outside the country on those who were confronted with Tunisian realities on a daily basis. He was on a collision course with his Tunisian readership who had forgotten about him since his moment of fame in 1966, especially considering the upheavals of the Ben Salah crisis, and who would not take kindly to his criticism. This would jeopardise his ability to be heard and understood – especially on such a subtle message.

4. Animosity against the celebrated critic

Despite his absence from the country, Djaït’s essay became a major topic of discussion in Tunisia, especially thanks to glowing reviews it received in France.⁵⁹¹ It benefitted from a favourable cultural environment and the lack of similar books on the Tunisian market. But in the meantime, fame was also a double-edged sword as he had learned in 1966-7 and he faced ambivalent reactions, and even sharp criticism. Later Djaït reflected on the polemic caused by his book, and he blamed these reactions on “jealousy”, “small-mindedness”, and mostly that his readers had not understood his message.⁵⁹²

Despite his high intellectual aims, Djaït had also hoped that this book would allow him to overcome his intellectual withdrawal. Initially, it benefitted from a favourable intellectual

⁵⁹⁰ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 21.

⁵⁹¹ Interview with Khaled Kchir, Tunis, March 2015.

⁵⁹² Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, January 2014.

climate because there had been a rising interest in question of heritage and socio-cultural transformations in Tunisia since the early seventies, but also in the Arab world: when John Donohue sampled several Arab periodicals from 1945 to 1970, he found a remarkable increase in articles dealing with the notion of “authenticity”, reaching 80% of sampled articles in “popular” publications and 90% for “intellectual” journals, in the period from 1965 to 1970.⁵⁹³ Authenticity, as a concept, did not have a fixed meaning, but it is enough to note, as Donohue did, that Arab readers across social categories were thinking and expressing concerns about it.⁵⁹⁴ The Tunisian intelligentsia did not have many books on offer that dealt with these questions, which meant that Djaït filled a void.

Soon after the book’s publication, it became the talk of “intellectual salons” because of the cultural connections between Paris and Tunisia. Its author also faced some backlash because he did not prepare or acquire a wider readership in Tunisia, and competed in the public sphere with other ideological actors. For example, his only interview in Arabic was with the Moroccan publication *Al-‘Alam al-Thaqāfi*, the summer after the book’s publication.⁵⁹⁵ He had probably considered it more of a personal endeavour to come up with his answers to the national crisis rather than having to involve his audience. In subsequent interviews, Djaït has not offered a single and consistent position on what had been his main aim when he decided to write this book: in 1974, he declared that he wrote against those who refused the very idea of change and the value of modernity whereas in 1997 he wrote that his aim was to “revolt against the chauvinism” of the Tunisian intelligentsia, and especially against the consummated “deep rupture with the Arab and Islamic roots of this people”.⁵⁹⁶ More recently, he denied writing to gain access to the spheres of power and instead, the book was a way to deal with personal issues in writing.⁵⁹⁷ His approach to the public sphere differed significantly from Bechir Ben Slama, who had been co-editor of *Al-Fikr* and who released that same year a book with the same title: *Al-Shakhṣiyya al-*

⁵⁹³ Donohue, “Islam and the search for identity in the Arab world” in *Esposito* (ed.), *Islam in transition: Muslim perspectives*, 1982, 51-2.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 53-6 (for the different types of ‘authenticity’).

⁵⁹⁵ “Hiwār ma’a al-kātib al-tunusī Hishām Ju’ayt” in *Al-‘Alam al-Thaqāfi*, 243, 27 September 1974, 11-12.

⁵⁹⁶ Berri, “Une pensée déchirée – entretien avec Hichem Djaït”, in *JA*, 703, 29 June 1974, 56 ; Arfaoui, “Entretien avec Djaït”, 31.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage February 2015.

Tūnusiyya. Ben Slama was known to Tunisian readers and had been regularly writing since the sixties on similar topics. His book and position were better understood: he called for a greater consideration of the long Arab heritage, mostly found in the Arabic language. He called for its restoration and more serious Arabisation campaigns.⁵⁹⁸ The Tunisian historian Hedi Timoumi referred to 1974 as the “Year of Personality” because of the publication of these two books with a similar title, and a broad social interest in this theme.⁵⁹⁹ However, Djaït’s book told another story, especially because of the combination of his quasi-unanimous glowing coverage abroad, and how he was ignored and later attacked at home. It illustrates well the difficulties and intricacies of intellectual re-engagement in the mid-seventies.

In Paris, his book was presented alongside Laroui’s as evidence of an emerging and exciting trend in Arab thought. According to Christine Souriau, who reviewed it in 1975 and regularly wrote about Maghribi intellectual life, this was the expression of a generation of young Maghribis coming to terms with their double-culture and ready to stand firm for their ideas, while undermining what they perceived to be archaic sources of authority.⁶⁰⁰ Her review also highlighted the difficulty of “placing such a book in the current Arab climate”, especially because of the “mixed reactions it provoked that left one baffled”: this time, reactions were as much part of the story as the ideas.⁶⁰¹

In March 1974, the Moroccan novelist and journalist Tahar Ben Jelloun wrote a short review of these two books in *Le Monde diplomatique*: “Two Maghribis faced with the problem of authenticity”. He read the two essays as a sobering counter-assessment of the current situation in the Arab world “at a time when some would like to believe that Arab society is on the eve of a new era and a restored honour” – after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war when Egypt managed to recover the Sinaï peninsula and its military’s honour. First Djaït offered a “patient, liberal and humanist reflexion”, while Laroui “posed the question of the crisis of Arab intellectuals and the

⁵⁹⁸ Ben Slama, “Limādhā al-ta’rib?”, in *Al-Fikr*, 16:7, April 1971, 39-57

⁵⁹⁹ Timoumi, *La Tunisie*, 2008, 184-6 ; Interview Hmida Enneifer in T. al-Bishri, *Les intellectuels et le pouvoir*, 211.

⁶⁰⁰ Souriau, Bibliographie critique “Djaït (Hichem). – *La personnalité et le devenir arabo-islamiques*. Paris, Seuil, 1974, 201 p., Bibliographie, Index”, 913-4. *AAN*, 1975. But also later, “La conscience islamique dans quelques oeuvres récentes d’intellectuels du Maghreb” in *ReMM*, 29, 1980, 69-107.

⁶⁰¹ Idem.

cultural delay at the origin of this crisis”.⁶⁰² Ben Jelloun was somewhat critical of the Tunisian writer: where Laroui “goes straight to the essential” by making concrete proposals, Djaït was subject to “seductions of language”, rejecting different ideologies in favour of broad, sometimes vague pursuits.⁶⁰³ In September, it was Olivier Carré’s turn to praise this essay that he identifies as having an “undeniable prophetic dimension” and the expression of Djaït’s take on the famous third way, spoken about “from Rabat to Baghdad”.⁶⁰⁴ Such a glowing review in *Le Monde* (alongside a review of Laroui’s book) was guaranteed to boost his notoriety in Tunisia where the newspaper “was considered to be something like the Bible”, in Djaït’s own words.⁶⁰⁵ A year later, in March 1975, *Esprit* published another combined review of the two Maghribis’ writing, but with a more extensive discussion of Djaït’s book. The reviewer began by noting the difficulty for “western thought to envisage the realities of Islam” often portrayed as a “perpetual image”.⁶⁰⁶ The issue, he wrote, was how to determine this “personality” that constituted a dynamic trait of Islam: Laroui raised the stakes but it was Djaït who had found a way to “perpetuate the Arab and Islamic self”.⁶⁰⁷ This book was a “double-revolt”, against “simplistic anti-Islamic prejudices”, and against the century old “passive and conformist” attitudes that established alienation.⁶⁰⁸ It was a valuable addition to the discussion with its refusal to perpetuate such “criminal” dualities, and its adoption of nuanced dialectics:

There is something fascinating, something both hurt and sublime in this quest for identity... by Hichem Djaït, an academic less than forty years old, westernised as can be expected, but still deeply committed to voices from deep within. There is something methodically obstinate in his attempt to define a basic personality for the Arab and Islamic man, overcoming a Fanonian dialectic between colonised and decolonised through a consciousness of history of civilisation.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰² Ben Jelloun, “Le long hiver de la société Arabe: Deux Maghrébins face au problème de l’authenticité” in *Le Monde diplomatique*, March 1974, 19.

⁶⁰³ Idem.

⁶⁰⁴ Carré, “Pour un renouveau prophétique”, *Le Monde*, 6 September 1974, 14.

⁶⁰⁵ Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, January 2014.

⁶⁰⁶ Dedet, “L’homme arabo-islamique” in *Esprit*, March 1975, 443.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid. 445.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. 448.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. 446.

The reviewer was nevertheless critical of some aspects: the scale of what he was attempting, how this project was motivated by “disillusionment and an uncertain bet”, a disillusionment with the simplistic or naïve representation of Arabs’ destiny in the context of Baathism and Nasserism. But despite the criticism, he acknowledged the value of a book that displaced the discussion by attempting to grapple with something much bigger: how to pursue secularism by overcoming the inherent fears in the Islamic world against the loss of identity. His book was an attempt to convince his readers that transformation could take place without turning into total alienation.⁶¹⁰ The outcome would be the “integral revolution”, whereby a modern and rationalised consciousness would be married to a re-Islamised state and a liberated society.⁶¹¹

After this Parisian acclaim, the essay had to make it in Tunisia. However, Djaït still carried the legacy of his acrimonious departure in 1969, and especially the social stigma that was attached to his name after the trial. He also had to ensure he was dissociated from the old Tunisian bourgeoisie and had to learn how to be accepted as a modern and critical intellectual. He knew how to speak to the scholarly Paris audience, but his Tunisian readers were drenched in nationalist rhetoric and they lived the realities he aimed to account for, especially since the purpose of the critical essay was to uncover structures of domination.⁶¹² Furthermore, his essay made more efforts to dialogue with the important thinkers of his time (such as Aflaq, Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, Iqbal or Kardiner) than it did with the Tunisian intelligentsia: he did not cite research on similar questions by CERES, *Les Cahiers de Tunisie*, *Al-Fikr* or the cultural renewal in film, poetry and theatre that the country was experiencing. He also did not engage in a thorough discussion of Abdelaziz Thaalbi or Khayr al-Din’s ideas that would have given his book a greater claim to speak from within the continuity of Tunisian reformism.

His first attempt to speak with Tunisian audiences came through the mediation of *Jeune Afrique*, but it was a timid one. The weekly magazine was created and edited by Bechir Ben Yahmed, a journalist who had been close to Bourguiba and instrumental in publicising the struggle for independence, until he left the country in 1961 after a disagreement with the

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. 448.

⁶¹¹ Ibid. 447.

⁶¹² Boltanski, *On critique*, 2, 13.

country's authoritarian turn.⁶¹³ He created his magazine and settled in Paris to cover African and Arab affairs, but he subsequently mended his fences with the Tunisian President and the Tunisian regime.⁶¹⁴ *Jeune Afrique* was widely read in the Maghrib by intellectuals and the authorities, and was periodically banned for its coverage of political and diplomatic developments, (a sign of its successful challenge of the authorities' hold on information). Ben Yahmed learned of Djaït's new book and gave him a stage on which to raise his profile.

Djaït's first article in 1974 came in May but it was not in relation to his book but about the trial of Radhia Haddad in Tunis on charges of corruption and embezzlement of public funds. She was "a political figure of the first order", who had been one of the first women elected to parliament, a member of the PSD's Central Committee and former head of the Tunisian Women's organization. She was also a prominent member of the group of Tunis-based liberals, and had enjoyed close relations of trust with Bourguiba and Wassila. But from 1972, she began to fall from grace and was facing public infamy and jail time. Djaït denounced this trial as a blatant political manipulation intending to liquidate Haddad from power because of her outspoken nature, but mostly as part of regime's counter-strategy to recover power from its critics on the eve of the Monastir congress (12-15 September 1974), to scare liberals into submission and to punish those who had spoken against Ben Salah and the President's blind trust in his former super-Minister in 1968.⁶¹⁵ For most political observers, this affair would not have been surprising as it was "part of the game".⁶¹⁶ However, Djaït chose to intervene because it was a manifestation of an injustice, which he had also suffered a couple of years before. Now that he was reclaiming the means of communication, he spoke directly to the regime to reiterate his innocence and emerge from his ostracism, by showing the injustice behind this common practice and denouncing how this political regime functioned.

A couple of weeks later, *Jeune Afrique* contributed to publicising his essay and building up his public profile. On 29 June 1974, he gave a long interview to its main journalist on Maghribi

⁶¹³ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 2012, 275-6.

⁶¹⁴ Ben Yahmed, *Ce que je crois*, 1989.

⁶¹⁵ Djaït, "Procès de Radhia Haddad" in *JA*, 18 May 1974, 32.

⁶¹⁶ Camau, "Tunisie – Chronique Politique" in *AAN*, 1974, 430.

affairs, the Moroccan political exile Hamid Berrada (writing as Younnes Berri), as part of a dossier on his and Laroui's essays. The interview began by emphasising the particularity (or even peculiarity) of calling for "maintaining while reforming, ensuring secularism without separating Islam from the state". For Berrada, this book was "not easy" and he predicted it would "provoke mixed reactions". Later in the interview, the author and interviewer agreed that aspects of the book were "ambiguous, torn, and contradictory".⁶¹⁷ This interview was Djaït's opportunity to introduce some clarity and frame his positions. First, Djaït conceived of the relationship between religion, secularism and the state outside of existing frameworks. Writing with Tunisia in mind, Djaït explained how the moral code contained in the Islamic message was no longer suitable for modern society and needed to be replaced by rational values. But in a Hegelian tradition, the state was expected to safeguard personality and therefore had to be Islamised and commit to the safeguard of the 'historical personality'.⁶¹⁸ This was one of those ambiguous contradictions that would confuse his readership. Secondly, he laid out how he envisaged the modernisation of Arab society without alienation. At a time when progressive Arab intellectuals were calling for revolution and total rupture (as advocated by Laroui, for example), Djaït was in favour of a progressive reform, a "modernisation that should not touch upon the historical foundations of the self," so that it "would not become a source of alienation".⁶¹⁹

His message was much clearer after this big interview and thanks to *Jeune Afrique's* circulation in Tunisia, it is quite certain that his ideas were heard. However, that was not enough because his return to the public sphere faced another sizable obstacle: whether there was a space for his type of critical interventions in Tunisia. Djaït might not have fully appreciated the importance of this question, seeing as Tunisia had changed significantly during his time in exile, and especially since the Ben Salah crisis in 1969. Tunisian society and the regime went through a period of soul-searching: the authorities turned the page on the socialist experiment, and the public sphere experienced a temporary thaw. Tunis liberals, led by Ahmed Mestiri, took advantage of Bourguiba's repeated health-related absences and the weakened Sahel clan to

⁶¹⁷ Berri, "Entretien avec Hichem Djaït", 56.

⁶¹⁸ Idem.

⁶¹⁹ Idem.

formulate greater demands for liberalisation and fragment the hegemonic state.⁶²⁰ The economic situation began to improve under the new Prime Minister Hedi Nouira and several discussion groups and journals emerged, such as *Al-Ma'rifa* and the Association for the Preservation of the Quran that campaigned for a greater recognition of Tunisia's Islamic heritage.⁶²¹ Finally, the Tunisian public was also captivated by the drama of the strange union proposal with Libya in 1974, all the more strangely aborted according to the account of the head-to-head meeting between Bourguiba and Qaddafi, as reported by Bessis and Belhassen.⁶²²

As a result of this highly eventful period, Djaït's book did not immediately benefit from coverage by Tunisian publications. Eventually, a year after its release, the history faculty's journal *Les Cahiers de Tunisie* published a review by the historian Béchir Tlili (the journal received a copy of the book in spring 1974, as reported in its back cover). Tlili's review was a broad and tame summary and it is surprising that none of the more senior members of the journal reviewed the book instead, a task usually carried out by Mohamed Talbi or Mohamed-Hédi Chérif (especially considering Djaït had contributed to this journal and the essay was thought provoking for historians). It would seem that the editorial board, on this occasion, was disinterested – or else chose to be cautious, considering the critical passages it contained targeting the regime, and that it was written by an exile. What was more telling was that national newspapers did not cover this publication despite it being clearly an important cultural event that could have been used to improve Tunisia's image.

This underwhelming reaction lasted a year, a period during which Bourguiba swept away his opponents (starting at the PSD's Monastir congress in 1974). The regime also went on to regain control of the public sphere that had been left somewhat open since 1969 due to political infighting. The authorities saw the importance of addressing concerns about social and cultural change in order to recover the regime's public legitimacy. All of these logics came together in the official treatment reserved to Djaït's essay in 1975. The PSD had launched a weekly magazine called *Dialogues* in 1973 in order to offer an informed alternative to the laconic state

⁶²⁰ Belhassen, Bessis, *Bourguiba*, 322-366.

⁶²¹ Boulby, "The Islamic challenge: Tunisia since independence" in *TWQ*, (10: 2) 1988, 599-601.

⁶²² Belhassen, Bessis, *Bourguiba*, 387-400.

daily newspapers and counter the influence of external publications (the equivalent in Algeria was *Révolution Africaine* a decade earlier). Despite covering current social, economic and cultural issues and responding to a need, this weekly magazine ended up being a mouthpiece of the regime with restricted coverage and shallow analyses.

On 31 March 1975, *Dialogues* devoted a two-page review article to Djaït's essay, and its title set the tone, calling it accusatorily "the art of cutting oneself off from reality".⁶²³ A year after its publication, and now that it was clear this had become a powerful phenomenon, being discussed by the Tunisian intelligentsia, it was finally being considered in its own right and the regime could not afford to ignore it anymore, hence this 'official' position.

In the current cultural renewal of the Arab world, the reviewer wrote, Maghribi thinkers had begun to contribute "to the renewal and the enrichment of Arab thought". Laroui was the first of such thinkers who inspired others like Djaït. But this so-called flourishing of Arab thought was problematic because it showed "a sense of disarray in the face of a subject-matter", in other words, that its authors panicked and were quick to call a crisis as opposed to politicians, who were calmer in running of the country and dealing with a complex reality.⁶²⁴ Djaït's book was a case in point, and the journalist believed it was unable to grasp the complex Tunisian reality: "As fascinating as Djaït's book is, as rich as it appears in its form and content... it lets appear this disarray and therefore, it is largely compromised".⁶²⁵

Furthermore, and this was presented in the article as an irrecoverable sin, the contradictions that Djaït discussed about the Arab world were in fact the author's own, in other words Djaït's personality projected onto society. Therefore, the journalist wrote, the book was more of a work of "existential literature" than an account of reality because "the defining trait of such a literature [is] to remain prisoner of its internal ruptures and traumatisms".⁶²⁶ He then attacked something that would have affected Djaït as a scholar: how the author confused the notion of 'patriotism' with 'nationalism'. Djaït was discredited because he did not primarily have Tunisia's interest at

⁶²³ Masmoudi, "La personnalité et le devenir arabo-islamique de Hichem Djaïet, ou l'art de se couper du réel" in *Dialogues*, 31 March 1975, 8-9.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. 8.

⁶²⁵ Idem.

⁶²⁶ Idem.

heart, not even in his gaze, and instead looked at a wider entity (the Arab world). The reviewer took a final shot by accusing Djaït of being unaware of (better) new books in the Arab world such as those of Zaki Najib Mahmud (who had published his *Tajdīd al-fikr al-‘arabī* in 1971). Despite these discrediting strategies, the article had to address some of the points raised by the author, chief among them being the relationship between the state and religion. But he simply turned Djaït’s critique into a non-issue by claiming that Bourguiba already defended the importance of this relationship thoroughly.⁶²⁷

In the last paragraph of the article, Masmoudi targeted the author and his political views: Djaït could be reduced to his social origin: he had no trust in society (the masses), because of his origin as a “member of one of the great families of the capital’s bourgeoisie”, who would have liked to see power devoted to a new intellectual aristocracy. Masmoudi managed to frame this as another reason to denounce the book and support the neo-Destour’s experience of “associating the populace and involving it in running the country, and taking the greatest advantage of its potential”.⁶²⁸

This review, in many ways a calculated effort from the political and intellectual establishment, made sure that the messenger got in the way of the message. But interestingly, the virulence of these reactions and efforts to delegitimise Djaït is what politicised his essay and gave it a wider public dimension. During the summer of 1975, the regime found the need to take over this debate on ‘personality’ by launching a strong ideological campaign, notably in the same magazine, and in order to update the meaning of ‘Tunisian personality’ that Bourguiba mobilised for Tunisia’s nationalist struggle for independence and had barely evolved since, according to Driss Abbassi.⁶²⁹

In August 1975, *Dialogues* published a special number on “Tunisian personality” to reiterate the official position. It reported on several round tables that barely brought anything new, or took into account the critiques formulated by Djaït, Ben Slama or *Al-Ma‘rifa* regarding the place of the Arab and Islamic legacy. From independence, *Dialogues* claimed, the Tunisian state had

⁶²⁷ Ibid. 9.

⁶²⁸ Idem.

⁶²⁹ Abbassi, *Identité tunisienne et histoire depuis l’indépendance*, 2005, 25, 47-50.

adopted an official narrative that celebrated Tunisian cultural pluralism and the multiple influences that shaped it during its long history. It cited the Punic age, the Romans and Phoenicians, the Arab, Islamic, the Ottoman and finally even the French legacy, which, despite its oppression, contributed to enriching Tunisia's culture. Even with all of these successive invasions and subjugations, the entity referred to as 'Tunisian personality' remained a constant feature that adapted by integrating these various additions to its existing and unchanging character.⁶³⁰ To give credence to this claim, the magazine organised a 'debate' with experts, though the majority of its participants were male civil servants of a certain age working in cultural administrations (such as the National Institute for Archaeology) and went on to commonly express the official position. It consisted in saying that 'Tunisian personality' was manifested in everyday life, in behaviours and artistic expression, that it was a debate about the past rather than an issue of the present and social concerns about the present and the political system. As for the line of criticism addressed by Islamist associations, the round table agreed that 'Tunisian personality' had been significantly enriched by the arrival of Islam and its spiritual message, but that it married an already existing personality and it did not establish it.⁶³¹ One participant did concede that progress should not be carried out by alienating the components of Arabism and Islam, but the past should be remobilised for the future rather than for its own sake or worse, to promote backwardness and refusal to change, because those who "speak about the past and think about people and their tradition... seem to work against progress... and feel nostalgic for an oppressive and obscurantist society".⁶³² The participants agreed that the quest for modernity should not alienated "Tunisian personality", thought without specification, and instead went on to denounce those who claimed that modernity and Arabo-Islamic legacy were incompatible as people out to instrumentalise tradition in order to discredit state efforts, and derail the national project.

⁶³⁰ Chakib Laouachri, "La Personnalité tunisienne à travers l'histoire" in *Dialogues*, special dossier "De la personnalité tunisienne", 18 August 1975, 16.

⁶³¹ S'Habou, *Ibid.* 14.

⁶³² Masmoudi, "Nos traditions et notre avenir", 24.

This episode served to highlight the regime's reaction to an infringement of its ideological hegemony: usually by mobilising relays of official positions, usually "co-opted" intellectuals or civil servants. After the summer of 1975, thanks to similar media campaigns, the PSD and *Dialogues* were confident of having closed the case on "Tunisian personality". They no longer brought it up, and instead dealt with it as an issue about state reform on language and education, rather than as a fundamental challenge to the national project.⁶³³

Djaït's difficult re-engagement in the public sphere had to do with his approach towards the Tunisian intelligentsia – a group that could have served as a relay to his reform project, but who never got on board. Part of the reason was that he did not recognize other views, he did not take part in intellectual life in Tunisia (being in exile), and did not keep informed by reading Tunisian publications (which he believed was mediocre as a whole). Furthermore, by writing from outside the country where he grew increasingly aware of the dual cultural sources of his personality, he projected this character onto Tunisian society as a whole, especially the "petty bourgeoisie" that ran the country, without necessarily verifying it directly (in this regard, see the considerable research carried out by CERES and the Tunis sociology department). He did not foresee the difficulties he would have in getting his message accepted, or the resistances that his criticism would elicit. Despite the failure of his call for a revolutionary "third way" to gather support, it did have a silver lining in that it stirred the muddy and still waters of the public sphere and forced a variety of actors to start thinking about this so-called "Tunisian personality". It was seen with the way Arabisation, heritage and the renewal of Islamic sentiment were discussed with greater urgency. And by bringing these issues up in Paris and using a modern writing style (the critical essay), it made sure that different elites and intellectuals were also starting to think about them.

⁶³³ Grandguillaume, *Arabisation et politique linguistique au Maghreb*, 1983, 58-9.

Conclusion: Claiming the right to speak for others

This chapter has looked at how the two intellectuals adapted to life under authoritarianism, and turned to social and cultural criticism in order to return from their intellectual exile and withdrawal. The call for “*révolutionur laquelle*” that Arab intellectuals mobilised with passion after the 1967 defeat may have sounded radical, but it contained more measured analyses, as Laroui and Djaït’s books have shown. They uncovered the place of the past in contemporary societies and suggested that collective representations were a significant obstacle in the pursuit of modernity. Laroui denounced “tradition...[as] the worst of policies” because it justified the internalisation of historical delay. Instead, he advocated the adoption of historicism, a mode of thought that promoted activism and change. Meanwhile, Djaït denounced reforms that went against the cultural components of Tunisia’s past and copied western modernisation because they alienated Tunisian society. Instead, he called for a reform agenda that respected the components of Tunisian personality and brought society on board.

Their respective intellectual projects for an Arab renaissance in the seventies by writing differently about the question of modernity, going beyond the limitations and inertia of public discourse. In the process, Laroui and Djaït contributed to making the intellectual’s purpose evolve: provoking an awareness of these dynamics went beyond the simple understandings of notions of engagement and disengagement, as usually used with regard to Arab intellectuals. The notion of public participation must be enlarged, by considering the conditions under which they worked, and their ultimate aims. In order to continue working, thinking and writing, critical intellectuals had to adopt certain strategies of accommodation to the regimes’ main characteristics (usually their legitimisation narratives), and avoid infringing on red lines. This pragmatic posture was a convenient compromise where they remained unaligned but still offered their vision on social and cultural matters, but cannot be qualified as “disengagement”. This chapter has also considered the material dimension of the circulation of thought in authoritarian and ideologically hegemonic settings. Surprisingly, the state was not the only obstacle to their

public and cultural engagements: the intelligentsia in Morocco and Tunisia played the role of a resistance to the emergence of radical new ideas. In fact, the emergence of their thought should be seen as the result of the interplay of these constraints, rather than independently of the context in which it operated.

Finally, the story of their return to the public sphere has also highlighted the importance of legitimacy and of social location (or insertion in particular networks). One of the differences between Laroui and Djaït's trajectories was the timing of their decisions to return, and the Moroccan benefitted from returning earlier. He became known to the public by publishing regularly and in a variety of domestic settings, rather than returning out of the blue from abroad and writing critically. Djaït still believed that a Tunisian who was famous in Paris was automatically a prestigious voice back in the Maghrib, but he failed to realise that during his absence, an independent cultural and intellectual life had taken hold.

In these two thinkers' essays, the intellectual's purpose was to understand, but also to lead cultural change, an awakening and the identification of structures of domination. However, the intellectual making this critique had to be within society and also have some critical distance, and this can raise crucial questions regarding their ability to find the right balance between the specific and the universal, and separate between a crisis of society and the crisis of intellectuals who could not assimilate and feel at ease. On the basis of the experiences cited earlier, it would be a dangerous assumption to equate their social experiences with those of other social groups, giving them the ability to speak in their name, and yet, without this ability to speak for others, it is doubtful whether intellectuals would still have a role to play.

Chapter 5 The crisis of intellectuals in society

During the seventies, the Arab intellectuals who had previously felt frustrated at their exclusion from public affairs (chapter 2), expressed this frustration in a number of critical essays that tackled, in some form or other, the “crisis of intellectuals” in society.⁶³⁴ This was a significant movement, according to scholars of the Arab world: in 1972, Menahem Milson wrote about Arab intellectuals who were alienated because they were “politically peripheral”.⁶³⁵ In 1973 Jean-Paul Charnay described the general feeling of *qalaq*, of dismay, which Arab intellectuals felt upon realising that even should they succeed in compensating their societies’ historical delay, it would be at the price of the transformation of the self.⁶³⁶ But above all, these Arab intellectuals were significant because they linked their exclusion with the various crises their countries were going through. This critical renewal of Arab thought followed the Arab defeat of 1967, and the new voices to emerge saw it as an opportunity to identify the social and cultural sources of alienation through powerful critiques. Suzanne Kassab studied in some depth those who “set the tone of post 1967 Arab critique”: Saadallah Wannous’s “existentialist dramatisation” of theatre, Qustantin Zurayq’s “humanistic” take on Arab civilization and Arab reason, Sadeq Jalal al-Azm’s scathing critique of religious forms of thought, Laroui on ideology and historicism, and Nawal al-Saadawi’s powerful feminist critique on gender and sexuality in the Arab world.⁶³⁷ These powerful works shaped debates across the Arab world, and were very much the product of that shared critical atmosphere.

The topic of a crisis of intellectuals and society was also arguably the most important component of Laroui’s essay, *La crise des intellectuels* (1974), as the title indicates, and Djaït in *La Personnalité Arabo-Islamique* (1974), as the running theme, as he explained in his introduction. The

⁶³⁴ Khoury, *Tradition et modernité*, 2013, 81-4.

⁶³⁵ Milson, “Intellectual traditions in the Arab world”, op. cit. 33-4.

⁶³⁶ Charnay, “L’intellectuel arabe entre le pouvoir et la culture”, op. cit. 58-9.

⁶³⁷ Kassab, *Contemporary Arab thought*, 2010, 13.

essays meant to engage the deeper reasons behind their difficult engagement with their intellectual peers or in intellectual debates, or to have a say on the country's orientations. It is telling that these two essays were published slightly later than most of their counterparts cited earlier: not in the late sixties and in the emotional post-defeat period, but with some distance in the seventies. Laroui and Djaït may have been part of the Arab intellectual atmosphere that Milson and Charnay depicted, but they were also set apart because of their personal circumstances and because the 1967 defeat had a different impact in the Maghrib. Laroui and Djaït had in common a willingness overcome this common self-pitying narrative regarding the "crisis of intellectuals", and envisage instead the terms of intellectuals' emancipation. After having identified the structures and mechanisms of oppressions in their respective societies, Laroui's and Djaït's essays depicted the intellectual's roles as a mediator between the state and society and as a vanguard in the achievement of "Arab rationality", a theme running across the works of the previously-cited critical thinkers.

In this chapter, I read what Laroui and Djaït wrote about the crisis of intellectuals in relation to the Moroccan and Tunisian social and cultural dynamics, and how this canvas offers particular source of explanation as to how both thinkers envisaged what public roles intellectuals could play. Therefore, it is important to read what these critical essays as a way to address the state-society relationship in the seventies. With the closure of the public sphere and the political process, the considerable social dynamics were displaced to a vibrant cultural field. I also argue that it is not fruitful to read these texts in relation to "politics" and "culture" because these two spheres were manifestations of change taking place in society regarding how individuals, and especially intellectuals, considered their roles in society. This change of perspective was influenced by the experience and writings coming from Paris in May 1968: the student riots that unsettled France's archaic structures, and the understanding that social questions were profoundly political in essence, as Richard Wolin explores in *The Wind from the East* (2010), expressing a profound desire for social emancipation. The events in Paris also undermined the intellectual's authority, especially the "mandarin" sitting with authority above society as epitomised by Jean-Paul Sartre. Instead, May 1968 began the process whereby the "specific" intellectual took the mantle, on issues of expertise

only and with more humility, in the image of Michel Foucault.⁶³⁸ However, while May 1968 was undoubtedly a marking event, my understanding is that the Maghribi modernist and critical intelligentsia reacted to their domestic conditions, their shared and experienced realities above all, and the experiences of other countries facing similar social, cultural and political challenges (in Latin America, Africa or Asia), which made 1968 a truly “global year”, around the common aim of social emancipation. As Michel Foucault declared in 1979: “It wasn’t May 68 in France that changed me; it was March 68 in a Third World country”.⁶³⁹

This chapter will start with a discussion of the social and cultural context in the early seventies in Morocco and Tunisia, especially around the notion of a ‘militant’ culture and its underlying social logics, during the region’s cultural flourishing. The reason for this initial focus is that before even thinking about the modalities of their crucial re-engagement, there had to be a space and a readiness for intellectuals to intervene, otherwise their ideas would be completely out of touch with reality. In the second section, I discuss how Laroui and Djaït built on this cultural atmosphere to reconfigure the intellectual’s function in society: for Laroui, intellectuals were in charge of provoking a “moment of collective consciousness” (*prise de conscience*) of these structures of oppression, which would create a more assured and unhindered drive towards modernisation and rationality. Meanwhile, Djaït saw intellectuals’ responsibility as being to educate and enlighten the public while providing moral guidance for the leadership on the courses of action to adopt. The passages relating to their evaluation of the intellectual’s role in society reveal a greater clarity regarding their public function compared to the sixties (chapter 2), and also a readiness to confront and challenge theoretical texts on intellectual responsibility (especially Julien Benda and Antonio Gramsci), that had acquired near-*dogma* status. Instead, they started from their observed reality and signalled their willingness to return from the margins to the public sphere.

In the final instance, I discuss how, despite their sound sociological analysis, there were changing social dynamics that offset the possibility for intellectuals to be re-integrated fully and play the role for change described in Laroui’s and Djaït’s critical essays. These include the states’

⁶³⁸ Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth-century France*, 1993, 3-4; R. Wolin, *The wind from the East: French intellectuals, the cultural revolution, and the legacy of the 1960s*, 2010, 56-7.

⁶³⁹ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, 1991, 136.

co-optation of the middle class and the imposition of a rigorous approach to cultural policy. They also reveal, I argue, how the two regimes picked up on the crucial importance of society to maintain their hold on power. This explains why several measures were introduced around 1972-3 to foster and co-opt a stronger urban middle class through favourable economic benefits, while undercutting the sources of cultural dissent. In light of Laroui's and Djaït's writings on intellectuals' roles, one would argue that these policies severely undermined that vision of social emancipation through the pursuit of rationality, and risked turning one crisis of intellectuals into another.

1. Cultural renewal and the “disruption of the (social) sensible”

Contemporary liberal theory argues that autonomy of the self is pursued and grounded first in cultural emancipation.⁶⁴⁰ The generation of intellectuals to which Laroui and Djaït belonged held this in high esteem, having internalised the colonial education's discourse on rationality, or kept abreast of intellectual and cultural developments in France. As previously discussed (chapter 2), modernist intellectual groups in the Maghrib such as *Souffles* or *Perspectives* were either cultural in nature, or they devoted significant attention to culture as a vector for political change. They pursued what Rancière called the “disruption of the sensible” in order to produce an “alternative imagining of society”.⁶⁴¹ Under authoritarian settings, however, even cultural pursuits carried risks, as energies and engagements shifted between the two spheres depending on the rate of closure, and these intellectual groups frequently suffered from state-led repression. This specific atmosphere created a favourable space for the reception of critical essays that sought to offer a vision on society, but it also carried significant political risks for these movements' main actors. In this section, I review how these cultural actors accommodated to the fine line they had to walk; especially important were their logics of resistances and the social dynamics these practices reveal.

⁶⁴⁰ Archer, *Culture and agency: the place of culture in social theory*, 1996, and also found in debates leading up to multiculturalism, for example: Raz, “Multiculturalism: a liberal perspective” in *Ethics in the public domain*, 1994; Margalit, “The moral psychology of nationalism” in McKim and McMahan, *The morality of nationalism*, 1997.

⁶⁴¹ Rancière, *Dissensus: on aesthetics and politics*, 2013, 152.

The Maghrib saw the emergence of new “cultural practices” in the early seventies. The youth bulge after independence, extension of education and media, and penetration of cultural productions from outside the region spurred an exciting cultural renewal in the Maghrib, as in the Arab world.⁶⁴² It was manifested in music (*Nass al Ghiwan* from Casablanca with their subversive lyrics), in literature (the Tunisian literary avant-garde, or the portrayal of poverty in Tangiers by Muhamad Shukri’s famous novel *Al-Khubz al-hāfī* in 1973), and cinema (regular *ciné-club* meetings, and the use of cinematic portrayal to drive social change).⁶⁴³ According to those who lived through this period, it was about more than artistic creation, but about a new set of practices that fashioned new aspirations for freedom, collective involvement and a more progressive society. These cultural actors believed that total liberation would be achieved through culture rather than economic development plans, and they integrated culture in their daily lives in a manner that is widely remembered, with nostalgia, by the youth of the seventies.⁶⁴⁴ The relationship between social and cultural practices remains to be properly studied, but is witnessing increased attention: Karima Laachir discussed the constant struggle between cultural actors and the Moroccan state, between co-optation and dissent, and Aber Krefa carried out a lengthy interview-based research on novelists and their pursuit of intellectual autonomy.⁶⁴⁵ Both works provide a useful insight into the logics of adaptation and accommodation that characterise cultural actors in this setting. I propose three additional axes/logics that offer explanations as to the development of these types of cultural practices: the impact of socio-cultural developments in France, the state and its cultural approach or policy, and the threat of repression faced by these cultural actors; all of which I review in turn.

Moroccan and Tunisian modernist intellectuals were often highly influenced by the ideological debates taking place in France at the time (Paris remained by far the primary destination for Maghribi studying abroad). French intellectuals and youth movements were themselves inspired by

⁶⁴² Pappé, *The modern Middle East: a social and cultural history*, 2014.

⁶⁴³ Hennebelle, “Cinéma et société au Maghreb” in *AAN*, 1973, 131-150 ; Armes, *Postcolonial images : cinema in North African film*, 2004.

⁶⁴⁴ Djedidi, “Culture et société en Tunisie”, in *AAN*, 1973, 21; Hajji, “Malaise dans la culture marocaine” in *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2000.

⁶⁴⁵ Laachir, “Contemporary Moroccan cultural production: between dissent and co-optation” in *JAS*, 25:3, 2013; Kréfa, “La quête de l’autonomie littéraire en contexte autoritaire: le cas des écrivains tunisiens” in *Sociologie* 4:4, 2013, 396-9.

Chinese communism and the idea of a cultural revolution. Richard Wolin argued that the student protests of 1968 were the manifestation of an ideological trend that considered cultural concerns as an essential part of the political struggle, and it increasingly encompassed issues about everyday life and about how people saw themselves and their place in society.⁶⁴⁶ These concerns were echoed in Morocco and Tunisia, and intellectuals were inevitably drawn to the role that culture could play for social emancipation. For example the testimony of Ben Khidder, one of *Perspectives*' founders on his time in Paris, where he was "interested in Sartre and existentialism and Kateb Yacine, adding that he "lived among the Algerians and the French and the Sub-Saharan Africans", and that he "used to go to Maspero's bookshop" daily to get books and discuss on broad topics;⁶⁴⁷ this is one example among many. Articles in *Souffles* and *Perspectives* frequently expressed distress toward the hollowness of materialism that afflicted their French counterparts, which they found rampant at home especially among their national elite. However, the issues they faced in Moroccan and Tunisian society called for specific paths for emancipation. They included a stronger conservative and religious establishment, and a well-entrenched patriarchal system of social domination, and increasing gender and economic inequalities. All these elements obstructed their aspirations for social change. Furthermore, and this was a major concern and a difference from French intellectuals, these groups faced the assured perspective of state violence and other unfair treatments because of their activism.

As much as these intellectuals and their audiences brought culture into their lives, these creative forces were constrained by poor infrastructures and the relationship with the state, and especially how the authorities envisaged the nation's cultural orientation. According to Jean-Robert Henry, these new energies and the lack of infrastructure and recognition meant that the cultural sphere grew increasingly autonomous from the state.⁶⁴⁸ Initially, it gave intellectuals and cultural groups some autonomy in contrast with countries like Egypt, where the authorities developed early on repressive

⁶⁴⁶ Wolin, *The wind from the East*, x – xi, 57.

⁶⁴⁷ Temimi, *Al-dawr al-siyāsī wa al-thaqāfī li-birsbiktīf wa al-birsbiktīfiyīne fī tūnes al-mustaqila*, 2008, 36.

⁶⁴⁸ Sassoon, *Gramsci's politics*, 1980, 109; Henry (ed.), *Nouveaux enjeux culturels au Maghreb*, 1983, 13; Touzani, *La culture et la politique culturelle au Maroc*, 2003.

cultural strategies.⁶⁴⁹ However, cultural actors began to clash with the authorities on their notions of cultural orientations, especially the pursuit of a “national identity” that pursued conformity and homogeneity over cultural pluralism; they especially clashed over education policy. The issue with this approach was that national identity’s semantic content was fixed, whereas society was rapidly evolving along with collective values and aspirations.⁶⁵⁰

The distance between the state’s definition of cultural orientations and that of these intellectuals grew apart. The Tunisian state’s national discourse glorified the multitude of its cultural legacies from the Mediterranean, as Driss Abbassi found by looking at history textbooks after independence,⁶⁵¹ a common narrative found in Tunisia’s cultural policy.⁶⁵² Furthermore, the state’s support for arts was often on the condition that creators steer clear of subversive and political content. In fact, any project benefitting from Ministry funding had to be cleared by a commission charged with the “assessment of quality”.⁶⁵³ The Carthage festival, which was launched in 1964, was a typical example of the kind of entertaining and a “family-friendly” form of cultural activity supported by the state. Tunisian novelists also felt the full weight of this oppressive atmosphere in their daily and banal interactions with the state, leading to instances of individual resistance.⁶⁵⁴ The state controlled the literary field through subtle or administrative means, such as the monopoly over cultural industries: it controlled the two publishing houses, the country’s cultural journals were run by members close to the regime, and it chose what to cover in the cultural pages of the official, and most read newspapers.⁶⁵⁵ Censorship usually took place before seeking the authorisation to publish, and it was thus a disguised constraint.⁶⁵⁶ Even within the literary field, clusters of writers confronted each other, especially the younger generation who Jean Fontaine referred to as a modernist *avant-*

⁶⁴⁹ Stagh, *The limits of freedom of speech: prose literature and prose writers in Egypt under Nasser and Sadat*, 1993.

⁶⁵⁰ Djedidi, “Culture et société en Tunisie”, 22.

⁶⁵¹ Abbassi, *identité tunisienne et histoire depuis l’indépendance*, 2005, 42;

⁶⁵² Rafik, “Cultural policy in Tunisia”, UNESCO, 1970.

⁶⁵³ Martin, “Cinema and State in Tunisia” in Gugler, *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence*, 2010; Hennebelle, “Cinema et société au Maghreb” in *AAN*, 1973.

⁶⁵⁴ Kréfa, “La quête de l’autonomie littéraire en contexte autoritaire”, 396-9.

⁶⁵⁵ For example, the destourian newspaper *Al-ʿamal* published cultural page in 1973, which was the only weekly magazine on culture in Tunisia destined for a wider audience at that time.

⁶⁵⁶ Kréfa, “Ecrivains tunisiens en contexte autoritaire”, 396

garde, who were increasingly vocal and critical of the more established writers.⁶⁵⁷ The former disputed the latter's ideological views and denounced being prevented from expressing themselves in official channels of expression, such as the Union for Tunisian Writers; this became a source of contention in the run up to the 9th Congress of Arab writers hosted by Tunisia in 1973.⁶⁵⁸ These tensions reveal how the lack of institutions and spaces for expression were also a constraint for the emergence of new cultural productions and practices.⁶⁵⁹ According to Fontaine, this literary *avant-garde* began facing criticism for being “*bourgeois*”, for expressing angst over issues that were far from the realities of the masses, which limited the reach of their critical literature.⁶⁶⁰

The Moroccan cultural policy remained undefined until the first full Ministry of Culture was created in 1968, hence the authorities had to be tolerant of what they could not control. Cultural actors had to contend with a stronger traditional constituency that weighed on the official line. Ahmed Massaia referred to cultural actors' constant resistance against the state's “ideological and political visions” seeking to stifle the younger generation's desire for expression.⁶⁶¹ From 1956 to 1968, the state reduced culture to arts and gave it derisory amounts of support, he added, and what little encouragement there was usually went to promote an idealised understanding of culture to promote a certain notion of authentic heritage (*turāth*) rather than to depict existing realities and collective aspirations.⁶⁶² When Massaia referred to the state's “ideological and political visions”, he referred to the myth of the “Islamic Golden Age” and past greatness, which was brought forth by supporters of *açala*. Bahia Aladabia (presumably a pen name), wrote a scathingly critical article in August 1970 in *Lamaliif* on this issue, by reviewing a recently-published book benefitting from the Ministry of Culture's support, on the “Moroccan environment and its cultural aspects”. She called it “the first testimony of official culture” that included a teleological reading of the past and an attempt

⁶⁵⁷ Fontaine, “Le courant formaliste tunisien” in *AAN*, 1973, 202.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid. 205; Monastiri, “Tunisie – chronique sociale et culturelle” in *AAN*, 1973, 533.

⁶⁵⁹ Jean Fontaine tells of the challenges faced by Mohamed Bénomor and Tahar Hammami and other avant-garde writers to be published see Fontaine, “Le courant formaliste tunisien” in *AAN*, 1973, 203.

⁶⁶⁰ Fontaine, “Le courant formaliste tunisien”, 206.

⁶⁶¹ Massaia, *Essai sur l'action culturelle au Maroc*, 2013, 23.

⁶⁶² Ibid. 30.

to justify the current pursuit of *Arabisation*, *Moroccanisation*, and overall a “bourgeois ideology” that maintained existing social preferences and the current elite’s views on culture and society.⁶⁶³

These tensions within the cultural sphere led to a radicalisation of certain cultural actors over resources, expression and representations. In addition, political militants that were excluded from the political sphere found refuge in the cultural sphere, and set about pursuing their call for change. For a time, thanks to these particular cultural practices, Maghribi culture became a temporary refuge from oppression and authoritarianism and it was where aspirations were expressed and the changing social dynamics were related. However, this transgressive cultural renewal in the seventies attracted state pressures and inevitably, state repression.

Parisian radicalism caught on with young Moroccan and Tunisian intellectuals who took advantage of the combination of a closed political system and a relatively autonomous cultural sphere to launch their radical political engagement. But radicalism in Paris was wholly different to radicalism in Morocco or Tunisia, where the authorities had much less restraint in dealing with protest movements.

In Tunisia, the *Perspectives* movement had experienced regular waves of repression, especially since the Tunis trials in 1968. Michel Foucault taught in Tunis from 1966 to 1968 and witnessed the repression this movement faced. He also wrote about how he was moved by these youth who went through so much risk for such little acts as distributing a leaflet or protesting in the street, and it inspired his theoretical effort on the authoritarian state and power; he later wrote about these students:

The dissatisfaction came from the way in which a kind of permanent oppression in daily life was being put into effect by the state and by other institutions and oppressive groups. That which was ill-tolerated and continually questioned, which produced that sort of discomfort, was "power". And not only state power but also that which was exercised within the social body through extremely different channels, forms and institutions. It was no longer acceptable to be "governed" in a certain way. I mean "governed" in an extended sense; I'm not just referring to the government of the state and the men who represent it, but also to

⁶⁶³ Aladabia, “La culture ou le mythe” in *Lamalif*, 41, 1970, 17-8.

those men who organize our daily lives by means of rules, by way of direct or indirect influences, as for instance the mass media.⁶⁶⁴

Foucault called his time in Tunis a “true political experience”, contrasted communist theoretical debates in France with Marxism for Tunisian students that represented “a true moral force, an existential act that left one stupefied”;⁶⁶⁵ but eventually he chose to leave following the regime’s intervention into his private affairs. However, these students did not have this option. After a few quiet years, the organisation relaunched the struggle from 1973 following its alliance with the workers’ movement. It continued publishing its two newspapers, encouraging student agitation, but in 1973, the authorities launched another large wave of arrests leading up to the major trial of 1974. The regime had targeted its leaders for their subversive ideas and actions, such as Ahmed Ben Othman who was arrested in early 1972 because of two articles he wrote in *‘Amel tounsi*.⁶⁶⁶ His wife was also arrested and deported from Tunisia. Simone Lellouche had been born in Tunis, but the authorities referred to her Jewish faith as a way to associate her with Zionism and to justify the two months she spent in prison and her expulsion.⁶⁶⁷ These arrests came in the wake of “Black Saturday”, a massive protest on 5 February 1972 by students for the improvement of their conditions and against government meddling in student organisations.⁶⁶⁸ According to Moncef Badday, this was all part of a strategy to discredit student protesters on two counts: by arguing that they had no say in politics because they lived off the state in terms of financial aid, and that they were influenced by foreign ideologies. This discourse only served to increase the antagonism between the state and students, especially because of the authorities’ paternalism in dealing with this new generation.⁶⁶⁹ After these protests in 1972, the extreme left saw another few years of sustained opposition to the state but soon, internal divisions compounded the effect of repression and the stalling of the cause. This radical cultural and political experiment left a lasting legacy among trade union contestation

⁶⁶⁴ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, 144.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. 135.

⁶⁶⁶ Badday, “Tunisie: L’affaire ben Othman” in *ReFEPA*, 75, March 1972, 9. He is also known as Ahmed Othmani.

⁶⁶⁷ Badday, “Tunisie: le procès des étudiants” in *ReFEPA*, 76, April 1972, 10.

⁶⁶⁸ Monastiri, “Tunisie – Chronique politique” in *AAN*, 1972, 429-443. For an account of the state’s dealing with student protests before this turning point, see Dhifallah, “Bourguiba et les étudiants: stratégie en mutation (1956-1971)” in Geisser, Camau, *Bourguiba, la trace et l’héritage*.

⁶⁶⁹ Badday, “Tunisie: le procès des étudiants”, 10.

and a developing civil society (many former *perspectivistes*, on release from prison, became involved in such organisations). The authorities also muted their repression against Marxists in order to concentrate on the new threat of Islamist contestation.⁶⁷⁰ As Omri argued, the *perspectivistes* also came to inhabit Tunisian social consciousness, “remembered lyrically as figures who suffered for the people, only to see themselves relegated to neglect, exclusion or denial if not by former comrades... then by family, the state and the rising Islamism”, and their goal to establish modern citizenship has lived on in other movements’ struggles.⁶⁷¹

In 1968, this group was not targeted for being radical leftists and calling for a revolution, but because they challenged the regime’s ideological hegemony. However in 1972, the movement had evolved and was less predictable for the authorities, especially as these protest movements took place at a time when the leader was undergoing a serious crisis of legitimacy.⁶⁷² These were no longer the bilingual intellectuals of 1963 solely producing leftist analyses: instead, the movement reached out to the working classes and began publishing *‘Amel Tounsi* in dialect Arabic, and could very well bring students and workers in a common front of contestation. Bessis and Belhassen argued that Bourguiba believed “the left was waking up in Tunisia”, but the fact that he lumped together the communist party, the intelligentsia, radical leftist groups, worker’s movements and student groups who protested at university meant that he was targeting the *act* of opposition rather than their ideals, but he became aware of the risks of bubbling social discontent.⁶⁷³

In Morocco, the regime suffered two coup attempts in 1970-1, and it used the opportunity to weed out dissent in society, and it organised a large-scale crackdown against leftist intellectuals. These had already been portrayed as a “fifth column”, steering discontent and internal division, and the Makhzen, especially keen on securing social obedience, as Hammoudi identified in his famous anthropological essay consisted of the foundational principle in Moroccan society,⁶⁷⁴ and as several

⁶⁷⁰ In his unpublished doctoral thesis, Michael Béchir Ayari describes the switching roles between the radical left and Islamists during the seventies: “S’engager en régime autoritaire. Gauchistes et islamistes dans la Tunisie indépendante”, Université Paul Cézanne-Aix-Marseille 3, 20 Janvier 2009.

⁶⁷¹ Omri, “The movement Perspectives : legacies and representations” op. cit. 163.

⁶⁷² Belkhodja, *Les trois décennies Bourguiba: témoignage*, 1998, 98-9.

⁶⁷³ Bessis, Belhassen, *Bourguiba*, 2013, 329.

⁶⁷⁴ Hammoudi, *Master and disciple. The cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism*, 1999.

recently published memoirs from intellectuals attest.⁶⁷⁵ In the early seventies, the atmosphere was suffocating and morose: corruption, inflation and stagnation on the one hand, and on the other, unemployment, housing crisis, increasing inequalities, the increase of petty crime and insecurity.⁶⁷⁶ Discontent spread to university campuses and the authorities decided to ban the main student organisation (UNEM) and arrest its leaders to prevent their protests from connecting with workers' movements in Rabat and Casablanca. In order to stop it from further spreading, repression was stepped up: the authorities organised several trials against its outspoken critics, using the opportunity to liquidate the opposition and intellectuals in one swift move (while the military, that led the coups, was dealt with through purges and clemency).⁶⁷⁷ The security services discovered a plot to launch an armed insurrection across the country, headed by a former-Socialist leader Fqih Basri. In early July 1973, 157 Moroccans tied to this affair were judged in the city of Kenitra.⁶⁷⁸ In the meantime, another trial was taking place in Marrakesh (from 1 February 1972), concerning a group of 33 Moroccans accused of being part of the radical left, who were arrested a year earlier for political dissent and calling for a workers' revolution.⁶⁷⁹ In Casablanca, on 31 July 1973, another trial was held that targeted intellectuals specifically: twenty out of the eighty-one Moroccans accused of endangering state security. According to journalists covering the affair, this was a concerted effort to crush the extreme left.⁶⁸⁰ Abdellatif Laabi was the headline of this trial after *Souffles/Anfas* had become the organ of the communist organisation *Ila 'l-amam/En avant*; this organisation, and the *23 March* movement had emerged from the banned Communist party and this trial was the regime's opportunity to end this opposition movement.⁶⁸¹ The judge's accusations, and Laabi's defiant responses reveal that this repression was about the movement's dissent: When asked by the prosecutor if he was linked with the terrorist plots that were being judged in Kenitra, Laabi disagreed firmly by insisting that their Marxist ideology valued the creative forces of the people,

⁶⁷⁵ Elinson, "Opening the Circle: Storyteller and Audience in Moroccan Prison Literature", *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 12:3 2009; Serfaty, *L'insoumis*, 155.

⁶⁷⁶ Daoud, *Maroc Les années de plomb*, 194.

⁶⁷⁷ Roudan, "Justice pouvoir et politique au Maroc" in *AAN*, 1972, 257, 276-7.

⁶⁷⁸ Idem. See "Maroc – Kenitra III" in *JA*, 652, 07 July 1973, 21; "Maroc – les armes de la critique" in *JA*, 657, 11 August 1973, 24.

⁶⁷⁹ Roudan, "Justice et pouvoir politique au Maroc". 278.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid. 279. See Also "Maroc – Chronique politique" in *AAN*, 1973, 398.

⁶⁸¹ Rollinde, *Le mouvement des droits de l'homme au Maroc*, 2002, 183-201.

rather than blind destruction. Once on the floor, he denounced his arrest and torture as an attempt to silence him and his journal after it had become “the source of free, progressive and revolutionary ideas”.⁶⁸² The *JA* journalist concurred, noting that the arrest came when the journal had evolved from being a cultural journal towards addressing political issues: “We could read in it Marxist studies that did not fall into soporific jargon”.⁶⁸³ Rather than endangering security, the threat was elsewhere: “Rather than critique by weapons, it is in fact the weapon of critique that the monarchy fears”.⁶⁸⁴ The judge turned his invective to the ideological underpinning of this affair and “denounced Marxism as the enemy of Moroccan civilisation and Islamic religion”.⁶⁸⁵ Whether because of the regime’s alliances with traditional sectors of society, or because of the threat it perceived the revolutionary component of Marxism to pose, the judge chose to lead an unwavering charge against the “intellectual”, rather than the ideology or people in question. This trial also put an end to the cultural experience of *Souffles/Anfas*, and signalled to other cultural actors the end of tolerance in the cultural sphere. Zakya Daoud, editor in chief of *Lamalif*, described the deteriorating atmosphere in Rabat, how they felt it in their daily lives from the police constantly standing outside their doors, indiscrete eavesdropping in *cafés*, or visits in the middle of the night to “deliver administrative paperwork”; in fact, Laroui even had an article in *Lamalif* on Arabisation censored. Faced with this situation, Daoud adds, “fear was there...everyone protected themselves as best they could”.⁶⁸⁶

Culture and politics were the expression of various social dynamics transforming Morocco and Tunisia after their independences. Chief among them in the seventies was the coming of age of a younger generation with aspirations for change, which they expressed in cultural activity that sought to maintain a state of social animation. Rather than seeing culture and politics as separate spheres, they were both expressions of a desire to think about individuals, their experiences, and the norms and values in society. The crises of legitimacy that emboldened these movements were brutally put

⁶⁸² Quoted in Roudan, “Justice et pouvoir politique au Maroc”, 280.

⁶⁸³ “Maroc – les armes de la critique” in *JA*, 657, 11 August 1973, 24.

⁶⁸⁴ “*Plus que la critique des armes, c’est en l’occurrence, les armes de la critique qu’appréhende la monarchie*”, Idem.

⁶⁸⁵ Roudan, “Justice et pouvoir politique au Maroc”, 281.

⁶⁸⁶ Daoud, *Maroc les années de plomb*, 192.

down with the return of repression (or control) in the early seventies, especially when cultural rebellion turned into open political opposition. By then, cultural expression opened the possibility to challenge this oppressive system.

Faced with this violence, questions were raised about intellectuals, their intervention and the expectation that they could bring about change in society. Intellectuals were able to identify and undermine this system because of their ability to manipulate cultural symbols, to shape and influence new collective representations.⁶⁸⁷ Intellectuals were “agents of transformation and hybridisation in their own narratives” rather than being the recipients of assimilation and acculturation.⁶⁸⁸ But on their path, they faced resistance and opposition from other actors when their mutual representations happened to clash. Soon after the brutal crackdown against these instances of free thought, Laroui and Djaït tried to bring these elements and social dynamics as part of a common explanatory framework, and envisage a role for intellectuals despite the brutal crackdown.

2. The modalities of intellectual intervention

The cultural renewal of the seventies expressed social rebellion, but also a hope for inclusion and Laroui and Djaït, through their essays, epitomised this call. Their cultural critiques (*La crise des intellectuels* and *La personnalité arabo-islamique*) were the manifestation of two less idealistic, more seasoned thinkers throwing a critical look at their societies, after having taken a critical look at themselves, hoping to address in a more pragmatic way the call for emancipation from *within* the national community. To that end, they devoted significant passages of their essays on intellectuals as socially inserted figures and on the ways they could lead change. Here, the genre of “critique” offered a convenient approach to avoid sounding too conspiratorial, while fulfilling their function to “speak truth to power”. Despite having met critical acclaim among a select leadership (in Paris and

⁶⁸⁷ Brown, “Cultural representation and ideological domination” in *Social Forces*, 71, 3, 1993, 658; Lionnet, “Logiques métisses: cultural appropriation and postcolonial representations” in *College Literature*, 19/20, 1992-1993, 101-2; Lazarus, “Disavowing decolonization: nationalism, intellectuals, and the question of representation in postcolonial theory” in *Nationalism and cultural practice*, 2009, 68-143.

⁶⁸⁸ Lionnet, *Ibid.* 102.

in Rabat/Tunis), their ideas faced another test: how they would measure to social and political realities, and whether intellectuals could indeed pursue change. In their essays, they had to show how intellectuals could operate the transition from creative cultural renewal to political change.

Their approach, as I explore in this section, was to frame intellectuals' responsibility to provoke a "collective realisation" (*prise de conscience*) among the population. Laroui inscribed his modes of intervention in a "Third Word" Marxist framework, where intellectuals led the way towards "rationality", and he offered a new reading of Sartre and Fanon's theory on intellectual engagement or "*praxis*". Djaït promoted the need to address collective representations in society and decision-making circles at a time when fast modernisation left them reeling from a loss of moral guidance. The modern intellectual should be an educator and a guide, as the *ulema* had been in the past, while emulating the *Nahda*'s spirit of reform and modernity. Side by side, these two critiques envisaged a different future for intellectuals, and can be traced back to the theoretical framework they followed: they would be called to disappear in Laroui's Jacobin analysis, largely inspired by Gramsci's conception of intellectuals, when the conditions of historical delay that led to their emergence would be resolved. Meanwhile Djaït envisaged a continual role for what he considered to be a separate class in society, a new intellectual aristocracy with no compromising ties to power, with only a positive role to play in society; this representation corresponds to Benda's representation of intellectuals as "clerics".

During the early seventies, Laroui came to interact with the Arab intelligentsia in Beirut, a group that had quasi-legendary status across the Arab world. However, he was left with a bad impression. He regularly corresponded with the Syrian Yassin al-Hafez, one of the main Arab Marxist intellectuals, who he respected, but who was ostracised back home.⁶⁸⁹ He also corresponded with the Syrian poet Adonis in Beirut, in late March 1972, as the Syrian poet and *Mawāqif*'s editor in chief wanted to publish his latest book in Lebanon; but Adonis faced political resistances and threats from Palestinian organisations (*hay'at al-tahrīr*), who had not appreciated how critical

⁶⁸⁹ Hafez was then stuck in Algeria because of the Moroccans' refusal to grant him an entry visa; see Laroui, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ*, 2001, 141, 146.

Laroui had been toward the Arab cause against Israel, and for having published an article in *Les Temps Modernes* (Jean-Paul Sartre had, since then, adopted Zionist and anti-Arab positions; see Edward Said's account of his disillusionment after meeting with Sartre).⁶⁹⁰ In his diary, Laroui comes across as disappointed by the Arab intelligentsia he had grown to idealise; Beirut was where Arab exiles and Palestinians found refuge, and was considered to be at the forefront of Arab ideology (as opposed to the Egyptian intelligentsia for which he held little regard from his time in Cairo in the fifties). This experience was one among many behind his interest in the public conduct of Arab "radical" or "revolutionary" intellectuals, as expressed in the opening passage on the inevitable choice they faced: either to be a pedagogue, to pursue a political cause, or to devote time and efforts to cultural creation.⁶⁹¹ But it would seem that the Arab intellectual's fate was inevitably destined for despair.⁶⁹² Later in the book, he traced the Arab intellectual's historical genealogy in a manner that applied to his personal condition (hence his continual use of masculine pronouns).

The "modern" Arab intellectual was born from the interaction of his society with the West, and especially its modern systems of education, which created an aspiration for these individuals to apply the principles of liberal philosophy to their own countries (as previously described by Albert Hourani).⁶⁹³ More importantly for Laroui's argument, the intellectual emerged when "he convinced himself that the objective of European culture is not only material wealth".⁶⁹⁴ The Arab intellectual then moved into the public sphere in order to pursue and promote these liberal principles (constitutionalism), promoting the fostering of a national sentiment, and socio-economic modernisation.⁶⁹⁵ The tragedy of this figure was the loss of hope and the cynicism that came from the failure to replicate "liberalism" and the realisation of his society's "backwardness". He would then devote himself to teaching while withdrawing into increasing isolation.⁶⁹⁶ Laroui experienced

⁶⁹⁰ As a result, *Mawāqif* only published a short article from Laroui in 1975; *Khawātir al-sabāh*, 139.

⁶⁹¹ Laroui, *Crisis of Arab intellectuals*, 1974, 8; on Sartre: Said, "Diary" in *London Review of Books*, 22:11, 2000.

⁶⁹² The discussion on the crisis of intellectuals took place in two different sections of his essay that must be read together: the birth of Arab intellectuals in relation to the West ("Annexe. II. Naissance de l'intellectuel"), the crisis of intellectuals in the area of thought ("4. L'intelligentsia Arabe et l'historicisme"), and later the crisis of radical (revolutionary) intellectuals to lead social and political change ("5. L'intellectuel du Tiers-Monde et le marxisme").

⁶⁹³ Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age*, 1962.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 145-6.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 148.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 148.

the type of despair induced by a crisis of values. According to the above-mentioned pattern, Arab intellectuals who lost their idealism would devote their time to teaching, but he was unable to due to the incessant student strikes in Rabat. He managed to interrupt the dynamic of despair before falling prey to the belief in tradition when he turned to “creation”: in his case the studies in *La crise des intellectuels arabes*.⁶⁹⁷

The type of “crisis of Arab intellectuals” Laroui was commenting on was different from the crisis of liberal thought in the Arab world Israel Gershoni had described, or the feeling of being ignored by the state, or their their unresolved dual identity in relation to the West.⁶⁹⁸

Instead, for Laroui, the crisis had two stages: the “critically unaware” radical Arab intellectual felt the crisis from the failure to lead or provoke a revolution, and because of the aftermath of the 1967 defeat against Israel and the crumbling of grand ideological narratives. For the “critically aware”, the one who had had a *prise de conscience*, the crisis ran deeper and it was an offshoot of the crisis of society: the historical delay, which had worsened under the independent state. Arab intellectuals felt tragically alienated and out of place because, paradoxically, their values were not those of their society. They were constantly advocating conducts and approaches from unsuited ideologies and could not understand society’s resistance to “rationality” – and this concept posed problems, as will be discussed. Therefore, Laroui sought to address the modes of thought that guided Arab intellectuals’ conduct in society. His reading of the situation stemmed from ordinary and daily observation, as he puts it in a laboured passage:

The intellectual living in a backward society thinks directly about issues of daily social existence, which he then interprets as a confrontation between two cultures. Since each culture expresses itself at a different level, what he experiences is actually the confrontation of different aspects of each culture. A number of essays, impressions and testimonies start to appear, where one cultural aspect is pitted against another. These essays are always brilliant, always true, and never convincing. When this way of apprehending reality is expressed in acts, when it is about “reforming” a delayed society, this approach shows its limitations by promoting limited reforms.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid. 149. Not only in the Arab world but also in China, or in Egypt and he considers Naguib Mahfouz’s trilogy the expression of a liberal isolated within illiberal realities.

⁶⁹⁸ Rejwan, *Arabs in the mirror: images and self-images from pre-Islamic to modern times*, 2008, 170; For a general attempt to explain the crisis: Sabour, *The ontology and status of intellectuals in Arab academia and society*, 2001.

⁶⁹⁹ Laroui, *Crise des intellectuels*, 172.

There was an urgent issue to address between theory and practice, and Laroui called for the adoption of historicism, a “philosophical practice of history”, that consisted in a rational attitude towards reality and change according to which the evolution of material culture had a proportional effect on culture and collective representations.⁷⁰⁰ Intellectuals had to re-evaluate what they knew about “reality” by starting from direct observations rather than looking at it through the framework of ideologies.⁷⁰¹ The revolution he called for demanded that intellectuals “formulate a general programme for the modernisation of thought and Arab society”.⁷⁰²

Laroui believed that this concern for “reality” and the desire that Arab intellectuals should compensate their societies’ historical delay is what turned Arab intellectuals towards Marxism (as a mode of thought rather than a political ideology): “Scientific Marxism” envisaged the means to overcome historical delay, rather than accepting it as a definitive condition. He illustrated this process by citing Germany’s ability to catch up with France and Britain in the 19th century.⁷⁰³ Furthermore, as a public conduct, historicism justified the intellectual’s intervention in the public sphere. This *praxis* or “acting historicism”, in opposition to “theory”, meant that intellectuals had a responsibility to come into the public sphere because of the dialectical interaction of thought and action, or ideas and reality constantly evolving together, which needed to be unpacked. The meaning of historicism as a concept, as Georg Iggers wrote suffers from a lack of consensus.⁷⁰⁴ Considering Laroui cited philosophers such as Hegel, it is most likely he adhered to the German Historical School’s understanding of historicism as an overarching *meaning* behind the stream of history, and where “historical study served to recreate a historical narrative of this historical past” and gain an understanding of this meaning.⁷⁰⁵

Historicism, under this understanding could be objected to as seeking to impose a *direction* to history, going from “backwardness” to “progress” (in French, Laroui uses “*le sens de l’histoire*”

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid. 138.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid. 209.

⁷⁰² Ibid. 208.

⁷⁰³ Ibid. 162.

⁷⁰⁴ Iggers, "Historicism : the history and meaning of a term" in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56:1, 1995, 129.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. 131.

that can be translated as both “the meaning” and “the direction” of history). Laroui embraced this “voluntary choice” that Arab intellectuals had to make, which required of them to “take charge of a selective past” (i.e. select from their reading of the past what could be mobilised to back up their claim for change), all the more because nationalism “did not care to lose its essence (its authenticity) as long as it ensured its permanence”.⁷⁰⁶ The ideas contained in this passage echoed the conclusion to his essay on the *History of the Maghrib* (1970) and the articles he published in *Lamalif*. The difference here was that the emphasis was on intellectuals, to justify their intervention in the public debate: while scholars or historians had a duty of absolute objectivity, the intellectual had a responsibility to introduce ideological concerns and use the past in favour of his ideological beliefs. This position raises a number of objections that Laroui felt he had already answered in the introduction to his essay in 1970 (Chapter 4). But in this new text, Laroui tried to offer something more substantial, by way of what intellectuals’ interventions should consist of: informing political action by this “selective reading of the past”. Unfortunately, it still remained vaguely formulated, probably out of concern that the authorities might interpret it as political manoeuvring and land him in hot water.

The issue of the specific nature of this intervention is partly explained in a footnote where he discusses how Gramsci viewed the philosophy of praxis as an “earthly concern”, justifying intellectual public engagement. Intellectuals had a moral and intellectual role to reform elite representations, which referred to the critical renewal of Arab thought as discussed by Kassab earlier.⁷⁰⁷ In conclusion, Arab intellectuals have to intervene in society because historicist thought has to be assimilated by society, through a lengthy ideological struggle by Marxists to change collective representations and weed out internalised backwardness.⁷⁰⁸ This passage on the selective usage of the past lends credence to the widely shared characterisation of Laroui’s call for a “break” with tradition and heritage in favour of modernisation of thought, though it consisted instead of a “selective reading of said past” and its integration as social norms.

⁷⁰⁶ Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels*, 125.

⁷⁰⁷ Though it is unclear whether it is meant as a positive or negative condition. Ibid. Footnote 36, 136.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid. 137.

Society will modernise, the elite will integrate society, ideology will be realised: the path towards political legitimacy will be drawn... we will thus find the meaning of forgotten *praxis*, which is the “realisation” by political action of a semantic system which, in its own turn, supports the political aim [sic]. When this Marxism will become the internal logic of what Arab society is saying about itself, it will have assimilated through ideological struggle the definitive benefits of utilitarianism, liberalism, of historicism.⁷⁰⁹

The discussion of intellectuals’ intervention raises the issue of their legitimacy in playing this role for Arab societies, and Laroui deals with this issue in a lengthy appendix, the value of which is open to debate, especially because it can seem as if he was trying to convince himself above all, or was not saying anything particularly new. The responsibility of intellectuals came from their social usefulness, but also from their legitimacy as “transitional” actors. They were the embodiment of the notion of dialectic because they were simultaneously in two worlds: they were products of modernity thanks to their education, but also lived in ‘traditional society’ and worked for it. On the other hand, they aspired to liberal values of progress but they lived in authoritarian contexts. And so, legitimacy and responsibility came from the choice or the opportunity that intellectuals had to bring about this transition. The first act of *prise de conscience* consisted in intellectuals coming to terms with their condition and their historical responsibility, which implied a rupture with previous modes of thought and Laroui added that this realisation came from daily life, when intellectuals were dissatisfied by their ideological toolkits’ ability to explain society around them.⁷¹⁰ This explains the upsurge of critical publications in the Arab world during the early seventies, and how the renewal of Arab political thought came from daily observations rather than profound (and dry) theoretical debates.⁷¹¹

This type of “transformative” intervention had a strong Sartrean inspiration. The French theorist thought extensively about “committed” (*engagé*) literature and the interaction between the individual and the community.⁷¹² For the committed writer, “words are action”: “To reveal is to change, and [...] one cannot reveal unless one has the project of changing”.⁷¹³ Therefore, the writer

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid. 136.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid. 169.

⁷¹¹ Ibid. 106.

⁷¹² Goldthorpe, “Understanding the committed writer” in Howells, *The Cambridge companion to Sartre*, 1992, 140.

⁷¹³ Sartre, *Qu’est-ce que la littérature ?*, 1947, 73.

follows a specific pattern in which his condition is reflected upon critically, made sense of in writing, and shared as a signification for the wider community through publication.⁷¹⁴ As for the intellectual's conduct, Sartre made an essential distinction between passive involvement (which he calls *embarquement*) and active involvement: *engagement* rests on the awareness of one's conditions and modes of action.⁷¹⁵ Therefore, the onus is on this act of realisation (or "moment of reflective consciousness"⁷¹⁶) preceding interventions, which consist of speaking to their readers and "appealing to their freedom".⁷¹⁷ Sartre then responded to criticism that his analysis removed the individual thinker from the social setting in his next book, *Questions de méthode*, in which he considered that the possibility of the individual transcending his social conditioning through his thought project was essential in reaching the universal.⁷¹⁸ His position was mostly about western intellectuals, and thanks to the work of Martinique-born thinker Frantz Fanon, it was calibrated to formerly colonised people and their perspective of emancipation. According to Ben Etherington, Fanon was decisively influenced by Sartre's notion of "dialectical reason" when he wrote his seminal and inspirational book *The wretched of the earth* in 1961 (with a preface from Sartre), and he believed in "the praxis of revolution as, itself, self-realising reason", especially because the violence of colonialism had to be responded to by a violence of equal measure.⁷¹⁹ In other words, it was through the act that reason emerged.

Laroui, who was significantly influenced by Fanon (as were other Maghribi intellectuals of his generation), took this idea further by applying it to the national setting where alienation and oppression had taken national (and more pernicious) forms.⁷²⁰ He also argued that intellectuals would find emancipation in the performative act of revolutionary *praxis*. However, this revolution would not be political and armed, as Fanon called for the Algerians, but cultural because it targeted

⁷¹⁴ Goldthorpe, "The committed writer", 141.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid. 142.

⁷¹⁶ Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, 197.

⁷¹⁷ Idem.

⁷¹⁸ Goldthorpe, "The committed writer", 144.

⁷¹⁹ Etherington, "An answer to the question: what is decolonization?" in *Modern Intellectual History*, 2014, 1.

⁷²⁰ As described by Albert Memmi: he published *Le portrait du colonisé* in 1957, followed in 1979 by *Le portrait du dépendant* and finally in 2004 *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman*, published in English as *Decolonization and the decolonized* (2006), where he explains the confusion and alienation that ensued from the transformation of the source of oppression under national traits.

the impact of the postcolonial legacy (internalised historical delay) on collective representations. Laroui continued to develop the “historically distinct idea of ‘decolonisation’” that first emerged in Fanon’s thought, as more than the sum of movements of national liberation.⁷²¹ However, the Moroccan took issue with the way emancipation was framed as the adoption of rationality across society. Instead, he preferred to frame it as the “compensation of historical delay”. In each case, the transformative *praxis* was a similar process in the pursuit of emancipation.⁷²²

Laroui’s issue with rationality was that it was a “bourgeois value”.⁷²³ It meant undergoing a process of *embourgeoisement* (or adopting bourgeois values), which was the adoption of culturally specific values of Europe rather than to strive for the universalism of historicism.⁷²⁴ Furthermore, this *embourgeoisement* would defeat the purpose of an intelligentsia that was not determined by its material interests and small-mindedness. How could he envisage the separation between bourgeois culture and bourgeois social class? For Laroui, the answer was Marx: “Turning to Marx is inevitable; but not the Marx of the liberals”; but this is one of the most problematic passages of his essay as he discusses what could be taken from Germany, and the intellectual work that remained to be done by Arab intellectuals.⁷²⁵

Marx not only envisaged that a revolution to rationalise social life was only achieved by intellectuals, we have to acknowledge the important role he foresaw for them in awakening the working classes: only the intellectual can make a distinction between the universal and the specific in bourgeois culture. As a result, workers would be able to accept the first, and critically refuse the second.⁷²⁶

As a materialist, Laroui believed that structures determined interests. In other words, the ability for radical Arab intellectuals to pursue the truth depended on their overcoming their “petty bourgeois” social belonging and “mentality”. Therefore, what impact did their social location have on the way they apprehended reality on the one hand, and the way they interacted with western

⁷²¹ Etherington, “What is decolonization”, 5-6.

⁷²² Ibid. 20.

⁷²³ Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels arabes*, 173.

⁷²⁴ Footnote on page 174.

⁷²⁵ Ibid. 176-9.

⁷²⁶ Ibid. 179.

values in favour of the aims of Marxism? There was a possibility to separate bourgeois social structure from bourgeois culture thanks to Marxism, but Laroui sacrificed the opportunity to empirically make the demonstration in favour of a circular and theoretical analysis where Marxism was shown to be the departure and arrival point (and even an end in itself).⁷²⁷

The discussion was incomplete because these were “merely unrealised possibilities... for Third World intellectuals”. Empirically, the “historicist Marx” has given way to the “dogmatic Marx” and intellectuals gradually joined the bourgeoisie as a social class rather than a rational culture, which put a severe strain on the Gramscian notion of organic intellectuals driving their groups forward, rather than succumbing to social privilege.⁷²⁸ Therefore, Laroui sat on the fence: there are a multitude of “Marxisms”, and the intellectual of the Third World expresses one depending on his reading of his context and its historical evolution. His way out was, again, historicism: he reiterated the need to produce better understanding of Moroccan society. But in the process, he opened the debate on the social location of knowledge, without explaining how these intellectuals could overcome their belonging to the bourgeoisie. He also introduced a useful semantic variation in Marxist interpretation that deserves to be studied further.

These questions were not instances of theoretical nitpicking because they affected cultural policy in Morocco, and Laroui’s alienation. In the conclusion, Laroui discussed the cultural situation of an alienation caused by *medievalisation* rather than *westernisation*. This was probably the most subversive part of his essay, because it was the most empirical and pointed to specific groups: a year earlier, Laroui had been supposed to publish an article on Arabisation in Morocco as part of a special volume in *Lamalif*, until it was “inexplicably banned”, and later amputated from several key passages.⁷²⁹ The article was eventually published abroad as originally written (in English), and it gives a sense of what would have been the book’s full picture. In the full article, Laroui investigated “the contradiction which implicates the structure of the whole Moroccan society [...] and seriously

⁷²⁷ Ibid. 173.

⁷²⁸ Ibid. 180.

⁷²⁹ Daoud, *Maroc les années de plomb*, 192; she referred to *Lamalif* number 58, April 1973.

restricts those responsible for educational matters”.⁷³⁰ He came to the conclusion that Arabisation campaigns were actively advocated by political actors, as a legacy of the anticolonial struggle, but were doomed to fail because state policies did not address the underlying social and economic structures that maintained French as a necessary language. State reforms fell short of what was necessary to achieve successful linguistic transformation because, he argued, the social category in charge of state policy had a vested interest in keeping the social structure as it was (the urban bourgeoisie was usually bi-lingual) and it allowed their offspring to maintain their elite status. Meanwhile, they were equally bound by public opinion to pursue Arabisation campaigns: “hence a more and more pronounced gap developed between their nationalist ideology and the practical experience”.⁷³¹ It was highly telling that this article was censored because, as he writes in his essay: the “petty bourgeoisie” dominated a variety of institutions, including those who produced cultural policy that “limit the horizons of intellectuals”.⁷³² It was a case in point, and it prevented *La crise des intellectuels* from achieving a good balance between his complete theoretical framework and its application in the case of a visible cultural policy for which he uncovered the social determinants while putting into practice his particular understanding of historicism.

In conclusion, alleviating the crisis of intellectuals faced several sizeable obstacles, such as their ability to become socially visible and changing their modes of thought from the “consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie” (*conscience petit bourgeoise*); but Laroui was optimistic for some intellectuals “who *can* overcome romantic thought in favour of positive thought” to lead the way.⁷³³ This conversion to rationality would come from their feeling of working for the national community “when a nationalist feeling that is conscious of reality replaces a feeling that is unaware or voluntarily blind”.⁷³⁴ Once they had sorted out these modes of thought by “adopting clear positions regarding language, history and tradition, and by owning up to historicist thought”, they would be able to reach out to the other social categories who shared the interest of overcoming the limits of

⁷³⁰ Laroui, “Cultural problems and social structure: the campaign for arabization in Morocco” in *Humaniora Islamica*, 1, 1973, 34.

⁷³¹ Ibid. 41.

⁷³² Laroui, *Crisis of Arab intellectuals*, 199.

⁷³³ Idem.

⁷³⁴ Idem.

the national state and coming up with “a programme that could convincingly show them the image of a different order opened on the future”.⁷³⁵ These “revolutionary intellectuals” had an important role to play, and could do so because “despite education being monitored, despite information being censored and culture being constrained, the system is not entirely closed and cannot be”; and it was their responsibility to “guide spirits towards the ways of the future”.⁷³⁶ However, the ideological parameters that allowed him to write about the great revolutionary Arab intellectual figure were also withering away. Furthermore, as he conceded in the conclusion, this type of intellectual was a minority within the intelligentsia.⁷³⁷ Above all, Laroui was writing for a social and cultural framework that was not Morocco’s, with its strong conservative, religious and rural component, but rather an Arab society that was more urbanised, educated and progressist: one would say, Tunisia, in a further instalment of a silent and cross-country conversation and between the two thinkers.

Djaït defined himself as an intellectual from the moment he went to study in Paris, and this determined his approach towards politics, his relationships with his family, his career choice, and his self-imposed exile in 1968. On the last point, he left to ensure his physical integrity in the face of mounting repression, but his departure was also a personal crisis induced by the realisation that he lived in a system that excluded intellectuals from playing a public role. The Tunisian cultural renewal did not improve the position of intellectuals, and there is no evidence that his essay on the “Arab-Islamic personality” had a tangible political impact, and instead it remained a topic of conversation in the cultural sphere. Instead, his call for a change of modes of governance was interpreted as yet another instance of a losing group making a bid for power from outside the country.⁷³⁸ When he criticised the petty bourgeoisie, his criticism was interpreted as the expression of the bitter old bourgeoisie of which his family was an integral part, hoping to recover some importance in public affairs. And so, he felt compelled to address the modalities of intellectual intervention in Tunisian society and its relationship with the social and political crisis. His essay

⁷³⁵ Idem.

⁷³⁶ Idem.

⁷³⁷ Ibid. 208.

⁷³⁸ Such as Ahmed Ben Salah when he created the *Mouvement pour l’Unité Populaire* after his escape from Tunisia in 1973.

contained some passages relating to this issue, but they were excessively theoretical, forcing him to simplify his message in a series of interviews. As with Laroui, Djaït discussed the role and place of intellectuals in order to make a connection between culture and politics, and to envisage the means towards social emancipation – but he was off to a difficult start, partly due to his approach on the question.

In *La personnalité arabo-islamique*, Djaït had harsh words against the Tunisian intellectual environment and the Tunisian intelligentsia: Tunisian intellectuals were either “fundamentalists” or “Marxists”, and neither had any regard for sociology, history and philosophy. Instead, they preferred “cheap and weak dogmatism”, and devoted most of their time attacking each other.⁷³⁹ Tunisia was culturally stagnating because its intellectuals “lacked the ambition to think”, and because they held “prejudices against free thought”. Furthermore, “rigid frameworks” of thought prevented cultural renewal.⁷⁴⁰ Those who held aspirations to intellectual freedom, ambitious thinking and innovative discussions that shook these foundations found themselves marginalised.⁷⁴¹ Djaït experienced this first hand in the sixties when he advocated the pursuit of a modernity that did not depart from the Arab and Islamic legacy, and he still held a grudge for being marginalised for this position that blurred ideological lines.

He claimed that the intellectual crisis had a political origin. Intellectuals were marginalised because they threatened politicians’ hold over power by being “annoying witnesses”.⁷⁴² Empirically, he found that the majority of the intelligentsia had abandoned their critical outlook and had succumbed to the attraction of power after independence. These “former intellectuals”-turned-politicians were resentful of those who were still fully engaged in intellectual activity: mostly academics and writers. To punish them, they made their existence difficult by imposing constraints on the production of thought (lack of funds, unhelpful administrative structures etc.). The devaluation of the intellectual’s condition meant the new intellectuals aspired to join the political

⁷³⁹ Djaït, *La personnalité arabo-islamique*, 270. The main passage in his essay on the role of intellectuals (pp. 270 - 276) was republished in Moroccan journal *Al-Asas*: Djaït, “le drame de l’intellectuel arabe” in *Al-Asas*, 23, 1980, 20-24.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid. 10.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid. 9-10.

⁷⁴² Ibid. 190-1, 271.

sphere, which meant recognition and privilege, rather than the pursuit of knowledge and truth in the cultural sphere.⁷⁴³

This antagonism between intellectuals and politicians lay in the role attributed to each group in public affairs. The two types of actor had a lot in common: they believed in the “unicity of truth” and the assumption that practice is preferable to theory (though intellectuals were ill-equipped to pursue it alone).⁷⁴⁴ After all, Djaït was a self-confessed Hegelian (“I cannot get out from Hegel”), and politicians were agents of the great State:

HD – Since the state is called to play an important role in the recovery of our Arab and Islamic personality, Islam must remain the state religion...

JA – We are under the impression that you attribute too many virtues to the state. Under your pen, it is no longer a cold monster but a real saint!

HD – What do you want, the state is the only organised force in the Arab world. It is true, I still believe it should have a moral purpose, despite the current mystifications and aberrations. I still believe in the state’s greatness.⁷⁴⁵

In order to resolve the crisis, he called for the restoration of the relationship between intellectuals and politicians, rather than the politicisation of the former. And for that, they had to find a common ground towards how they envisaged reality. Politicians felt constrained by it, and only thought of violence as a way to bend it to their designs. Meanwhile, intellectuals’ purpose was to pursue knowledge of reality in order to transform it, thanks to their “general vision”, which politicians lacked. In other words, realism was to politicians what idealism was to intellectuals: the latter had the ability to create and launch ideas in favour of social and political reform, while politicians could pursue their realisation. The conflict, of course, was the politicians’ fault according to Djaït: since intellectuals had this ability to mobilise the masses with their ideas, politicians considered them to be a threat and preferred to break this social contract (and induce a stagnating culture and crisis of the national project) rather than risk losing their power.⁷⁴⁶ This stagnation of culture was profoundly

⁷⁴³ Ibid. p. 10.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 270-1.

⁷⁴⁵ Bérri, “Une pensée déchirée, un entretien avec Hichem Djaït” in JA, 703, 29 June 1974, 56.

⁷⁴⁶ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 271.

upsetting because it prevented them from carrying out their civil function, which he defined as “critique and a spirit of free thinking”, hence the personal crisis of values.⁷⁴⁷

Arab society, he wrote, “should be built on science and culture... without a renaissance in those highest fields, there will be no hope for technological development”.⁷⁴⁸ The State was required to play a leading role for these transformations, alongside a dynamic bourgeoisie “after it has been rationalised and modernised”.⁷⁴⁹ But this was not a given, and this was where intellectuals were needed: to transform collective representations into a complex and subtle “third-way”.⁷⁵⁰

JA – How do you envisage the modernisation of our societies?

HD – Not by rupture. Affirming the self must go alongside a deep form of change, in order to facilitate this change. Modernisation must not touch upon the historical foundations of the self, but instead the collective representations [*mentalités*], attitudes, and especially the vision of the world. On the other side, I am not one of those who think that we must welcome technology and reject the intellectual foundations of our civilisation. Modernity is a whole, and should not become a source of alienation.⁷⁵¹

The modalities of intellectuals’ role and interventions were not clear from the outset, as the theoretical models regarding intellectual engagement and disengagement had shown their limitations after Tunisia’s independence. Djaït’s own ideas on the issue were in gestation, even after the publication of his book, as they were dependent on his trajectory as much as his understanding. In his extended interview with *Jeune Afrique* covering its release, when he was asked who could lead this very specific form of change, Djaït first answered that it must come from “deep, underground” sources. The interviewer narrowed down the question by citing a passage regarding the rationalisation of society and the individual,⁷⁵² in order to counter his historical determinism. Djaït was forced to reflect on the role and typology of intellectual intervention:

JA – Where then would these reformers come from?

HD – They would be intellectuals without a doubt, on condition that their ideas would be adopted and applied by politicians. In any case, this can only be done with some delay.

JA – Can there not be people who think and act at the same time?

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid. 72.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid. 244.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid. 264.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. 247.

⁷⁵¹ Berri, “Une pensée déchirée”, 56.

⁷⁵² Djaït, *Personnalité*, 267.

HD – In my opinion, there are two kinds of intellectuals. There are thinkers who are unfit for action by character, and there are very few of them in the Arab world today. There are assimilating intellectuals who take ideas and visions of the first type, simplify them; they are more politicians than intellectuals. It would be a miracle for intellectuals to act.⁷⁵³

In this exchange, Djaït referred to the difference between the thinking intellectual (*muffakir*) and the cultured intellectual (*muthaqqaf*), a definition that was unexplored in 1974 but that he would later explore in 1982.⁷⁵⁴ In 1988, he depicted the intellectual as a figure responsible for the pursuit of humanist values and their diffusion in his contemporary society. He no longer considered the “acting intellectual” from the definition, which tells volumes about his evolving, or declining public ambition.⁷⁵⁵ But in 1974, the urgent matter was to mend the relationship between intellectuals and politicians (or his own relationship with the regime) in order to revive the national project. For that, he referred to the model of their relationship in the Islamic past as an instance of when these two worked together successfully, and seek to re-establish a sense of mutual trust by ensuring that intellectuals were not out to topple the regime:

In the past, Islamic society honoured intellectual effort, which benefitted economic and trading activities. The cleric was integrated to the running of public affairs; not to a group or another, but the global direction of society... today, intellectualism has no value in itself besides that it prepares for access to the circle of authority.⁷⁵⁶

Djaït called for modern intellectuals to assume a pedagogical and integrative function towards society, which he did by spelling out these prescriptions and with his *praxis*. They would have a modern outlook but they would take inspiration from the Tunisian *ulema* and reformist thinkers of the *Nahda* as agents of historical transformation and moral guidance:

What is lacking in Muslim countries is precisely the type of organic intellectual as incarnated by ulema of the classical and postclassical period. Probably, because of the intellectualisation of politics and the politicisation of the intellectual, the modern world is

⁷⁵³ Idem.

⁷⁵⁴ Majid al-Samra'i, “ḥiwār ma’a Hishām Ju’ayit ‘an al-‘arab: al-māḍi wa al-mustaqbal” in *Dirasāt ‘Arabiyya*, 1:2, 1982, 70.

⁷⁵⁵ Djaït, *La crise de la culture islamique*, 2004, 84, 216.

⁷⁵⁶ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 243.

reluctant to accept such a model. However, an evolving society cannot do without an intellectual support of its aspirations... the organic intellectual could be defined by his integrating power, by the junction he operates between the past and the future, between the social ideal and social reality: not as the ideologue of a particular political order, but as an interpreter of a changing civilisation.⁷⁵⁷

In this article from 1976, Djaït was already putting into practice what he had called for: the “junction between the past and the future”, by educating the Tunisian public about Islamic heritage. He would carry this pedagogical task until 1978 and beyond, with the publication of his second essay on *Europe and Islam*. He was inspired by the role that the ulema had played in Tunisian society before colonialism, when they were in charge of transmitting norms and values and supporting the country’s rulers in their important decisions and guaranteeing their legitimacy.⁷⁵⁸ According to Leon Carl Brown, the Tunisian ulema establishment was consolidated and integrated to a well-structured state administration, they were consulted and occupied a number of key administrative functions, in addition to their religious tasks, thanks to their skills, especially as legal clerks and teachers. Teaching “offered the best opportunity for devotion to religious studies without distraction from either the world of business or government”, despite leading to less recognition and less wealth.⁷⁵⁹ Overall, ulema were highly regarded in Tunisian society for the role they played, but also because of their reserved public conduct, enlightenment and politeness rather than excessive lifestyles.⁷⁶⁰

This highlights the importance of the relationship between intellectuals and politics, and Brown underlined how “the learned” were ambivalent toward politics, and were satisfied to stand back and serve.⁷⁶¹ While on several occasions they demonstrated flexibility to avoid confrontation with politicians, they were safe in the knowledge that their position was secure, thanks to their social backing as doctors of the faith and learned men, as opposed to rulers who continuously had to prove

⁷⁵⁷ Djaït, “Spécificité et vitalité de l’Islam” in *JA*, 789, 20 February 1976, 53.

⁷⁵⁸ Brown, “The religious establishment in Husaynid Tunisia” in Keddie, *Scholars, saints and Sufis: Muslim religious institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, 1972, 34-8, 135

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid. 4-7, 53, 69.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid. 161, 163, 166.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid. 75.

their legitimacy.⁷⁶² Their relationship was like a cohabitation for instrumental purposes, where the ulema would mediate between the state and society and promote social and cultural change, pre-empting popular resistance, and ensuring continuity of moral values.⁷⁶³ This relationship came to be the capstone of the pre-colonial Tunisian political system.

In conclusion, Djaït wanted to recapture the special bond that existed between the state and intellectuals on the one hand, and intellectuals and society on the other. The ulema played the role of the “community’s consciousness” and thanks to them social peace was safeguarded despite the many upheavals faced by the Islamic world in the modern era. However in 1974, Tunisian society was fundamentally different and facing challenges of a different nature than moral guidance and the legitimation of leaders. Djaït’s knowledge of Tunisian social realities appear rudimentary: for example, he often sums up in the “Tunisian masses” merely as an un-nuanced desire for tradition and Islamic culture, rather than interacting with their social and economic issues. Did his model of the society-intellectuals-state relationship truly envisage the emancipation of the former under its own terms? By replicating a structure of “inspired guidance”, it would always fall short of the liberal conception of the emancipation of individuals. In 1982, in an interview following the release of his second essay, Djaït remarked that the current crisis in the Arab world was caused by the lack of critical thought, by the infantilisation of individuals by political regimes instead of promoting their emancipation. He added that if regimes relieved their pressure on society, we would find a “more open and emancipated society” that could be involved in the running of collective affairs. Herein lay the “role of Arab intellectuals: to create a “sensibility” or an “inner intuition” for a leading role in society that they had to assume their responsibility. Intellectuals had to ensure the passage from a *traditional* society (*al-mujtama‘ al-bada’i*) to a *developed* or *civilised* society (*al-mujtama‘ al-mutaḥaddir*) by provoking an awareness (*wa‘i*) or cultivating consciousness and

⁷⁶² Ibid. 172

⁷⁶³ Ibid. 32, 41, 70.

collective representations (*al-nudhra ila al-wujūd wa al-nafs*); and that is what intellectuals were required to cultivate.⁷⁶⁴

In contrast to Laroui's optimism and faith in rupture, Djaït set limits to what intellectuals could do, and the extent of society's possible transformation. After all, the Tunisian was a culturalist who was not as convinced of universalism as Laroui, which was why this was not considered a limitation in his analysis. But as with the Moroccan thinker, his conclusions did point to another unit of analysis: social groups and the ideological expression of their respective preferences in terms of cultural policies. In both countries, these were determined by the characteristics of the leading class in the political system, which were undergoing a crucial period of change.

3. The petty bourgeoisie, and shifting strategies of control

The cultural renewal of the early seventies meant there was movement in society in favour of emancipation and rationality. Intellectuals confidently envisaged a setting where, thanks to the backing of those segments of society, they would be called to play a leading role in extending collective awareness or educating the public towards a greater sensibility and changing collective representations. The authorities and other reactionary social groups were the enemy, but time was not on their side as material changes reinforced the chances of rationality and emancipation.

However, the essays published by Laroui and Djaït in 1974 introduce a measure of doubt. The "chances of rationality", Laroui wrote, depended on intellectuals correctly reading social dynamics. Djaït thought in similar terms when he wrote that overcoming the crisis hinged on a strong state and a rational ruling elite, which was a big condition. Their writings on the crisis of intellectuals and their modalities needed to be anchored in reality to have the expected impact. On some level, Laroui's intellectual fit better in Tunisia's socio-cultural realities, whereas Djaït's intellectual had better chances to lead change and be listened to in Moroccan society.

⁷⁶⁴ al-Samra'i, "ḥiwār ma'a Hishām Ju'ayit", 70-1; similarly expressed in 1984, after the bread riots in Tunisia where he felt his responsibility was "to think and make gift of his thought to his country": Djaït, "Tunisie: dérive ou renouveau ? (2e partie)" in *JA*, 1208, 29 February 1984, 3.

The importance of the context proved to be a legitimate concern in the following years, as the two regimes changed their approach towards society in such a way that threatened to derail the encouraging dynamics of the previous years. Before 1972-3, the manifestations of opposition were repressed when they took an overtly politicised shape, which did not weed out deep discontent. Cultural expression was tolerated, and observers began to read in it the expression of unaddressed social issues. A change began to appear from 1973: regarding culture, the states took over cultural policy by shifting discussion to the issues of “authenticity” and “heritage”, while ensuring that independent culture succumbed to its elitist and bourgeois character. Regarding society, they each developed a stronger social pact with the middle class or what these intellectuals liked to refer to as the “petty bourgeoisie” in order to pre-empt the emergence of opposition, and allow power to rest on stronger bases. Therefore, the parameters on which Laroui, Djaït and this whole intellectual trend had built their understanding of public reason shifted under their feet. Intellectuals could no longer claim to speak for the masses because the “militant” culture that gave them a mandate to speak became the expression of “bourgeois values” instead, however radical and anti-imperialist their members were. Increasingly, modernist intellectuals were part of the urban middle class, and their socio-economic experiences grew further from the realities of the masses. Therefore, they lost their ability to provide critical insight, and their legitimacy to speak for others as a result of their social belonging.

The seventies saw the return of the state in the cultural sphere. The vacuum that had grown to allow the formation of a “militant” or “engaged” culture was addressed when the authorities led a charge in favour of “authenticity” and “tradition”, which became the structuring axes of a previously unfocused cultural policy. In Morocco, the regime reactivated the discourse of historical continuity required to reverse the effects of colonialism, in which the Makhzen was the connecting thread.⁷⁶⁵ This continuity translated into the valorisation of tradition in aspects of life, including the rise of religiosity – despite the problematic understanding for the Arab self that an ideological reading of

⁷⁶⁵ Daoud, *Maroc les années de plomb*, 198.

the past contained, as Laroui highlighted in his 1967 essay.⁷⁶⁶ In Tunisia, the country's cultural orientation evolved with a strong emphasis on "Tunisian specificity" following the post-Ben Salah popular consultation that brought back sizeable interest in the issue of "authenticity within renewal", or "*aṣāla fī al- tajdīd*" as it was referred to in debates.⁷⁶⁷ In the following years, state discourse and policy took a turn towards the valorisation of this heritage, especially in domain of history and school programmes. Islam and Islamic civilisation grew in importance to become the twin pillars of state programmes alongside the history of the national movement. Furthermore, from 1970 to 1982, the discipline was progressively arabised.⁷⁶⁸

The return of tradition and the newfound concern for religion and morality gave a platform for Arabisation campaigns, understood as the path towards recovering an "authentic personality". This struck as the dominant cultural issue of the seventies on which different social groups intervened because it could relate to the different aspects of their daily lives, irrespective of their positions in society. Similar logics took place in neighbouring Algeria as well.⁷⁶⁹

The public debates, carried out in the media or in political institutions, began as an examination of the states' language and education policies, a technical discussion which the authorities tolerated, and on which the relevant ministries frequently released documentation.⁷⁷⁰ But more than language, this was about the values on which national communities should be established: cultural plurality or cultural authenticity.⁷⁷¹ A conservative trend in each society took it as a starting point for a deeper discussion of cultural tradition and the continual alienation under the independent state that saw the perpetuation of French in public life. They cited the devaluation of the Arabic language in everyday life and how the younger generation preferred to speak in French, a language that opened better

⁷⁶⁶ Benjelloun, *Projet national et identité au Maroc*, 2005. See also Combs-Schilling, "Performing monarchy, staging nation", Bourquia, "the cultural legacy of power in Morocco" 243-5, in Bourqia, Miller, *In the shadow of the sultan*, 1999.

⁷⁶⁷ "Chronique politique – Tunisie" in AAN, 1970, 274.

⁷⁶⁸ Abbassi, *Identité tunisienne et histoire*, 93-98.

⁷⁶⁹ McDougall, "Culture as war by other means: Community, conflict, and cultural revolution, 1967-1981", in Rabah Aissaoui and Claire Eldridge (eds), *Algeria revisited. History, culture and identity, 1830 to the present*, forthcoming 2016.

⁷⁷⁰ *L'Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* released a yearly discussion of cultural issues, which would start with a discussion of numbers, usually released by the state.

⁷⁷¹ Adam, "La politique culturelle au Maroc" in AAN, 1973, 123-4

opportunities for employment in the modern sector – therefore, it was the source of perpetuating structures of inequality and alienation.⁷⁷²

A decade earlier, a wide variety of positions could have been expressed during this public debate, including the cultural benefits of bilingualism (especially in Tunisia, from the Sadiqi College model). It also helped that the two states' development programmes required such bilingual nationals to lead the economy and the administration. However, in the seventies, the changing atmosphere forced all parties to agree on the necessity for total Arabisation as the starting point despite the domination of the French language in the social fabric, as illustrated by the continuously high numbers of French schools and cultural cooperation with France, and created a gap between public discourse (and expectations) and social realities in the two countries. In Tunisia, this national debate on "Tunisian personality" culminated in 1974. In Morocco, it remained continuously on the agenda after the powerful petition signed by 500 ulema and intellectuals in 1970 made Istiqlal understand the political importance of such an issue.⁷⁷³ Only by the late seventies, when the political uncertainty of the early seventies had been addressed and when its principle had been ingrained in society, did this issue evolve from being a polemical matter of public concern to a technical issue of policy-making.

In addition to these cultural policies, the two states introduced stronger measures of control over the structures of cultural action. They displayed some tolerance towards the radical and subversive elements in the cultural spheres while pushing them to fully embrace the bourgeois leanings they had already been displaying, as long as they remained on the margins and divorced from politics. Laroui described cultural *embourgeoisement* in 1967 along the lines of Frederick Cooper's definition of bourgeois culture: "a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion".⁷⁷⁴ Increasingly, since the high point of cultural action in the seventies, cultural life has become divided along social lines, and prevented from leading the charge for change in the same manner. Since then, cultural actors have

⁷⁷² Result of a survey carried out by the Bourguiba institute for languages at the University of Tunis in the early 1970s: Mohamed Habib Ounali, "La langue des étudiants" in Payne, *Language in Tunisia*, 1983, 136-7. Timoumi, *La Tunisie (1956-1987)*, 2008, 171.

⁷⁷³ Grandguillaume, *Arabisation et politique linguistique au Maghreb*, 1983, 50-58.

⁷⁷⁴ Mark Katz, "The embourgeoisement of revolutionary regimes: reflections on Abdallah Laroui" in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1998, 261; Cooper in *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*, 1997, 3, 9.

been at odds about explaining and overcoming the Maghrib's "cultural crisis",⁷⁷⁵ and many have fallen instead into nostalgia of the seventies, which is not necessarily an indictment of "the end of culture" in the Maghrib but rather the end of cultural "modernness" as this generation had experienced during the formative years and as Tarek Sabry argues, we must instead broaden our focus onto other forms and manifestations (such as "popular culture and everyday life").⁷⁷⁶

In conclusion, the state introduced some order in an area it had left vacant since independence, but it did so by crushing the hope that culture might introduce a positive social dynamic for change that would go beyond its own limitations. The debates that were opened up during this episode envisaged the possibility of unpacking the deep layers of the colonial legacy in favour of the formulation of a truly decolonised and emancipated culture. Instead, the states chose to come together around notions of "specificity" that could only envisage, at best, a tedious and uncertain "harmonious synthesis" between two cultures,⁷⁷⁷ or at worse, the emergence of "the cultural question" to mean the rise of identitarianism and the fragmentation of the national community.⁷⁷⁸ Evidence from the late seventies in the Middle East such as the sectarian war in Lebanon, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism served to confirm the latter interpretation. Thus, these questions raise the issue of the social sources of cultural policy, and especially the interplay between different groups' ideologies in producing the eventual outcome.

In the early seventies and for a brief period after their crises of legitimacy, it appeared that the Tunisian PSD and the Moroccan Makhzen might consent to some measure of liberalisation to ease tensions. But from 1972-3, Tunisia and Morocco saw the return of the regime with a new approach towards the control of society and towards the opposition, as reported in *L'annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*.⁷⁷⁹ From independence, they inherited a society with a particular configuration they had to contend with as they pursued their aims: economic development and national consolidation. Education policy represented a main component of their strategies: it served to consolidate national

⁷⁷⁵ Hajji, "Malaise dans la culture marocaine" in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2002.

⁷⁷⁶ Sabry, *Cultural encounters in the arab world*, 2010,

⁷⁷⁷ Adam, "La politique culturelle au Maroc", 126-7.

⁷⁷⁸ Henry, *Enjeux culturels au Maghreb*, 6.

⁷⁷⁹ See Adam, "Chronique sociale et culturelle au Maroc" and Monastiri "Chronique sociale et culturelle en Tunisie" in AAN, 1973, and especially the founding text from Abdelkader Zghal, *Les classes moyennes au Maghreb*, 1980.

independence by fostering national sentiment and improving the population's skillset, and ultimately, to ensure regime legitimacy. But in the seventies, the authorities began to consider the possibility of shaping their societies instead. The modern, urban middle classes had a greater tendency to be swayed by materialism and steer clear of politics, and did not require significant ideological concessions (as opposed to the traditional sectors of the population), and could be bought in exchange for better economic opportunities (hence the combination of market capitalism and a welfare state). Furthermore, in countries where the population grew at unprecedented rates, an approach reliant on elites was not as effective as it once was. This new policy came from the realisation that the authorities could increase the size of this urban and modern middle class, and make it the source of its legitimacy instead of merely co-opting the elites in the state apparatus and coercing the masses. The result of this social strategy in the seventies was greater regime stability, but it was costly and only sustainable under a (very) favourable economic context.

The radicalisation of culture in the sixties and seventies told another story from the perspective of the two regimes: the disaffection of the two countries' future elites from the national project and the system of power. In 1972, John Entelis carried out a survey among Tunisian university students in Paris and Tunis studying law, humanities or politics, in other words the future political leaders.⁷⁸⁰ He found that the regime was losing the support of the largest parts of this group because of rampant nepotism and corruption, archaic structures and the difficulty of joining the system despite one's qualifications.⁷⁸¹ Instead, the ideologies that seemed to attract these students were those of pan-Arabism and Maoism because they called for radical change, and gave hope for a fairer society in which the students could play a leading role.⁷⁸² Similar feelings also ran through Moroccan society: when describing the two putsch attempts, André Adam noted how the initial news of the King's demise was met with indifference in society. The coups highlighted how the "Oufkirian" model of "repression-corruption" did not put the regime on solid and perennial bases to wither such storms.

⁷⁸⁰ Entelis, "Ideological change and the emergence of a counter-culture in Tunisian politics" in *MAS*, 12, 4, 1974, 546.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.* 552.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.* 545.

And so, from the mid-seventies, these two countries saw a change of approach, but it did not mean the easing up of modes of control, dialogue and liberalisation. The return of the strong state turned towards another approach based on social co-optation. In Tunisia, Hédi Nouira was named Prime Minister and after the end of “Mestirism” and Bourguiba’s return to the helm, he was able to pursue his liberal economic agenda.⁷⁸³ In addition, he fostered an urban middle class, which saw its material conditions of life improve significantly. He also struck a social contract with the workers that guaranteed a steady increase in wages, on the condition that labour unions would engage in dialogue rather than pursue protest movements. The PSD also co-opted the head of the UGTT as part of its council, for good measure. Under this quasi-technocratic leadership, the regime addressed the material sources of contestation before they could turn into opposition, and effectively emptied the leftist organisations’ ideological discourse of their substance.

In Morocco, the Makhzen began to promote a class of economically wealthy families who were less politicised. What had ensured the possibility of the previous form of governance, as described by John Waterbury, was the “smallness of the elite” which ensured that enmity stayed localised and that the monarchy could keep control over it through its interventions and the distribution of goods between factions, leaving these groups unable to reach out to other bases of power (such as society).⁷⁸⁴ The Moroccan population grew significantly after independence, especially those groups that provided manpower to the civil service, the army, and organised labour. The passing of General Oufkir was the symbolic opportunity to adopt a different approach. Later, Abdallah Laroui described the change in the following terms:

The King acknowledged the failure of the policy he pursued for the past decade...from 1973, and precisely to placate internal opposition, the King pursued the same policies as them [the Arab radical countries]. Recuperating lands from colonisation, the *Moroccanisation* of foreign companies, Arabisation of education, a development strategy relying on intensive public investment, unilateral decision on the price of the main exported product, direct implication in the Palestinian conflict. What is all this if not Nasser’s programme? ... Hassan II gave the impression to Moroccans and foreigners that he had a programme and

⁷⁸³ Ahmed Mestiri was a Tunis-based liberal, one of the driving forces of the anti-Ben Salah liberal contestation and considered one of the possible PMs after the Ben Salah affair. He was excluded from the party for his defiant attitude, but re-integrated by Bourguiba’s decision in 1973. “Chronique politique Tunisie” in *AAN*, 1973, 418.

⁷⁸⁴ Waterbury, “Marginal politics and elite manipulation in Morocco” in *European Journal of Sociology*, 1967, 96.

that he was applying it. He invited journalists to travel around the country and see for themselves how the country was becoming a real construction site.⁷⁸⁵

According to Laroui's description of this period, even the opposition could not help but acknowledge these changes, especially when the ambitious development from 1973 to 1977 began opening new perspectives for private business and land redistribution in the countryside, and addressed criticism that Morocco's so-called "liberal" policy was perpetuating post-colonial dependency as it hesitated between maintaining existing structures and opening up to the world economy.⁷⁸⁶ The opposition and political class worked with the state on technical issues such as the opening of universities, social planning policies or irrigation policies in the countryside, and built a dynamic of cooperation.⁷⁸⁷ The regime became heavily indebted to foreign institutions, and economic inequalities increased, but the middle class's condition improved as the administration hired massively and opened possibilities for consumption and the improvement of lifestyles. The urban middle class was co-opted, and it became the pillar of stability for the regime rather than the recruitment ground for ideological contestation. Finally, in 1975, the King completed the regime's relegitimation when he launched the Green March and invested the task of territorial integrity and the country's historic destiny in his own person.⁷⁸⁸ In the same move, he managed to put the masses on his side around a common ideological goal, and defused the political class's opposition by forcing them to join him for the national cause. Fences were mended with Istiqlal, especially after the passing of Allal al-Fassi, while the state continued to support the traditionalisation of state and society.⁷⁸⁹ Thanks to these two axes of intervention, the King felt in a better position to restore political dialogue in view of resolving the political crisis in the second half of the seventies.

In 1974, Laroui and Djaït were less than impressed by the effects of these dynamics they foresaw in their essays. The discussion revolved around the effects of social tampering on cultural policy, and the dangers of a group that was characterised by its depoliticised nature and its eclectic

⁷⁸⁵ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 83-4.

⁷⁸⁶ Zakya Daoud, "Etude- pourquoi et comment le Maroc a choisi le libéralisme" in *Lamalif*, 12, 1967, 12.

⁷⁸⁷ Idem. Abraham Serfaty made the same observation, emphasising the political effect of fostering this social category: Elbaz, *L'insoumis*, 167.

⁷⁸⁸ Benjelloun, *Projet national et identité au Maroc*: on the King as the figure of unity (69 -73) and the King as the supreme representative of the nation (90-93).

⁷⁸⁹ Gourdon, "Chronique politique Maroc", 1972, 317-322, 325-328.

cultural orientations. The “petty bourgeoisie”, Djaït wrote, replaced traditional elites through the capture of the state apparatus, and they were characterised by their dual and tortured relationship to the “sources of their selves”, seeking absolute cohesion but also rejecting the Arab and Islamic component of their heritage.⁷⁹⁰ This petty bourgeoisie was constituted of the social group that had been referred to by the French as “evolved” (*évolués*) under the protectorate, and they adhered to the narrative of the superiority of western values and lifestyles. However, they felt guilty about succumbing to the oppressor’s values, a *treason* mentality they would carry with them even after independence giving way to an “awkward feeling of psychological and cultural regression”, particularly as these were the people who had been the backbone of the struggle against colonial occupation.⁷⁹¹ Their “anti-Islamic prejudices” served to mask their crisis of the self, profound deviancy, desire for liberation from a repressive and backward society, and it was what drove them to promote a culturally alienated approach to Tunisian personality.⁷⁹²

In Laroui’s analysis, this social category’s centrality carried wider risks for the pursuit of modernity. The petty bourgeoisie was a contradictory group, defined by its materialism and pursuit of power over ideological consistency. They campaigned for national independence in favour of recovering the “authentic personality”, but they often came out of bilingual French education.⁷⁹³ After independence, they maintained this narrative in order to secure popular political allegiance, but their actions, once in power, ran against those principles.⁷⁹⁴ They gave free rein to traditional actors to pursue their moral supremacy, and even recurrently called for Arabisation campaigns; but in the meantime, they failed to pursue social and economic reform, and thus maintained existing structures serving to defeat the very purpose of the reforms they advocated – due to their vested interest in such a system remaining, for language policy not to translate to an overall economic reform. As a result, policy was ineffective and this contradiction projected “ambiguities in individual and group behaviour” onto Moroccan society in their image.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁰ Djaït, *Personnalité*, 21-2.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid. 24, 189.

⁷⁹² Ibid. 26.

⁷⁹³ Laroui, *Crise des intellectuels arabes*, 35.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid. 37, 41.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid. 34.

Laroui appeared incensed at what he considered to be a failure of public responsibility. This group that was supposed to carry out the drive for modernisation ended up enabling social conservatism and re-traditionalisation, just in order to secure their material social status.⁷⁹⁶ Despite its (then) numerical minority, the petty bourgeoisie evolved to take over social structures and reproduce its privilege through the capture of political power and continuous domination, striking alliances with the army to shield it from change, and with the traditional sector to ensure social peace. Behind this materialism and pursuit of power, another crisis was brewing that Laroui observed hopelessly.

So soon after having reconstituted a system of meaning in the wake of their exiles, the regimes' new social strategy left them facing a changing reality and yet another crisis of values. The way intellectuals envisaged the pursuit of social emancipation was defused by the regimes' changing social strategy that targeted the relationship between society and politics. The new pillar of power was an urban middle class that extended its depoliticised and materialist values against the radical aspirations of the cultural elites. In the meantime, the authorities began appealing to their "petty bourgeois conscience" by improving their condition and valuing their expertise. In order to be part of this ameliorated middle class, a number of intellectuals were sucked into this dynamic, as radical cultural creation lost the energy it had once displayed. And so, rationality did not appear to be the inevitable historical driver towards the modernity Laroui and Djaït had envisaged, and instead there were other ways society could be transformed, that liberal theory had not predicted. As for intellectuals, this was a serious blow to how they had conceived of their role in society. While the national crisis was resolved, they had to adapt and lose what made them intellectuals, or be left behind as irrelevant public actors. In the wake of these changes taking place in society, intellectuals began to reflect on their social location, their public functions, and the future of their social groups.

⁷⁹⁶ Laroui, *Idéologie*, 51.

Conclusion: Gramsci's return: legitimacy, criticism and embedness

When Charles Forsdick and David Murphy discussed the “rise of the Francophone postcolonial intellectual”, they portrayed this individual as a nodal point within the wider francophone world network (containing France, but not subservient to it).⁷⁹⁷ What this approach is saying, and it is a dominant paradigm, is that such intellectuals have been so alienated within their own communities by the failure to drag them forward that they have instead fostered their belonging in a transnational setting closer to their cultural and ideological preferences. And as such, Forsdick and Murphy offer a neat reading of the spread of a culture and its hybridisation within other systems. Among the three cases studies they addressed, there was one Maghribi: Abdelkebir Khatibi who had the privilege of being known to Anglophone audiences by being a “postcolonial novelist”, portraying him in a constant conversation with the likes of Aimé Césaire, Jacques Derrida, Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, Albert Memmi, Léopold Senghor and many others through their mutually shared texts and ideas. This aesthetically pleasing story fails to explain the relevance of these intellectuals in their own *primary* context: their immediate social, cultural and political environments. Khatibi was a sociologist before being a novelist. His main interlocutors were the authorities trying to shut down the department of sociology, the slow bureaucracy, or the Islamist students that populated the humanities faculty in the seventies. He regularly met and read the contributors of the *Bulletin économique et social du Maroc* (he was its editor in chief), the small circle of readers who often interviewed him, his publishing house (Okad éditions) and, above all, he interacted with the social realities that provided the material for his novels and studies.⁷⁹⁸ Khatibi's personal qualities, according to those who knew him and were left reeling at his sudden passing, were his kindness, his patience and optimism in the face of such challenges.

As such, this chapter has argued that Maghribi intellectuals have sought to understand and resolve their conditions primarily through the national perspective. Their first aim was to understand

⁷⁹⁷ Forsdick, Murphy, “The rise of the Francophone postcolonial intellectual” in *Modern & contemporary France*, 17:2, 2009, 164.

⁷⁹⁸ Idem.

social dynamics and have a bearing on them, rather than to engage in discussion about aesthetics in distant realities. To neglect this dimension of their struggle and to take their cultural production without considering those difficulties would be an injustice to their trajectories.

The seventies raised hopes that these intellectuals could resolve their crisis under the national state. They saw the moment of cultural flourishing or renaissance as an opportunity for social emancipation that would extend to their condition and challenge rigid and oppressive social norms. And in the late sixties and early seventies, this radical culture began to feed leftist radical politics during the two regimes' crises of legitimacy to raise their hopes further. Writing in the midst of these developments, Laroui and Djaït detailed the role that intellectuals should play: they should provoke awareness in favour of rationality and change collective representations. These modes of intervention rested on the fundamental assumption that social structures determined group preferences, and that the crisis was merely caused by social representations not having caught up to material changes through a set of conscious or arbitrary obstacles, which intellectuals had a responsibility to resolve.

But considering what ensued, this revealed itself to be a pious hope since the two regimes demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt. When the Makhzen and the PSD returned in full force to the public sphere around 1972-3, they imposed a strong cultural policy focusing on centralising values, they repressed movements that ventured too far in the sphere of opposition politics, and most importantly they developed a social policy to foster an urban middle class to depoliticise those who had rebelled years earlier. Instead of liberation, this period saw the transformations of mechanisms of oppression for intellectuals and again, the dashing of their hopes. Furthermore, intellectuals had valued their independence to such an extent that they cultivated their withdrawal for objectivity's sake, but in the process, they lost their organic embeddedness that offered them unparalleled insight and legitimacy to speak in public. Laroui and Djaït came to this realisation in the mid-seventies and appeared to make moves toward returning to a social location from which they could observe and speak with greater effectiveness.

The last building block in the sociology of intellectuals was the relationship with politics.⁷⁹⁹ With the states' changing social approaches and the emergence of civil society, what had seemed to be a straightforward answer (intellectuals need to remain independent) was challenged by the need to have some measure of influence. A number of intellectuals felt they had to get over their rebellious rejection of authority and instead, seek ways to have a tangible impact. The terms of public responsibility were posed between the choice to hold on to their visions of their role and risk being left behind, or seek to adapt and carve for themselves a new role by letting go of some of their idealism.

⁷⁹⁹ Stein, "Intellectuals and political change in the modern Middle East and North Africa" in *BJMES*, 41:1, 2.

Chapter 6 Responsibility and national re-integration

After a decade of political atrophy, the two political systems began to show some movement from the mid-seventies. In Tunisia, the UGTT began to adopt a growingly daring position against Hédi Nouira's government, until the violent events of "black Thursday" in 1978 rocked the country and prompted long-overdue reforms of its decayed structures. In Morocco, the Green March in 1975 gave the existing political forces a cause to agree on, and created a favourable context to hold legislative elections in 1977.

These political events created an opportunity for intellectuals to seek an improvement of their overall condition. However, what unfolded was that neither of the two intellectuals played a meaningful role in these events. Djaït made a couple of statements in the recently created independent media, but remained largely silent and seemingly disinterested. On the other hand, Laroui campaigned for Morocco's position on territorial integrity in 1975 and in 1977 decided to run in the legislative elections, but he was defeated and left upset by the experience, which put an end to his political aspirations.

Despite these setbacks, neither Laroui nor Djaït went through another crisis of values comparable to the late sixties, when their political exclusion led to exile. They continued working at home without interruption, which raises serious questions over whether intellectuals needed to be politically engaged to feel part of the national community.

In this chapter, I argue that these events did not provoke a crisis of values because national re-integration was of greater importance than political participation at that stage of their lives. In fact, they had secured their place as social and cultural critics in the previous years, and enjoyed improved social condition, public recognition and mutual recognition with the authorities, which meant that there was little riding on their ability to make a political name for themselves. Eventually, after 1978, their public interventions became selective and lost their critical edge, while their

writings were increasingly reserved for an erudite audience, which brought an end to their phase of critical thought.

First, I will establish their political thinking on the basis of the relevant passages in their 1974 essays. This will be followed with a discussion of the two authors' political conduct and choices from 1975 to 1978, in order to determine how national re-integration was privileged when they encountered obstacles to their taking part in public affairs. After living in a situation of creative marginality for more than a decade, the narrative arc came to a form of conclusion with the "age of reason", with its lot of personal and intellectual responsibilities, prompting a multitude of reconciliations: with their realities, their fathers, history and their selves, creating the image that the Moroccan and Tunisian intelligentsia have had of these two intellectuals since then.

1. The seamless transition from culture to politics

The national crisis in the Maghrib had social and cultural roots, but the two intellectuals were aware that resolving it would require drastic political change. Consequently, in their essays, they each offered a depiction of politics, in the form of power relationships and intricate networks of interests and influence. By writing about the politics, Laroui and Djaït were evidently seeking to uncover and undermine, and they would have faced a backlash. But in the text, the passages about the respective political regimes were measured and pragmatic: they still identified domination mechanisms but they also framed their criticism alongside concrete solutions to the legitimacy crises; it contrasted with much more straightforward essays published at the time, such as Kamal-Eddine Mourad *Le Maroc à la recherche d'une révolution* (1972). This constructive approach raises questions about their intentions, whether they wished to see the change or something else, maybe even prepare their eventual re-integration and make sure not to burn too many bridges.

The political dimension of Laroui's analysis was secondary and instrumental to the bigger aim of understanding structures of oppression and alienation in society. But because he formulated a

“call for action” destined for the Arab intelligentsia, he had to offer an understanding of political structures.⁸⁰⁰

The Moroccan political sphere, he explained in characteristically Marxist terminology, had grown autonomous from national material realities. As a result, the national project was stagnating and produced eclectic (and suboptimal) outcomes such the simultaneous pursuit of technical modernisation and the promotion of traditional values.⁸⁰¹ Political and social attachment to “tradition” grew stronger despite modernisation of structures and lifestyles, the sign of “sectional involution”. Since independence, he explained, political leaders had used different approaches to rule (tradition) and to manage the economy (modernisation). Therefore, this political system was unstable because the dominant ideology did not fit its material realities.⁸⁰²

Secondly, Laroui attributed the shape of Morocco’s current political system to the characteristics and behaviour of its elites, but he criticised existing models of understandings for being “too static”, and hoping instead to have models grounded in Moroccan historical realities.⁸⁰³ And so he wrote that these elites secured power by “the manipulation of men” rather than by “the administration of things”, therefore it was harder to determine their economic preferences and interests.⁸⁰⁴ This new understanding would integrate their systems of references, their values and how they conceived of their place in the overall system: hence the importance of ideology.⁸⁰⁵ Here, the need for his censored chapter on Arabisation is striking because it would have given an ideal illustration of this heterogeneous elite (as a whole) and how it permeated policy-making, and the failure of these campaigns.⁸⁰⁶

Finally, the third characteristic was that ideologies had lost their political purpose and had become a tool for group consolidation, “distinctive signs” for members of their groups, “like

⁸⁰⁰ Laroui, *Crisis of the Arab Intellectual*, 1976, Preface, vii, viii, ix. These chapters were originally delivered to an Arab audience of specialists in Rabat, Algiers, Tunis and Beirut.

⁸⁰¹ Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels*, 130.

⁸⁰² Ibid. 52-55.

⁸⁰³ Ibid. 127-8. He referred to David Apter, Douglas Ashford and Daniel Lerner who portrayed tradition as a static object. See footnote page 58.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. 131.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid. 131-2.

⁸⁰⁶ Laroui wrote a study on this topic that was due to be published in *Lamalif* in 1973 but was seized by the authorities. Presumably, he removed it from his essay where it would have logically belonged.

clothing trends”, instead of depicting reality. He even targeted Moroccan “marxism” (with a lower case “m”) for having become totally autonomous from social bases; he probably meant the *frontistes* organisations that emerged in the early seventies.⁸⁰⁷

Laroui had several audiences in mind when he wrote and above all he addressed Arab leftists when he called on them to forsake autonomous ideologies and turn to reality instead, through historicism, and reformulate an Arab political tradition. These groups needed to develop “studies on mechanisms for the elite’s ‘ideologisation’ and on the economic structure”, and if that was achieved, the crisis would be alleviated: “Through this action society will be modernised, the elite will integrate society, and ideology will be concretised: the road towards political legitimacy will be drawn”.⁸⁰⁸

The analysis depicted the Moroccan political system quite vaguely, by focusing on ideology over people or institutions. When he wrote that “ideology will be concretised”, he was effectively calling for democratisation that meant a situation where ideological discourses and political structures would be the same. In other words, what society says about itself through its politics would correspond to what it actually was; for anyone living in Morocco during the seventies and reading Moulay Ahmed Alaoui’s columns in *Maroc Soir* on where the country was heading, those two were significantly different.

It would allow for “real political programmes” to be pursued in Morocco in urgent areas such as “agrarian reform, democracy, national independence”.⁸⁰⁹ Yet, Laroui still remained vague about his own intentions: did Laroui genuinely believe in the Marxist approach, or was the focus on ideology a way to avoid retribution and further censorship by laying off political groups?

This situation raises bigger issues relating to this genre. Laroui was a historian offering his views on politics and simultaneously trying to impose scientific frameworks on a diffuse and unclear reality. In addition, his political consciousness was in the way as he tried to explain and influence at the same time, while having to remain vague enough not to upset the authorities.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid. 133.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid. 131, 135-136.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid. 136-7.

The risks of meaning being lost between writer and reader make the critical essay a self-defeating act, if indeed it was intended to have a tangible political impact. For example, he called on the elites to “convert to rationality” by “rectifying the ideology-structure dichotomy”.⁸¹⁰ Despite his essay bringing in a fresh perspective, it is too dense as an ideology, and too diffuse as an academic text: it is again unclear how he positioned himself in relation to the emerging literature on the Moroccan political system. He criticised modernisation theory and complimented John Waterbury’s study of Moroccan elites and the King, which depicted a system where political groups were in constant competition for resources with the King orchestrating, and where the greatest energy was spent in “ritualistic hostility” rather than in the collective project of development and modernisation.⁸¹¹ Laroui qualified Waterbury’s work as a positive trend in political science that “revealed the real issues, and detected real stumbling blocks” and “introduced a bit of rationality in what was usually considered to be the area of psychological impressionism”, and he even proposed a future research agenda where the last axis, “political culture”, corresponded to his interest in ideology.⁸¹²

The question raised by this line of interest is whether he genuinely believed that ideology – in this case, it meant “political culture” – opened the door to understanding the Moroccan system’s predicament and, if so, why it did not lead to more discussion in his book. If not, it would be entirely possible that he focused on ideology rather than political groups and elites, as Waterbury or Palazzoli had done, because he was a Moroccan and it would ultimately have come back to haunt him, or perennially damage his political ambitions. This raises the strong possibility of self-restraint, perfectly in line with common intellectual attitudes at the time.

After these passages on politics, Laroui ended by issuing his call to Arab Marxists, hoping that his depiction of the political systems would contribute to intellectuals producing a counter-ideology to fight against petty bourgeois influence on the system. His optimistic assessment did not materialise in the Arab world: Marxists remained sidelined, and Arab regimes made an assured turn towards conservatism and neo-liberal policies. But despite the failure of his book to look forward, it

⁸¹⁰ Ibid. 138.

⁸¹¹ Ibid. 132. Waterbury, *The Commander of the faithful*, 1970. The book was banned from entering the country.

⁸¹² Ibid. 128.

did not undermine his place in the collective project and instead, the political upheavals of the mid-seventies created a different optimism.

Djaït's essay was richer in substance, but it was free-floating and prone to digressions. Thankfully, his political discussion was grouped in two sections: first, he went over the politics of reform, and especially "the relationship between the state and society" across the Arab world.⁸¹³ Building on his critique (Chapters 4 and 5), he tried to understand why the state could not live up to its potential for progress and the realisation of Arab destiny. The Arab world was then endemic with poverty and inequality, and the pursuit of material growth and misguided state interventionism had clearly not worked.⁸¹⁴

To explain this situation, he focused on the role of elites that were constantly undermining the state to further their interests as a group. To make his point, he used the Egyptian case because it was a "model country in the Arab world", but also because it allowed him to describe Tunisia in all but name in a series of ambiguous passages.⁸¹⁵ He depicted a tragic combination of despotic, misguided and entrepreneurial state measures, and a fragmented and competitive group of elites that turned away from their economic functions, and failed modernisation and nationalisations that failed to "provoke rapid growth and high social equality".⁸¹⁶

This group's relationship with the state was problematic. Colonialism had unsettled the historic state-society equilibrium and created a new bourgeoisie to facilitate its colonial extraction. After national independence and the launch of the Nasserist project, these were the people that took over the state and bent it to class interests.⁸¹⁷ This "techno-bureaucratic class" turned into a "state bourgeoisie" lacked a historical perspective (his way of accusing its members of being *arrivistes* attracted to materialism, power and the obscene display of wealth) and this group did not respect the founding tradition of the strong state based on the primacy of its economic role, an argument also

⁸¹³ Djaït, *La personnalité*, 125-7, 135. VI Organisation de la société et de l'état", 229-276.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid. 231-4, 252.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid. 263.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid. 257.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid. 254-8.

made by Asma Larif-Béatrix for Tunisia.⁸¹⁸ In the meantime, this weakened state remained central to economic matters, by controlling important industries and building infrastructures, and the impossibility of carrying out its mission without meddling caused the difficult outcome.⁸¹⁹ To illustrate his claim, he finally openly moved to talk about Tunisia: “Here as in Egypt, the ideological hinders the development of concrete powers, and nothing has been done to define, in the overall social setting, the respective roles of the state and the bourgeoisie”.⁸²⁰ He recommended that the cohabitation with the state be organised, and the different groups that formed the bourgeoisies (the old, the new economic or commercial, and the state bourgeoisies) work together.⁸²¹ This group would then seek its own economic activity by “overseeing popular effort” and economic animation, and would then recognise and respect the autonomy of the state as the primary economic actor in charge of large investments.⁸²² This renewed solidarity would be translated by a renewed dynamism and even political liberalisation.⁸²³

Djaït’s analysis of political economy was well intentioned but outside his realm of specialisation. The second area in his discussion of politics was on the nature and exercise of power in Tunisia. He argued that the rationalisation of the elite and the liberation of the state apparatus were necessary but not sufficient conditions to resolve the crisis because a strong state also had the potential to be arbitrary and deficient. Tunisia showed that well enough, since the PSD and Bourguiba’s centralism illustrated the incompatibility between the personification of power and rationality.⁸²⁴ The few benefits of this model (such as unification of society, or overcoming bureaucratic limitations through personalised interventions) could not compensate for the harm it caused. Furthermore, the source of power was subject to endless pressures from those seeking to pursue their own interests,

⁸¹⁸ A. Larif-Béatrix, “Édification étatique et environnement culturel en Tunisie” in *Arabica*, T. 33, Fasc. 3, Nov. 1986, 295-7.

⁸¹⁹ Djaït, *La personnalité arabo-islamique*. 258-9.

⁸²⁰ Ibid. 259.

⁸²¹ Ibid. 260.

⁸²² Ibid. 264.

⁸²³ Ibid. 260-5.

⁸²⁴ Ibid. 266-7.

while the system also ended up being reliant on the leader, which the state suffered from during Bourguiba's repeated health-related absences that fuelled uncertainty.⁸²⁵

In this system, violence was essential and frequently used as a political tool to “target all those who challenge the dominant group or aspire to replace it”, rather than to protect the state as an institution.⁸²⁶ Any form of contestation could be framed as opposition against the leader, as it increasingly began to produce rather than resolve its contradictions by banning journalists or intellectuals who were critical, rather than see it as a corrective mechanism for the reporting of bad practices and abuse of power and the improvement of the political system.⁸²⁷

But at this stage, Djaït also suffered from conciliating the political analysis that demanded detachment with ideological leanings, as illustrated by his unnecessarily long quest for an appropriate theoretical model explaining the nature of the Tunisian political system: it was an unfair system, but “tyranny” was not specific enough. He tried to compare it to Hannah Arendt's fascism, but found that state repression in Tunisia was more “banal” than punctual (and smaller in scope). Eventually, he seemed reasonably satisfied by writing that post-1945 Arab regimes were “dictatorships with complex components” that combined traditional structures of rule with modern means. Djaït even wrote that they contained elements of “Oriental despotism”. The *Raïs* was located at the top of the pyramid of power, incarnating “the idea of consensus”. Furthermore, disagreement was always personalised and considered to be seditious because the practice of dialogue was never institutionalised.⁸²⁸ Finally, he called it a form of “personalised absolutism” because Bourguiba's ambition was to turn the country and the party into “an extension of his own person”, which was similar to Elbaki Hermassi's depiction of a system that could be explained by leadership rather than by the single party.⁸²⁹ But he brushed aside all these models, arguing instead that society should be the main issue because authoritarian rule took hold because of the dislocation of social structures,

⁸²⁵ Idem.

⁸²⁶ Ibid. 273-5.

⁸²⁷ Idem.

⁸²⁸ Ibid. 274.

⁸²⁹ Idem. It is surprising that, in this respect, and unlike Laroui and a significant section of the Arab intelligentsia, he did not mobilize Gramsci's concept of hegemony.

the emergence of individuals without frameworks of meaning causing “the inflation of politics and the decadence of everything else”.⁸³⁰

Was Djaït as optimistic about the possibility of overcoming this crisis? His essay oscillated. Faced with the state turned oppressor, “clamours fuse[d] from across the Arab world” expressing a call for freedom.⁸³¹ On the other hand, the perspective of Arab democracy was uncertain, adding that “before this work is done, we will experience ruptures, failed revolutions, and the spasms of a difficult maturation”.⁸³²

This indecision might have stemmed from his reading of the situation in Tunisia and the Arab world as much as indecision regarding his personal destiny as an exile: both were shrouded by emotion and distance, and Djaït’s book could have been his ticket back or another bolt on the door, depending on its content. And on that front, what strikes the reader is how the text alternated between criticism and constructive tones. For example, he avoids talking about specific political reform, and talks instead about “the failings of the state as an engaging organism and a driver for development”.⁸³³ He followed that with attempts to give concrete solutions, and even a hint of a political vision: these Arab regimes benefitted from an unparalleled opportunity after independence “which they wasted with their mistakes, hesitancy and timidity, or on the contrary because of a guilty recklessness” – and it could all have been avoided by a “sober intelligence” that could perceive mistakes from miles away.⁸³⁴ In other passages, his choice of words echoed official speeches: on education, he wrote of the urgent need for education reform because it “would spread positive values and representations within society”, it was “a major piece in the economic and social development project” that must not be neglected alongside culture in society, deserving of attention as much as technical efficiency. He would even write what could have been said by Bourguiba, how “in the Arab world, the crisis of technology was equal to the crisis of culture”.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁰ “Reform of the place of individuals, change of values, authentic modernity”, 264, 275.

⁸³¹ Ibid. 273

⁸³² Ibid. 276.

⁸³³ Ibid. 267.

⁸³⁴ Ibid. 234-5.

⁸³⁵ Ibid. 242.

But at the end of the essay, Djaït gives in to his urge to denounce political authoritarianism, and he did so in a virulent tone. He called for the type of change that would have provoked animosity in some quarters by arguing that “the mere change of structures of institutions would not suffice” and instead called for “a new spirit and new men, because the current political personnel is unfit to reform the state through its mode of work and mental habits”. The time had come to move on from the era of nationalism and “the generation of state builders must give way to a generation of state reformers” who would lead on the basis of “imagination, intelligence, assured instincts and talent”.⁸³⁶ But such calls were not realistic: elites and the state had entered a symbiotic relationship by the seventies, while elites were efficient at managing new recruits and competitors. There was no reserve pool of ideal candidates to take over state affairs as his essay seemed to call for. While Djaït’s efforts to appear constructive and pragmatic in favour of an eventual reintegration gave way to his need to “speak the truth” and to be critical against despotism, it is difficult to offer a reason why, especially after having built up his case for so long in the book. What is more certain was that he appeared to hijack any political ambitions by appearing as a maverick.

In another twist of events, despite his criticism the book propelled Djaït’s career and he was invited to return. Bourguiba learned of his book and asked for a copy, and while his aides removed the excessively critical passages, he was back on the radar in the mid-seventies.⁸³⁷ Paradoxically, Laroui displayed more political caution than Djaït in his political critique. The Moroccan spoke to an audience of Marxists advocating revolution, while Djaït was a bourgeois calling for deep reform, but the latter burned his bridges by targeting personal power, while the former remained far from criticism of the regime’s red lines. It may have been an issue of audience, subject matter or style, but a significant place must be devoted to their aims, and especially their hopes of future political integration. Their writings therefore need to be juxtaposed with their praxis during the events stretching from 1975 to 1978 despite the precariousness of reading aims from subsequent developments.

⁸³⁶ Ibid. 266-7.

⁸³⁷ Interview with Djaït, Carthage, January 2014.

2. The challenges of re-integration in the late seventies

The political events and upheavals of the following years provided crucial opportunities for critical intellectuals to determine whether they could play a political role, and whether the legitimacy of thought and vision could be translated into political authority. When the two intellectuals entered the political sphere they were confronted to political practice and soon realised how different it was to armchair political analysis, and how ill-equipped they were, causing frustrations and setbacks.

After a couple of difficult years in exile, Djaït achieved what he could not in the sixties: public consideration without betraying his ideals and having to “bend the knee” to politicians. It took a long time but eventually, his name reached the highest circles because of his ideas:

Someone who attended the scene told it to me: Bourguiba went on an official visit to Morocco. In the Royal palace, one of the royals came to him and said “I must congratulate you for the great book by your compatriot Hichem Djaït”. Bourguiba later asked one of his aides about the book (which he had not heard about before) and they brought it to him – without the very critical passages on him of course.⁸³⁸

From then on, members of the regime tried to bring him back. Soon after, Wassila Ben Ammar, Bourguiba’s politically influential spouse, offered him a ministerial post. He turned down this offer because he “was not a politician”. At the time, Djaït was still working on his second essay and “had no interest in such *honours*”.⁸³⁹ A year later, Djaït wrote an article in *Le Monde* on the Maghrib that Bourguiba read and liked, and the President gave firm instructions to the Prime Minister Hedi Nouira to bring him back. Contact was made through the Tunisian ambassador in Paris, and Nouira asked him to return in a manner of his choosing, because “his country needed him”. Djaït came back to the faculty of history as a Professor of Medieval Islamic history – a different type of honour – and could finally start his reinsertion in a country from which he had felt unwanted seven years earlier. But what this convenient narrative omits is the work that was carried out under the surface and before his return. His publications would have meant he was already on the Tunisian Embassy’s watch list, all the more so since in 1974, Djaït had accepted Bechir Ben Yahmed’s offer to write

⁸³⁸ Idem.

⁸³⁹ He was working on *L’Europe et l’Islam*, 1978; Interview with Hichem Djaït, Carthage, February 2015.

regular columns in *Jeune Afrique*. Considering the enduring proximity between Ben Yahmed and the Tunisian state, this could be seen as a trial period prior to his return.

After the difficult reception of his intellectual project from 1974-1975, Djaït adopted a different approach with regard to the public sphere, and this took place by extending his collaboration with *Jeune Afrique*. He first began to write regular opinion columns on the current events in the Arab world, allowing him to gain some notoriety as a lucid commentator on Arab and Islamic affairs, the role of the United States in the region and the continued struggle with Israel. His genuine contribution came when he began to write more substantial articles on the renewal of Islamic sentiment, and especially on the dangers of not addressing rising social discontent. A number of those ideas were already present in his 1974 essay, but this was an opportunity to confront them to a changing reality and adapt them accordingly. Therefore, there was a fundamental shift between his previous approach, which consisted of writing about the past, to this new one, when he wrote about the seventies and the perspectives of the future. This allowed him to emerge as an intellectual addressing the concerns of his epoch and providing answers to what mattered to the public.

Late in February 1975, an article was published accounting for a round table Djaït convened on “the renewal of Islamic faith” that brought together Maxime Rodinson, a noted French orientalist, Mohamed Béhi, editor in chief in the official Algerian newspaper *El Moudjahid*, and Abou Ali, an independent Tunisian journalist. Djaït was leading the discussion, and began by noting the distinction that should be made between the renewal of Islam as a public sentiment, as opposed to the renewal of public (political) discourse about religion. He cited the recent Lahore conference of Islamic states where participants “tried to insert an Islamic dimension to the unification efforts”. But such a revival was also seen after the 1967 defeat and the “shift towards the right” that brought back the issue of religion and raised Saudi Arabia’s profile in the Arab world.⁸⁴⁰ Rodinson and Djaït then agreed to explain this renewal of faith as a refuge, especially among young people who were also attracted to the social dimension in leftist ideology. This was particularly felt in countries where religious practice was repressed, hinting clearly at Tunisia. He defined this renewal as “either a

⁸⁴⁰ Djaït, “Un renouveau de la foi musulmane?” in *JA*, 738, 28 February 1975, 62.

renaissance of practice or reaffirmation of Arab and Islamic historical identity”.⁸⁴¹ Displaying his critical methodology, Djaït reacted sharply against one of the participants by emphasising the distinction between new forays and a renewal, since the latter was located in the area of thought and what had been observed was within the area of practices.⁸⁴²

This round table was also an opportunity to advance his intellectual interpretation, as contained in his book, regarding the evolution of Tunisian society, that could not only be explained in terms of class interests and colonial legacies. Instead, the revival of religious sentiment was part of a bigger story with regard to change and cultural authenticity, the central issue of his book:

I see it as the end of universalism as an ideology. The more the world is unified through technique, the more it differentiates itself on other levels, or rather it structures itself. The resurgence of Islamic faith is therefore a deeper phenomenon in a world perspective.⁸⁴³

On this basis, Djaït let his Baathist feelings express the ambitious hope that some new form of unification would take place, following the emergence of Islamic sentiment in non-Arab countries such as Turkey and Iran. Instead of formal unity, he saw the possibility of “something on the level of consciousness” coming from an awareness of being different from the rest of the world.⁸⁴⁴ The article and round table concluded on Rodinson’s observation that this was the end of a universal ideology of revolt in the Third World, replaced by the emergence of separate sub movements of which the renewal of Islamic sentiment is a leading example.⁸⁴⁵

Late February 1976, Djaït gave a short preview of his ongoing work in an article under the title “Specificity and vitality of Islam”. In this article, he was able to address one of his essay’s shortcomings: the vagueness of the call to remobilise certain elements from the Islamic past in favour of the demands of the present, which meant that some saw him in the Islamist camp rather than an advocate of a “third way”. In his article, he described the “genius spirit” thanks to which Arab culture flourished in the past, leading to great works of science and art. He was speaking to

⁸⁴¹ Ibid. 63.

⁸⁴² Ibid. 64.

⁸⁴³ Ibid. 65.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid. 65.

⁸⁴⁵ Idem.

both audiences, the traditionalists and the modernists, by demonstrating his knowledge of Islamic history in favour of the demands of modernity:

High Arab and Islamic culture in the classical age was a fundamental component of the overall edifice, was not reduced to the juridical dimension as it has been thought, neither by the rationalism of *falsafa* or the mystical tendency as it is increasingly believed... during these five centuries of flourishing, the common cultural language was the unavoidable horizon of revelation running across geographical and mental spaces... the unity of a culture is to feel as one and to want to be one... Intellectual enthusiasm commanded all of the efforts of Islamic spirit, but also a passion for autonomy. With abnegation, this culture pursued a variety of forms of knowledge: history, geography, law, scholastic theology, philosophy, medicine, and mathematics.⁸⁴⁶

This moment of culture is presented as a general spirit that ran across Arab and Islamic society then, and was still present in society in Djaït's time. Therefore, it was the intellectual's function to enlighten the public on the relationship between religion, civilisation and culture, which were neglected aspects of Tunisian history in the official narrative. Not only did the authorities portray Islam as the source of decadence (that led to colonial occupation), they also removed the study of this period from school programmes. The notion of decline had to be revisited, especially because it was not felt until the interaction with the West, and served to legitimise the hegemonic state.⁸⁴⁷

Djaït then dealt with the topical and sensitive issue of the political dimension of the Islamic phenomenon. He opposed the prevalent orientalist view claiming the existence of a specific political structure in Islam. Instead, he framed the political dimension in Islam as a spirit:

The strength of Islam has been its ability to express the poetry of the collective, and not the frenzy of modern-type demagogues, but the dramatic intensity of crucial moments.⁸⁴⁸

He displayed caution by pointing to the many instances of manipulation and how "Islam has become an instrument of pure diplomatic manipulation" and "an empty shell launched in turn against

⁸⁴⁶ H. Djaït, "Spécificité et vitalité de l'Islam" in *JA*, 789, 20 February 1976, 51.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 53.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 52

communism and Arab nationalism” for internal conservative policies.⁸⁴⁹ Instead of being adequately mobilised as an energy in favour of cultural renewal, Islam became “the ideology of the masses to adopt Gramsci’s terminology”, maintained by increasingly populist Arab regimes, rather than being the ideology of the intellectual elites.⁸⁵⁰ He concluded, as in his 1974 essay, by underlining the need for intellectual elites to bring back this heritage to the state and society.

This article was published in 1976 and already represented an evolution of Djaït’s ideas on cultural change and modernity from his first essay, with a greater emphasis on the rise of Islamic sentiment. He foresaw the upcoming seismic change that would affect the Arab and Islamic world, and was keen to ensure that he, and the figure of the critical intellectual, needed to be taken seriously in these debates. And for that, he had to speak a language to be heard and understood, explaining his turn towards medieval Islam and the language of *turāth*. As a medieval historian by training and a modern thinker mastering modern scholarship in the social sciences, Djaït was in pole position to assume that function and speak with the Tunisian audience on these matters.

The decision to return in 1976 would have been a difficult choice because he was at the peak of his academic career, finally obtaining recognition and teaching assignments. In fact, no sooner had he finished his first book on *Personality* that he had moved on to a second one on Europe and Islam (published in 1978). But the appeal of Tunisia’s leaders was too difficult to pass and he responded to the call, also because of a timely reminder that France was not his home: in a short column he wrote in *Le Monde* in 1971, Djaït denounced being assaulted by a security guard in front of the CNRS where he worked and saw it as a big conspiracy against foreigners. From then, he felt a malaise” because despite his self-declared “French culture”, he started to feel “alienated from its institution because of racism”, and contemplated a return to his country.⁸⁵¹ Five years later, before he left for good, sensing that life in Tunisia would change his academic opportunities, Djaït decided to go to California for the summer as an academic visitor (and walking in Laroui’s footsteps, a decade earlier).

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid. 53.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid. 53.

⁸⁵¹ Djaït, “La violence contre l’intellectuel” in *Le Monde*, 23 July 1971.

The state of politics on his return could best be described as the calm before the storm. Hédi Nouira became Prime Minister in 1970 and this long time collaborator was charged by Bourguiba to turn around the country's fortunes after the crisis of 1969. He had strong economic credentials, nationalist credibility and no threatening political ambition (in contrast with more popular but more volatile figures such as Ahmed Mestiri or Bahi Ladgham) and he represented the ideal of technocratic collaborator that Bourguiba favoured.⁸⁵² Nouira turned the economy back towards capitalism, reassured foreign investors and shortly into his mandate, economic growth reached double digits.⁸⁵³ He also struck an alliance with the workers' union guaranteeing social peace in exchange for regular wage increases.⁸⁵⁴ The country was caught in a positive momentum, and the government felt confident enough to initiate measures of political opening, taking heed from the popular consultation launched by the PSD in the aftermath of the Ben Salah crisis that called for democratisation and party reform. Back then, this was thought of as nothing more than an appeasement measure: political leadership believed that the Tunisian people "was not mature enough for democracy" and that it should not be pursued for its own sake as opposed to economic development.⁸⁵⁵ With the President in better health, inner-regime strife under control and the radical left in jail, the mid-seventies was a good time for reforms, and it began with the rebirth of the independent press.⁸⁵⁶

But what was supposed to be a controlled process grew disproportionately due to the political conjuncture. Before 1977, the state had a monopoly on media and information through its two dailies (*al-'Amal* and *L'Action*). Tunisians had to turn to foreign media for alternative views such as French newspaper *Le Monde*, or radio channels from the BBC, from Libya or Egypt. But from 1977, the state began carefully delivering licenses to people it could reasonably trust, such as Hassib Ben Ammar, a PSD member close to the Mestiri constituency, who launched *Errai*

⁸⁵² See account of Nouira's nomination and ripple effects in Abbès, *Bourguiba et Nouira: souvenirs et mémoires*, 2014, 3016, 309; Moore, "Tunisia and Bourguibisme: Twenty years of crisis" in *TWQ*, 10, 1, Jan. 1988, 177.

⁸⁵³ 18% in 1972, 11% in 1974 : "Tunisie – Une année faste" in *JA*, 729, 28 December 1974, 21.

⁸⁵⁴ Abbès, *Bourguiba et Nouira*, 316-320, 378.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid. 311-4.

⁸⁵⁶ See Chouikha, "Pluralisme politique et presse d'opposition" in Geisser, Camau, *Bourguiba la trace et l'héritage* ; Ben Hamed, *Renaissance de la presse périodique d'opposition en Tunisie, 1977-1983*, thesis CUJAS, Paris, 1985, 8.

(*Démocratie*).⁸⁵⁷ But this newspaper adopted its own dynamic and a critical tone, covering neglected issues of interest to the Tunisian public.⁸⁵⁸ The crisis of 1977-8 propelled this newspaper to new heights. Nour's second five-year plan in 1977 did not include wage increases, despite UGTT demands. Animosity turned into confrontation until the Union declared a general strike in January 1978. The Government's response was brutal, and ended jailing the Union's leadership including its president, Habib Achour.⁸⁵⁹ *Errai/Démocratie* was five editions into its existence when it reported on these events, but it did more: it became a platform for silenced trade-unionists. The newspaper became a critical voice against the unfair trials that resulted from the protest: in October 1978, it wrote about "the trial without precedent", a "strange trial" in which Achour and his colleagues were accused of endangering state security and where they risked the death penalty. The article highlighted severe issues of legal procedure.⁸⁶⁰ It resisted government pressures as best it could, and ensured that the rebirth of the press was more than the regime's way of reorganising flows of information.⁸⁶¹ Instead, it became a space of criticism, constantly testing the limits, and a space for alternative information.

Meanwhile, Tunisia saw the rise of religious sentiment in society and the emergence of Islamist political movements.⁸⁶² In an interview in 1983, Sheikh Hamida Enneifer argued that he was part of a generation that was distraught by the Arab defeat of 1967 and the Ben Salah crisis in 1969, and decided to turn to the fundamentals of religion to bring society together and imagine a different future and reform path. He and Rashid Ghannushi found positive responses to their message and their support base grew in high schools and universities, where the authorities did not bother them, and they were confident enough to formulate political programmes and mobilisation

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid. 11, It would become the organ of Ahmed Mestiri's MSD party. See "A nos lecteurs", 01 July 1978, *Démocratie*. Réalités in 1979, Le Phare in 1980, al-Maghreb in 198.

⁸⁵⁸ Ben Hamed, *Renaissance de la presse indépendante*, 1985, 12, 42.

⁸⁵⁹ Perkins, *A history of Modern Tunisia*, 2005, 164-5.

⁸⁶⁰ "Un procès sans précédent" in *Démocratie*, 15, 07 October 1978. Ben Hamed, *Renaissance de la presse indépendante*, 54, 57-9, 63.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid. 8.

⁸⁶² Zghal, "Le retour du sacré et la nouvelle demande idéologique des jeunes scolarisés, le cas de la Tunisie" in AAN, 1979, 41-64 ; Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam, a case study of Tunisia*, 7-22.

tools from 1977.⁸⁶³ But the Iranian revolution “changed everything” according to Enneifer, because it sent the message across the Islamic world that an Islamic wave might be pending, and the authorities began to look at them differently.⁸⁶⁴ Tunisian society and leadership appeared to wake up in shock to this new and poorly understood phenomenon. Several Arab leaders tried to delegitimise them by arguing that they were “not Islam”. Increasingly, states adopted repressive approaches but that did not slow the attraction to this ideology among those disenchanted by the states’ pursuit of alienating modernisation.⁸⁶⁵ Despite their growing appeal, as Sheikh Enneifer argued, the movement would not achieve its design as long as it only attracted “marginal” elements from society, and instead had to become clandestine to evade state repression in the late seventies.

These events shaped the Tunisian political context in which Djaït would see whether he had a political role to play. But from the outset, Djaït was not immediately drawn in and instead he devoted most of his time to his research and teaching duties.⁸⁶⁶ But this silence could have been hiding the difficulties he had, after being away for so long, to recover the domestic public voice he left in the sixties. He eventually intervened by giving a long interview to *Erraï (Démocratie)* on 27 November 1978 regarding the situation in Iran. The article introduced him as a “writer” (*écrivain/mu’arrikh*) but did not evoke his prior writings. Instead, this was an opportunity to talk about religion from a historical perspective and with regard to its political repercussions, and Djaït displayed considerable erudition on that matter. He exposed his thoughts on the question of Islamic revival in Tunisia, the historic problem with religion and the place of historical and cultural legacy, as he had been doing for *Jeune Afrique* since 1974. Three years after his return, the opportunity was given to him to speak to domestic audiences about his reading of the situation.

Hichem Djaït argued that this was a new phenomenon, and it was taking place across the Islamic world, but it had to be properly understood in relation to history. In its visible dimension, he noted one important characteristic: that it emerged from the bottom up, and these movements were

⁸⁶³ “Aux sources de l’Islamisme en Tunisie: entretien avec le Sheikh Hamida Enneifer, Directeur de la Revue “15/21” (Tunis) entretien conduit par François Burgat” In *Les intellectuels et le pouvoir, Syrie-Egypte-Algérie-Tunisie*, 1986, 215-6.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid. 217.

⁸⁶⁵ Roussillon, *La révolution iranienne dans la presse égyptienne*, CEDEJ, 1982.

⁸⁶⁶ Interview Hichem Djaït, Carthage, January 2014.

“rooted in the masses” such as Islamists in Tunisia or the return of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. That was something neither Arab regimes nor the West properly understood because they were too worried about its magnitude.⁸⁶⁷

Islam’s “unmistakable mobilising power” had historical roots and highlighted the relationship between religion and politics. In the interview, he was critical of those who took these movements’ call for an Islamic state at face value. To dispel that he went back to the early days of the Islamic community, when the issue of the Prophet’s succession was determined and showed that the Islamic state, historically, was different to what these movements depicted. Instead, he posed the issue differently: in 1979, the discussion should not be about merging the two together, but finding ways for the state to uphold Islam.

He then raised the deeper issues behind this religious revival. The neglected issue was that these populations expressed “a desire to fight for cultural autonomy”. These movements rejected imposed western ideologies, which they denounced as “ideology of technology, of pleasure, consumption... and constant change”. This ideological intrusion had alienated the “personality of the Muslim world” and instead, there was a desire to uphold an Arab and Islamic set of references, continuity and stability. He found a similar dynamic in countries across the region, including Pakistan and Tunisia.⁸⁶⁸

This reading of the situation was innovative in the late seventies. It took Djaït’s historically grounded analysis to bring it back to social and ideological concerns, restating the risks of rupture with the Arab and Islamic heritage from his essay in 1974. And while *Erraï* (Démocratie) aired his ideas in Tunisia, this did not lead to many others. He gave another interview with the newspaper in 1980, but instead took his ideas back to academic audiences and launched his cycle of thought on religion and politics in Islam.⁸⁶⁹ His opinion was solicited as a scholar rather than as a public thinker with a vision, and he soon came to realise that there was no chance for political involvement in this environment. In the meantime, it cannot be said that he had no interest in public life anymore: in

⁸⁶⁷ “Entretien avec H. Djaït” in *Démocratie*, 27 November 1979, 4.

⁸⁶⁸ Idem.

⁸⁶⁹ Djaït, “Du réformisme à la révolution Islamique” in *Démocratie*, 76, March 1980; and “Religion et politique” in Gellner, Vatin, *Islam et politique au Maghreb*, 1981.

February 1980, he wrote to *Esprit* following the release the previous month of a special number on Islamism, and concluded: “I am writing with emotion because I just learned that in Tunisia, they have just condemned fifteen people to the death penalty. For the past twenty-five years, we have not stopped the bloodshed”.⁸⁷⁰

Djaït’s return to the public sphere was lukewarm, and his foray into the political system was non-existent. Instead, the state went on a path of repression rather than conciliation with the Islamist movement. Meanwhile, Djaït continued to speak and write to an audience of scholars. While he was happy to be back, he also faced “bureaucratic bother” from his department and the ministry that were hampering his effort to put together a book on the genesis of Islamic civilisation. He added that he accepted an offer to be a visiting faculty member of the prestigious EHESS in Paris and even threatened that “if this climate were to remain [as it is], I [would] think about handing in my resignation”, saying that “there was no shortage of Arab institutions where I could continue my work”.⁸⁷¹ This outburst showed his problematic integration that would last until his retirement in the nineties. But it also showed that before politics, the Tunisian intellectual cared more about his research, the overall direction of society, and his condition as a critical thinker.

He remained a solitary figure, steering clear of the Islamist intelligentsia or the secular former radical leftists.⁸⁷² This was a withdrawal and not someone who was disinterested, as a recently revealed letter shows: in June 1978, Hamouda Ben Slama⁸⁷³ wrote an article in *Erraï* calling for the establishment of a democratic process and allowing the development of a constructive opposition. A month later, Djaït wrote him a lengthy letter where he gave support to Ben Slama’s call, wondering what made politicians cling to power, showing his disbelief at the violence suffered by Marxists for the past decade, and hoping for a sudden maturity from Tunisian leaders and for a genuine democratisation process to be launched.⁸⁷⁴ At the end of the letter, He indicated how he was “dreaming of a liberal, smart, fair and dynamic Tunisia”, but he “was not going to depart from his

⁸⁷⁰ “Correspondance et avis”, *Esprit*, February 1980.

⁸⁷¹ “Entretien avec H. Djaït” in *Démocratie*, 27 November 1979, 6.

⁸⁷² Enneifer, “Aux sources de l’Islamisme en Tunisie”, 213.

⁸⁷³ Ben Slama was a doctor and a political figure who contributed to the creation of *Erraï* and a member of the Tunisian human rights League.

⁸⁷⁴ Ben Slama, “Il y a 33 ans : la vision prémonitoire d’Hichem Djaït” in *Leaders.tn*, 12.08.2011.

position as an observer, a man of thought” because he continued to believe that the first problem was “the elites’ lack of intelligence”, and he invited other intellectuals to continue working for the improvement of the collective discussion. This letter, published recently in an respectable Tunisian newspaper shows the parameters of Djaït’s future civic engagement: he was aware of the challenges and his own limitations, and preferred to play a role more suited to his skills. A month later, Djaït wrote an opinion piece in *Errai/Démocratie* again, expressing a desire to “expunge hatred from the political game” and re-introduce the notion of “fair-play” that was characteristic of the Tunisian tradition.⁸⁷⁵

While Djaït withdrew from the public sphere, he maintained his engagement with the pan-Arab cause. This meant that he was not disinterested in a political role, but rather in a role in Tunisian politics. He believed in something bigger, but that also looked less likely to be realised. Arab unity was a path fraught with malaise and Tunisia could not offer an aspiration of this magnitude, as exemplified by the aborted and farcical Union with Libya in 1974. A decade after his return to Tunisia, Djaït wrote that he was alienated because of his ideals, not unlike Eastern European intellectuals under communism who represented a “superb intellectual tradition” despite their “recurring subjugation, imposed ideological lock-down, lack of recognition by the outside world”.⁸⁷⁶ He lived in a “mediocre Tunisian reality” but wanted to be part of a greater whole as a self-defined “*qawmi*”, an organic Arab nationalist intellectual “pursuing unification” in favour of “a utopian and conscious Arabism”. He felt he belonged to a transnational community of academics, journalists, diplomats or Arabs working in international organisations, having assimilated western modernity, who believed in the same ideals.⁸⁷⁷ And so this turn towards pan-Arabism could have been more of a withdrawal from domestic politics rather than how he envisaged the future of the Arab world. He clung to the “the yearning for modernity in the 1930s” despite the fact that it had given way in the fifties to “authoritarian autocrats” and the “shouting of the masses, unified

⁸⁷⁵ “Expurger de la haine l’action politique” in *Démocratie* 29.07.1978.

⁸⁷⁶ Djaït, *Crise de la culture islamique*, 209.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid. 215.

mystically in meetings”, and especially the illegitimate “fearsome monster that was the modern Arab state”.⁸⁷⁸

Hichem Djaït disliked politics but was fascinated by power. He abhorred Tunisian elites but believed in the strong state. He refused to seek political favours, but enjoyed public recognition and being courted for his opinion. In 1976, he negotiated his return from a position of strength without having to make ideological concessions. But rather than his return leading to political involvement, he remained on the margins, dealing with a malaise located on the plane of ideas, and the question can be asked as to whether this conduct was imposed by the circumstances or illustrated his conception of his public role. In light of his pan-Arab ideals, his refusal to engage in domestic politics was understandable. For the rest, he found a convenient refuge in his historical work on medieval Islam and the relationship between religion and politics, where he found greater satisfaction as an “academic intellectual”, intervening in a manner of his choosing and depending on his ethics. In 1978, he appeared to have completed his national re-integration.

Abdallah Laroui began to ponder whether his intellectual notoriety could lead to political engagement after a decade of withdrawal when the Green March in 1975 brought the expectation that the state of emergency would be lifted and ordinary politics would be restored. But he would realise that national politics had a way to blur the lines between intellectual independence and co-optation and that politics had changed significantly since independence.

On 6 November 1975, Hassan II launched the Green March, a symbolic procession into Spanish-occupied territory to force the issue of its decolonisation in Morocco’s favour.⁸⁷⁹ Even before it was held, it had been changing the parameters of the political system because it proved a rallying cause for national forces to put their differences aside, and rally behind the King’s

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid. 217-8.

⁸⁷⁹ Pennell, *Morocco since 1830*, 339.

leadership. Suddenly there was unanimity of purpose across the political board despite doubts over respective expectations.⁸⁸⁰

In a surprising turn of events, Laroui was also asked to take part. Considering that he did not have any prior working relationship with the authorities, this was a turning point in his intellectual trajectory, the implications of which were unclear. But the authorities needed someone to make the march appear credible on the international scene and bring domestic audiences on their side – *Le Monde* did not even list the march as one of the events marking the year 1975.⁸⁸¹ Laroui's intellectual notoriety as a critical thinker could offer them that, but the question was how to convince someone notoriously uninterested by political favours. The authorities were spared the ordeal because Laroui was already committed. In his diary, he registered several entries in 1974 where he fumed against Morocco's poor diplomatic conduct and its apathy in the face of repeated Algerian attacks in its national press.⁸⁸² As with his other major publications, these entries on Morocco's diplomatic campaign announced an impending return to the public sphere.

As he later wrote in his memoirs, Laroui came on the authorities' radar when he wrote a critical article on Algerian foreign policy in *Lamalif*, at a time when they were having difficulties on the diplomatic scene.⁸⁸³ The sharply-worded article dissected what he identified as the intellectual contradictions of Algeria's approach and discourse. He discussed the inconsistent ideological usages of revolutionary nationalism after independence and how they suited its interests. Furthermore, he explained Algeria's position towards Morocco and the Saharan issue as a continuation of French colonial policy seeking to undermine its neighbour.⁸⁸⁴ This was understandable, he argued, because the common "law of decolonisation" was that "countries that did not have autonomous state structures [before colonisation] simply take up colonial policy [after independence]". Finally, this continuity of structures, aims and ideologies did not immediately appear because it "veil[ed] itself in

⁸⁸⁰ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 63. M. Rollinde, "La marche verte: un nationalisme royal aux couleurs de l'islam" in *Le mouvement social*, 202, 2003, 113; Chronique politique Maroc 1976, 360-1; Santucci, "Chronique politique – Maroc" in AAN, 1976, 375.

⁸⁸¹ On *Le Monde*: Rollinde, 140, 150.

⁸⁸² Laroui, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ*, 2001, 25-29, 31, 33.

⁸⁸³ Laroui, "L'évènement – Réflexions sur la politique extérieure de l'Algérie" in *Lamalif*, 70, 1975, 4-9.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid. 5.

a pseudo-socialist ideology”.⁸⁸⁵ Laroui even went for Algeria’s founding myth, its revolution, by arguing that there had not been a genuine rupture with the French past. He sought to discredit it by contrasting the lofty aims of Algerian foreign policy (“international solidarity”) but appeared to prioritise its interests, the ultimate illustration of “aggressiveness” and “opportunism” of Algerian decision makers – here, probably referring to the very active Algerian foreign minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was frequently cited in his diary entries.⁸⁸⁶ The deeper aim of Algeria’s “principled position” was to create “the conditions of a mutual disinterest” and to ensure that Morocco would not claim territories integrated to Algerian territory by French colonial authorities.⁸⁸⁷ He reached two conclusions: that Algeria should be judged for its acts rather than its declarations, and that it spelled the end of the aspirations for a united Maghrib.⁸⁸⁸

This article was not a significant departure from Laroui’s previous line of thought, since he had been interested in the ideological contradictions of progressive Arab states since the early sixties.⁸⁸⁹ But the tone of the analysis, and the implications he drew for Morocco reveal that this was a different genre of analysis than those of the critical essay. In fact, his article concluded with an ominous observation: “Nowhere has silence, weakness and withdrawal served peace and stability” and that “each of us must know it and make it known”.⁸⁹⁰ He called on Moroccans “to prepare for the worst hypothesis: that of a blatant collusion between Spain and Algeria”.⁸⁹¹ This was a crucial time and the outcome of this question “would determine the country’s destiny for generations”.⁸⁹² He followed it up with an opinion piece he sent to *Le Monde* because, he argued, he was staggered by the newspaper’s pro-Algeria bias, considering Paul Balta covered the region, and his intention was to “set the record straight”.⁸⁹³

The high spheres of power looked favourably on the article and tried to co-opt him. Laroui was invited to chat with Ahmed Taïbi Benhima, the Minister of Information whom he knew from

⁸⁸⁵ Idem.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid. 7.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid. 8.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid. 6.

⁸⁸⁹ Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels Arabes*, 115-6.

⁸⁹⁰ Laroui, “La politique extérieure de l’Algérie”, 1975, 6.

⁸⁹¹ Idem.

⁸⁹² Idem.

⁸⁹³ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 90.

his student days. The Minister complained to him that the administration lacked skilled people to formulate and defend Morocco's position, adding that it had a detrimental impact on the diplomatic effort.⁸⁹⁴ A couple of weeks later, Benhima made him an offer of a prestigious post as the Prime Minister's advisor, a job with no constraints and only benefits. Laroui declined, but had to be careful not to upset the establishment, and so he added that he could always be "counted on to carry out his patriotic duty" on the Saharan question.⁸⁹⁵ A year later in the summer of 1975, he was contacted to cover the big event as a journalist. In November 1975, Laroui travelled alongside Zakya Daoud and benefitted from the authorities' logistical support, privileged access and information, and treatment usually reserved for high officials.⁸⁹⁶

Despite turning down the opportunity to join the state and gain influence, Laroui was keen to continue vying for a place in the political system. The cycle of elections that was launched in 1976 gave him an ideal opportunity.

Moroccan political parties saw this historical event as an opportunity to demand an improvement of the domestic political situation. Zakya Daoud interviewed the three remaining historic nationalist party leaders (Bouabid from UNFP, Ali Yata from the Communist Party, and Mahjoubi Aherdane from the Berber party *Mouvement Populaire*) who all insisted that the Sahara was ultimately about democratisation.⁸⁹⁷ In the following months, movements among the parties revealed that they strongly believed in this interpretation: the socialist party held an important meeting in January 1975 in Rabat, referred to as the "congress of clarity, continuity and hope" where party members determined their "post-revolutionary phase".⁸⁹⁸ The congress produced a series of reports, among them the founding "ideological report" that formed the basis of the new party "*Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*" (USFP).⁸⁹⁹ This new party formally turned its back on radical opposition and paved the way, in ideological terms, for constructive participation and a new political strategy based on the pursuit of social justice.

⁸⁹⁴ 2 October 1975, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ*, 74.

⁸⁹⁵ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 90.

⁸⁹⁶ Daoud, *Maroc les années de plomb*, 208-9. Laroui's articles were eventually published as a collection in *L'Algérie et le Sahara Marocain* in 1976.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid. 204.

⁸⁹⁸ Dessaints, "Chronique politique – Maroc" in *AAN*, 1975, 466.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid. 467 ; Daoud, *Maroc les années de plomb*, 205,

In 1975, this looked possible but was still fraught with political obstacles such as continued student arrests and distressing events like the brutal murder of Omar Benjelloun in the streets of Casablanca on 18 December, with strong suspicions over the involvement of the security apparatus.⁹⁰⁰ But mostly, political parties had yet to force the Makhzen to make concessions and it was a stark reminder of their weakness in politics. Nationalist parties had tried to present a common front, the *Kutlah wataniyya* (National Bloc), created in 1970 and negotiated as a group up until 1972 to pressure the King into making concessions. It had proved ineffective as Hassan II dissolved parliament.⁹⁰¹ Political parties, and the left in particular, were going through a structural crisis due to their targeted membership and because they were in a multiparty system that worked better to share economic interests than capture power.⁹⁰² As Palazzoli wrote, just as John Waterbury had argued before: “Borders are not fixed. Opportunism is rampant and makes them adopt a variety of positions. Personal relationships, from leader to leader, militant to militant, matter more than ideas or programmes. Political families usually intervene, and barriers are not rigid, even between extremes”.⁹⁰³ Therefore, the political crisis in Morocco was a crisis about the object of politics, and the political class had to clarify its place in the system, and its relationship with the other actors before it could aspire to a meaningful role.

It would seem that these parties were unprepared despite demanding that elections be held. The political opening that began was interpreted optimistically as a positive move towards democratisation but as it took place with weak political parties, it accelerated the reconfiguration of the political system with one notable development: the consolidation of the phenomenon of “independent” candidates. The elections and “return to legality” took place in three stages: local, professional and legislative, with guarantees over the way they would be held.⁹⁰⁴ Political parties made a very poor showing. In the municipal elections, “independent candidates” ended up securing

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid. 206, 211-4; Dessaints, “Chronique politique”, 1975, 469-70.

⁹⁰¹ Lahbabi, *Al Koutla el Watania, l'agonie d'une grande espérance*, 2012, 9, 11-2: Allal al Fassi, Mhamed Boucetta, Mhamed Douiri; Abderrahim Bouabid, Mohamed Lahbabi, Mehjoub Ben Seddik, Moulay Abdellah Ibrahim.

⁹⁰² Abdellaoui Bouchaib, “L'opposition et son insertion dans le système politique au Maroc, 1982-3”, Doctoral thesis, CUJAS Paris, 1985.

⁹⁰³ Palazzoli, *Le Maroc politique de l'indépendance à 1973*, 127-9.

⁹⁰⁴ Santucci, “Chronique politique – Maroc” in *AAN*, 1976, 466-8 ; Daoud, *Maroc les années de plomb*, 207.

65% of the outcome.⁹⁰⁵ This trend was confirmed in the legislative election in June 1977: it was reported as a fascinating campaign with a high calibre of candidates, but again, independents scored the most: 906 candidates competed for 176 seats, and half of the new parliament's 264 deputies were independents, while USFP only managed to secure 15 seats (5%) despite a bullish political campaign. It tried to justify its defeat by citing irregularities and misconduct in favour of official candidates, but this was not a widely shared assessment.⁹⁰⁶ These elections had damning implications for political parties, who ended up worse off than before.

In Spring 1977, Laroui had taken the decision to run in these elections. He ran in one of Casablanca's districts, on the USFP list alongside 18 other candidates of an impressive calibre: lawyers, university professors, tradesmen and several former fighters in the resistance.⁹⁰⁷ The party's platform denounced rampant economic contradictions and the resulting social contrasts of the economic capital, and vowed to work towards better equality and harmony. It spoke about the working classes and their dire living and housing conditions, the situation of labour and income, health and education. However, their platform could be criticised for being too technical, not specific enough to appeal to voters' emotions.⁹⁰⁸

This decision was unexpected. Several elements could have weighed on Laroui's decision to give politics another chance, from the creation of USFP to his rapprochement with the authorities. In his memoirs, he refers to a chance encounter with Abderrahim Bouabid in front of the train station in Rabat. Upon informing him of his idea to run, Bouabid immediately instructed him: "It's a good thing, present yourself as an independent and in Parliament you'll associate yourself with the USFP group".⁹⁰⁹ Laroui had previously tried to run in his hometown, Azzemmour, but found too much fear for people to support anyone but the Makhzen's candidate, so he turned to USFP, though quite reluctantly, he remembers:

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid. 216; Santucci, "Chronique politique", 377-8.

⁹⁰⁶ Dessaints, "Chronique politique – Maroc" in *AAN*, 1977, 503-4.

⁹⁰⁷ "Les candidats USFP vous parlent. Casablanca: l'illustration des contradictions de notre société" in *Libération*, 31 May 1977, 6-7.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid. 6.

⁹⁰⁹ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 92.

Ultimately, I decided to defend the colours of a party where I had not been active for a long time, where young leaders were educated in the East and were influenced by *baathist* slogans, and did not like my ideological positions, where few of them wished me to succeed. Therefore, my return among their ranks was merely for Benhima's offer not to be renewed...I chose to present myself under USFP's colours in order for the Makhzen's people not to have the wrong idea over my motivations on the Sahara issue.⁹¹⁰

His decision to launch into this political adventure had a number of underlying and unaddressed aims, such as the need to reaffirm his independence. Laroui tried to restore the balance, but ended up getting swallowed in these political developments

The election was held on 12 June, and he lost to Istiqlal candidate. The next day, still reeling from the emotion, Laroui wrote a full-page article that was published in *Libération* on 16 June.⁹¹¹ He took the loss badly because he believed in his chances, before the name of his opponent was announced, because USFP had made significant gains in that area during the municipal elections. However, he soon learned that he would wage an unfair fight: "After a week, it became clear that the administration would support Istiqlal's candidate". He went on to list instances of meddling and administrative obstruction in the campaign to give the other candidate better chances: the other candidate's poster were everywhere, his were in designated spots except in one case, while Laroui was given fines and warnings about electoral regulations. Laroui added that he faced difficulties in securing the administrative authorisation to set up his electoral office, and that police forces were stationed around cinemas where he spoke to his supporters. In fact, his opponent did not campaign but waged an anti-campaign: "the *moqaddem*⁹¹² followed us in the afternoon transmitting instructions from the *khalifa*⁹¹³ to vote for the "Makhzen's candidate", along with threats".⁹¹⁴ Despite these pressures, Laroui expressed his belief that in some areas, some populations resisted the authorities out of defiance and his sympathizers were convinced by his platform. But evidently, this was not enough against such underhand tactics.

⁹¹⁰ *Idem.*

⁹¹¹ Laroui, "Témoignage d'un candidat que l'administration a fermement combattu" in *Libération*, 10-16 June 1977, 4.

⁹¹² Administrative auxiliaries.

⁹¹³ Important administrative official.

⁹¹⁴ *Idem.*

Laroui had a hard time accepting the defeat, citing clear instances of fraud, and adding that the votes his opponent received were not as legitimate as his, they “have another weight, another signification” because they were motivated by intimidation rather than political conviction. Later, he was told that he had been “privileged”, that he had “benefitted from consideration” because he was allowed to campaign and have headquarters and a team of militants, and this only made him angrier by general apathy regarding how “everything was decided from the top”.⁹¹⁵ Despite expressing a glimmer of hope for the future, the article was defeatist because it offered nothing but a descriptive statement of a depressing but overpowering reality. The next week, the newspaper offered a detailed listing of similar instances of administrative meddling across the country, with a greater propensity for irregularities in smaller cities like Taroudant, Safi or Beni Mellal.⁹¹⁶ It vowed to continue the struggle and listed the positive outcomes from the election: the manifestation of popular enthusiasm for the elections, and the start of a democratic process.⁹¹⁷

Laroui’s emotional reaction was that of a political newcomer who was not used to defeat and unfair political tactics, and this had been a steep learning experience of the Makhzen’s reach and influence. Laroui was still incensed in his diary in mid-July, a month after the election results were announced: the rate of Makhzen intervention, and the lack of anger and frustration, his disbelief that “what took place defeats any attempt to understand”.⁹¹⁸ Finally, he reported with some resentment that Morocco still lacked a new government, despite a new parliament.⁹¹⁹ But around October, he finally adopted a less emotional tone to assess his experience and rubbished the notion that “a new Morocco would emerge from the Green March”.⁹²⁰ He also acknowledged that three weeks on the campaign trail had awoken in him an unknown enthusiasm, that he had “dreamt of since I saw, in Los Angeles, students leave the university abruptly in Spring 1968... to support Eugene McCarthy, the candidate of peace in Vietnam”.⁹²¹ And it also allowed him to have a concrete experience of the politics he wrote about in his analyses, coming to important realisations such as the importance of

⁹¹⁵ Idem.

⁹¹⁶ “Elections législatives – est-ce cela l’authenticité?” in *Libération*, 10-16 June 1977, 2.

⁹¹⁷ “Editorial – l’enthousiasme populaire a tracé la voie” in *Libération*, 11-18 June 1976.

⁹¹⁸ 14 July 1977, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ*, 109-110.

⁹¹⁹ 2 August 1977, *Ibid.* 110.

⁹²⁰ Laroui, *Le Maroc et Hassan II*, 94.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.* 93.

wealth, and the impossibility of getting elected on a “clean” campaign, and that the administration was unavoidable and always determined electoral outcomes in Morocco. And it also had an important outcome regarding his public conduct: political practice bred cynicism over ideals – or “in the intellectual language, that Marx could not erase Machiavelli, and made Aristotle obsolete”.⁹²² It allowed Laroui to understand that as a man in the pursuit of truth, his place did not belong in the political system. In his diary on 20 August 1977, he reacted to debates on awareness and responsibility regarding public affairs and remarked that “the enemy of the politician is the writer because he remembers and reminds [others]”.⁹²³

Laroui settled for remaining on the margins, and defined his responsibility as working to keep politicians accountable through his writings. After having given power, politics and influence a try, he came to the realisation that he was not suited for that and would rather remain withdrawn, as a critical observer of society and politics. It can even be said he re-joined the party, ideologically if not politically, as he published a number of studies with *Libération/Al Moharrir*, including a two page spread of his 1967 essay’s second edition in 1977.⁹²⁴

The new characteristics of Moroccan politics took shape after these elections. Independents, usually backed by the authorities, were the major constituency while political parties waned. It spelled the decline of militants and professional politicians and instead, the regime relied on a new type of politician: independents who were “a new generation of men between 35 and 45 years old, equipped with modern higher education and recruited in the private sector or the administration”.⁹²⁵ These elections had the benefit of “clarifying Moroccan politics” whereby most political parties aligned with the *Makhzen*, and USFP seemed content with being recognised as the opposition.⁹²⁶ It also raised the issue that democracy was as much a matter of institutions as the people who were supposed to be “democrats”.⁹²⁷ If Laroui’s experiment is anything to go by, intellectuals did not have a place as actors, and were not the ones that could bring political change.

⁹²² *Idem.*

⁹²³ 20.08.1977, *Khawātir al-sabāḥ*, 110.

⁹²⁴ “Abdellah Laroui répond aux critiques” in *Libération*, 22-26.04.1977, 6.

⁹²⁵ *Idem.*

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.* 506-7.

⁹²⁷ Salamé, *Democracy without democrats? The renewal of politics in the Arab world*, 1994.

As USFP joined the system and the elections reinforced the authoritarian regime, Laroui's defeat and the resulting disenchantment would ordinarily lead to another crisis of values such as the one following March 1965. But instead he remained in Rabat after successfully obtaining his doctoral thesis in Paris in 1977. He continued working at the humanities faculty, did not contemplate another departure, and appeared to have accepted the state in its current shape as the only one that could realistically lead (some form of) change. This was, in a sense, where pragmatism (some would say submission) and the quest for belonging crossed paths.

Conclusion: Intellectuals not politicians, and the measure of expectations

From the mid-seventies, Laroui and Djaït looked to build on their notoriety as critical thinkers in order to play a political role and fulfil their responsibilities as intellectuals during the first signs of political change and liberalisation in Morocco and Tunisia.

They had earlier argued in their writings that lasting change would come from cultural emancipation and social change, yet they now sought to show that intellectuals could also make crucial political interventions. In fact, their essays made seamless transitions from understanding the crisis of society and culture to a discussion of the crisis political systems, intimating the linkages and common destinies of these two spheres. However, their interventions did not go as planned and neither figure managed to leave the margins and join the centre of power: Djaït seemed to remain voluntarily in the periphery of political action, only contributing with a couple of interventions in the nascent independent press on political Islam. Laroui tried harder by writing articles on the politicised case of Morocco's territorial sovereignty battle, and then by running in the legislative elections and campaigning under the socialist party's banner, where he was defeated.

In light of the sociology of intellectuals, especially Max Weber and Edward Said's contributions on the political responsibility of intellectuals, these two instances appear to be failures. Yet, neither Laroui nor Djaït suffered from a crisis of values at that point, nor did they envisage

another departure from their countries. Instead, as their later writings have shown, they took these political disillusionments to mean that they could be publicly responsible intellectuals by displaying vigilance toward the state and politicians, and by intervening when needed to clarify, explain or put into perspective; all of these tasks could, and should be carried out outside the political system. Furthermore, these regimes may have shown some willingness to make some political concessions, but they also loathed criticism or excessive transparency. As such, intellectuals such as Laroui and Djaït had to develop suitable approaches to induce behaviour change without sounding conspiratorial, and while remaining grounded in reality and keeping their objective in mind. In this chapter, I have argued that their analyses were framed in “constructive” terms, despite their criticism. It shows how they were strategic in the concerns they brought forward, which usually fell into their area of expertise. Thus, a new intellectual *praxis* was born and it marked a distinctive rupture with the idealism of the “Sartrean model” of the sixties.

By the late seventies, Laroui and Djaït had achieved intellectual notoriety. Compared to the sixties, they were now more seasoned and could shape public debates with greater authority. They public and the authorities acknowledged them, despite occasional frictions. In all, they had successfully found their place in the national community without reneging on their ideals. This episode raised questions about the deeper aims of critical thought: whether it was to pursue the application of change (as they wrote), or to make a case for national reintegration and the right to contribute to the national project, questions to which the western sociology of intellectuals has not provided satisfying answers. Instead, these two cases invite us to think the intellectuals first as individuals who sought recognition and integration to the centre from the creative margins, which was a difficult position to sustain over the long term. To abandon critical postures in the name of pragmatism is the quintessential “treason” for Benda, but from a historical (rather than moral) perspective, it is less damning: along with the “age of reason” came new viewpoints, and new responsibilities in life and towards their public – and ultimately, a new conception of how to be an intellectual.

Conclusion

For the colonized countries of North Africa, securing independence from France had seemed like a monumental task. This achievement paled in comparison to the less straightforward challenges these countries faced a decade into independence such as the disillusionment that gripped a generation of young modernist intellectuals, as Tunisian writer Hélé Béji described in *Le désenchantement national* (1982). This group had played such an important role in their respective nationalist movements in the fifties by defining the terms of the Nation and articulating the collective struggle, and sometimes even by leading it. Yet after independence, these young voices were absent from the main arena despite the widening access to education and the historic nature of the transformations the Maghrib was experiencing. Violence, nepotism, fear and inequality, extinguished these energies when they were most needed to sustain a path for hope: in fact, Morocco and Tunisia faced several crises from the mid-sixties, and the authorities appeared unable to find lasting solutions. In this thesis, I have argued that members of this intellectual generation turned to critical engagements (including creation) in order to overcome their marginalisation and the national crisis. However, this was not a simple relationship where criticism (and self-criticism) acted as panacea to fundamental anxieties about one's place in a disappointing national project, and instead it was marked by the stirrings of those countries' turbulent histories in the 1960s and 1970s, and individual choices along the way.

The trajectories of Abdallah Laroui in Morocco and Hichem Djaït in Tunisia offer in depth illustrations of the interplay between intellectuals and the post-independence dynamics through the two angles, disillusionment and critical thinking. In the meantime, the story of their writings and engagements has raised several tensions or paradoxes, discussed in the conclusions of each chapters, both at their individual level or in their relationships, which tests further the parameters of this relationship and its implications. I have raised the importance of thinking about national belonging and integration when considering the way we approach the Maghrib's recent history (the struggles of collective memory, youth mobilisation and institution building after authoritarian rule), to the

way we write the region's intellectual history by reconfiguring the level of analysis and integrating such material factors. In the reminder of the conclusion, I will broaden these observations by returning to the three structuring axes or *problématiques* identified in the introduction, enriched by the above discussion: the formulation of a grounded sociology of Arab intellectuals, the quest for self-representation after independence and the attraction for *turāth*, and finally national belonging as an often neglected problem space of intellectual production.

Toward a new sociology of Arab intellectuals?

I began by highlighting the problematic rapport to western sociological theory and the study of Arab intellectuals, that often seeks to impose rigorous sociological theories or concepts at the expense of complex social realities, or individual subjectivities. This has explained why scholarship or observers often “judge” intellectuals according to whether they have upheld their “responsibility” to speak truth to power. Instead, in this thesis, I have tried to frame these two intellectuals within social and historical dynamics. I have devoted greater attention to structural constraints and the motivations behind specific intellectuals' choices. Laroui's and Djaït's trajectories have shown that they did not act according to a clearly-defined moral compass and social road map. Instead, they have made decisions in the realm of the possible and went through considerable trial and error. These two cases will, I hope, contribute to the emergence of a more grounded sociology of Arab intellectuals, that focuses on turning points and the interplay between the text and the trajectory.

Laroui and Djaït were products of a colonial system of education where they acquired a double-culture, an advanced education and an outlook on society and politics that would, paradoxically, become the source of anxiety under the independent state. On their return in the early sixties from France with their *agrégation* diploma in hand, they were not particularly welcomed as they had hoped, and despite securing teaching jobs, were ill at ease with the direction their countries

were taking after independence. The sixties was a difficult period when they failed to interact harmoniously with their surroundings and their colleagues, or have a significant bearing on social, political and cultural transformations and debates. They chose to remain outside the system of power or to withdraw altogether, and were forced to accept a situation where they were inconsequential compared to other social and political actors. As this sense of malaise and powerlessness began to spread, the Moroccan and Tunisian regimes went through a period of crisis of legitimacy and the two intellectuals chose to go (or were pushed) into exile abroad. This was the major turning point in their intellectual trajectories because the distance allowed them to abandon the nationalist narrative and look at what had provoked their predicament after their return. They started to see their historical trajectory outside the parameters of the national discourse. They gained public acceptance for their writings, but they also withdrew from society and took refuge in the theoretical realm, endangering their ability to “perceive reality” beyond ideological frameworks.

In order to return to the public sphere, the two intellectuals adopted the call for revolution and the Arab renaissance, but despite these notions’ seeming radicalism, they contained measured analyses and a desire for inclusion: Laroui critiqued traditionalisation policies that revealed an internalised historical delay, while Djaït critiqued the excessively western-inspired state reforms. In trying to get their message across, they realised that they faced unexpected obstacles: the other ideological groups who saw these proposals as a challenge to their views and interests, showing that society and intellectuals themselves can pose as much resistance to intellectual renewal as can state authorities, and become a major opponent of their own emancipation. Consequently, the two intellectuals framed the crisis of society and the crisis of intellectuals together and argued that their responsibility was to provoke general awareness and change collective representations. They redefined the public thinker’s role: an individual who had to speak from within the national community in order to be seen as a legitimate critical voice and to be taken seriously. At this point, Laroui and Djaït adopted different approaches: the Moroccan returned to Rabat while the Tunisian remained in France, which allowed the first to benefit from a flourishing cultural space and diffuse his message, inspired by bubbling social dynamics in favour of emancipation, while the second continued to produce important historical studies. However, the authorities also picked up on the

link between cultural expression and social discontent, which they countered by promoting targeted social interventions that depoliticised cultural groups.

The authorities strengthened their hold on society, and radical intellectuals toned down their critical engagement. Laroui and Djaït were re-integrated without major difficulties with the first signs of liberalisation in the late seventies. The terms “constructive” and “civic engagement” began to determine intellectual conduct, but after brief and unsuccessful attempts to join the political system, they realised that this did not mean intellectuals could have a political role of that nature. The silver lining was that in the process, they had carved an accepted space for the critical (and constructive) intellectual who could occasionally intervene from his academic vantage point in public debates to keep politicians accountable and debates grounded in facts.

However, the last instance reveals a paradox: while they called on intellectuals to mobilise and confront authoritarian politicians, when came the opportunity with the first signs of liberalisations, two figures failed to make an impact on the political arena. This, it could be argued, was through no fault of their own as politics was a difficult endeavour. Yet, they decided to remain in the national setting without updating their theories on intellectual interventions, and closed that chapter of their critical intellectual projects, and devoting their time to their respective academic historical research. This choice puts into stark relief the purpose of critical writing as merely a social strategy or a pursuit of knowledge and truth. Secondly, “constructiveness” and “reform” were the terms of the public intellectual’s conduct that began to emerge in the eighties, representing the minimal amount of expectation by the public and the most the authorities were willing to tolerate, namely the emergence of civil society organisations. Thus, we must consider the relationship between this reconfiguration of conducts and the importance of ideological forces shaping public debates in the eighties onwards. Here, I briefly consider the unexpected outcome of the post-1967 renewal of Arab thought: Islamic heritage

Expression, self-representation and the importance of *turāth*

The 1960s and 1970s in the Maghrib were moments of considerable cultural creativity thanks to which Laroui and Djaït gained an audience. Several movements such as *Perspectives* in Tunisia and *Souffles* in Morocco combined engagement and alternative visions of society. This narrative often pits this “great” cultural renewal against the emergence of intellectuals who turned toward *turāth*, or Islamic cultural legacy. Several important Arab intellectual historians have written on “liberal” or “enlightened” thought, and what comes across is the depiction of *turāth* as a failure for modernity.⁹²⁸ The issue, I believe, does not lie in the *possibility* of liberal Arab thought, but rather the way travelled to raise this question. As Israel Gershoni showed, intellectual history has long pruned a narrative of “crisis” in the region under dubious reasoning. He argued that western orientalist scholarship resorted to this narrative to explain why the Arab (here Egyptian) modernist school of thought “abandoned” their pursuit of liberal ideas (understood as integrating western philosophical principles) and pursued instead Islamic cultural heritage, or *turāth*, in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹²⁹ Gershoni went to explain that the turn to *Islamiyyat*, the accessible fictional accounts of early Islam epics, obeyed these intellectuals’ own lines of concerns, such as a willingness to connect with their audiences. The Maghrib offers two recently studied cases of intellectual figures who were drawn to *turāth* after independence, not as a crisis and a rejection of modernity, but as a conscious effort to develop a different vocabulary and cultural imaginary to drive their societies forward.

First, James McDougall traced Tawfiq al-Madani’s path as an illustration of Algerian nationalism’s trajectory, from the colonial era during which the ulema theorised the Islamic sources of Algeria’s identity, to independence and nation-building, when the independent state’s cultural policy adopted the call for “authenticity” as its cultural roadmap, which included the Arabisation of school programmes, and a greater place for religion in public discourse. Al-Madani represented an

⁹²⁸ Schumann, “The failure of radical nationalism and the silence of liberal Arab thought” *CSSAME*, (28 :3) 2008 ; Hatina, “Arab liberal discourse : old dilemmas, new visions” in *Middle East Critique*, 20 :1 (2011) ; Binder, *Islamic liberalism*, 1988.

⁹²⁹ Gershoni, “The theory of crisis and crisis in a theory. Intellectual history in twentieth century Middle Eastern Studies” in *Middle East Historiographies*, 2006, 133-5.

instance of “cultural authority and historical imagination”, a figure who represented the desire for emancipation through self-definition, which he carried out by revisiting the region’s history in light of the Islamic legacy. As McDougall explains, “authenticity” in his ideas was not conceived of as the opposite point to “modernity”, but rather a response to a combination of concerns and aspirations in a specific historical and social context: the imperative for a unifying national project, and the need to grapple with the country’s 132 year-long colonial presence and profound cultural transformations its populations had experienced. All these elements begin to explain the strength of the discourse of the “recovery” of an “authentic personality” in Algeria. Above all, al-Madani’s efforts represented a willingness to have a voice in the act of self-definition from Maghribi postcolonial intellectuals.

In Tunisia, Mohamed Salah-Omri looked at Messaadi’s contribution to *turāth*: not as Minister of Culture, but through his novels, and especially the implications of Messaadi’s views on tradition on his literary choices and forms.⁹³⁰ Messaadi, as Taha Hussein wrote about him, had a classical style, an elaborate language, and his prose had a particular rhythm, which Hussein meant critically as it rendered the Tunisian inaccessible for the simpler-minded readership. Messaadi’s work was also “virtually saturated with references to *turāth*”, such as his characters’ names (such as Abu Hurayra, of the Prophet’s companions).⁹³¹ Omri adds that Messaadi’s turn to *turāth* was not sign of defeatism but confidence over having mastered the precepts of modernity, enough to be able to revisit the Islamic past with a spirit of critical rationality.⁹³² The debate on literary forms, especially how to treat the *maqāmah*, offers (in Messaadi’s case) insight into Arab intellectuals’ relation with their past and theorise “Islamic reason”.⁹³³ A similar case to al-Madani and Messaadi could be made for Allal al-Fassi in Morocco and his relentless call for *aṣāla*, adjusting for Morocco’s social and cultural specificities.

These three examples reveal the importance postcolonial Maghribi intellectuals devoted to the quest for self-representation, and how the forms they took did not come from a “rejection of

⁹³⁰ Ibid. 34-5.

⁹³¹ Idem.

⁹³² Ibid. 68-9.

⁹³³ Ibid. 71, 138.

modernity”, nor from a simple path toward an embrace of western-inspired values, but rather confidence in making their own cultural choices, in this case revisiting the Islamic past, often by mobilising western methodologies. The three examples above were older members of the national movements who turned toward authenticity, in a clear link with the colonial experience and the quest for self-affirmation. It would be interesting to compare the interest in *turāth* from the younger generation in light of the concerns they faced under the independent state, such as the anxiety over their belonging in the national community, as argued earlier for Laroui and Djaït. In fact, both can be said to have written within these questions, as heritage became arguably the most pressing question faced by Arab intellectuals from the 1980s onwards.⁹³⁴ It is also useful to note the timing: debates on *turāth* and *aṣāla* grew in popularity and became mainstream topics of discussion not straight after independence, but when the terms of the community were fixed and after several social battles had been fought, such as Djaït and Laroui’s struggle for belonging. This approach underlines the importance of the individual thinker as a product of a certain epoch, and shaped by intellectual and cultural debates. Laroui and Djaït’s modes of engagements raised several paradoxes, here again: they wrote as critical intellectuals, producing “critiques”, the founding principle of which was that they uncovered power dynamics invisible to the naked eye, and this approach was sometimes counter-productive. For example they provoked mixed reactions by writing with uncertain authority due to their withdrawn locations (abroad, outside politics or intellectual groups), and yet their tone implied they enjoyed a deeper understanding of domestic realities than those who struggled with them daily. Furthermore, they later arrived with an intellectual notoriety secured through prestigious Parisian publishing houses and impressive prefaces and reviews without having necessarily built that notoriety at home. They spoke extensively about “cultural decolonisation” and a new “Arab renaissance”, while their modes of thought, their methodologies and their sources were often fixed western scholarship traditions, without a proper engagement with religious thought, which were the dominant mode of thought in their respective countries, or growing in strength. The two figures’ decisions to settle in their home countries, re-integrate the university and shift their research agenda to different topics may well have come from such realizations, and is invitation to rethink

⁹³⁴ Boulatta, *Trends and issues in contemporary Arab thought*, 1990, 11-56.

the relationship between large ideological developments and how intellectuals form their perspectives in a certain space. .

National belonging as the problem-space

After the late seventies, our two thinkers entered an “age of reason”, a quieter period where they enjoyed a more established position in society. Laroui and Djaït both completed the *doctorat d'état* they had interrupted more than a decade earlier. Laroui completed his work in 1976, and his public defence was well attended in Paris on 12 June that year. His thesis on *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme Marocain, 1830-1912*, was supervised by Raymond Aron, and published as always with François Maspéro in 1977, and studied the emergence of nationalism as a social and cultural movement.⁹³⁵ In June 1981, Hichem Djaït defended his thesis on *Kūfa aux deux premiers siècles de l'hégire: naissance et développement d'une ville arabe*, under his long-time mentor Claude Cahen, demonstrating with the use of socio-historical models the existence of an "Arab" model of urbanity that contributing to the spread of Arab civilisation. After securing their final degrees, they enjoyed quiet careers at the Universities of Tunis and Rabat. They went on to lead comfortable and well-integrated lives surrounded by their families. Djaït retired in the 1990s and Laroui in 2000. During the past two decades, they occasionally intervened in newspapers and weekly magazines, but usually as erudite commentators and nothing more. Most of their publications were usually reserved for scholarly audiences, and none of the previous critical engagements. Their examples show the compatibility of radical engagement and successful national re-integration, as opposed to how postcolonial literature conveniently fixates on alienated intellectuals and the image of a constant marginalisation.

Yet, this convenient narrative is difficult to conciliate with their travails in the sixties and seventies: the idea that the individuals who went out of their way to call for an overall change of the system seemed to fall back in line a couple of years later. We may ask where did their radical

⁹³⁵ Tahar Ben Jelloun, “Abdallah Laroui et les origines du nationalisme marocain” in *Le Monde*, 21 June 1976.

engagement go, and if the purpose of their hardships and efforts was simply to gain public esteem and material improvement. In the absence of an alternative explanation, their re-integration might have been a case of tragic resignation and a statement of failure, as Marie Duboc concluded upon interviewing the now-withdrawn former Egyptian leftist intelligentsia.⁹³⁶

However, the reason for this paradox might be our understanding of the term “revolution”, and in contrast to the actual transformations that took place in the sixties and seventies. As Maurice Flory remarked in 1968, revolution was first a political act referring to a violent transformation and the overthrow of a political system. However, it saw a new dimension in Morocco:

The extension from a political concept to an economic and social dimension has an impact on the techniques of the revolution: from a purely political level, a revolution is violent... when it adopts an economic and social meaning, revolution can take place peacefully, though we will say that ‘there was revolution’ if the transformation in question is radical and irrevocable”.⁹³⁷

National independence was the first modern-day revolution in the Maghrib and political forces on the left were calling for another one because of their ideological convictions, while the authorities proclaimed it abusively to distract the public and maintain the status quo.⁹³⁸ Flory concludes that the perspective of revolution appeared bleak in Morocco due to the absence of actors that could liberate this revolutionary potential, and the latent crisis of legitimacy blurred the political game. Still, Flory neglected the movement of youth and intellectuals, which was a significant oversight because they had been clamouring vehemently for a revolution, social and cultural, as part of their call for change. The term cannot be dismissed without losing the essence of that period.

There is another way to envisage the call for revolution in the Maghrib in the sixties and seventies that would offer a better understanding of the paradox of critical intellectuals: according to Clifford Geertz, the “integrative revolution” consists of the the passage to modern citizenship during which primordial forms of belonging (tribal, ethnic etc.) gave way to an identification with the

⁹³⁶ Duboc, “Egyptian Leftist Intellectuals’ Activism from the Margins: Overcoming the Mobilization/Demobilization Dichotomy” in Bein, Vairel (eds.), *Social Movements, Mobilization and Contestation*, 2011.

⁹³⁷ Flory, “Le concept de revolution au Maroc”, 145.

⁹³⁸ Ibid. 146-152.

national community.⁹³⁹ This was a painful process that involved letting go of one entrenched form of affiliation in favour of a recent and unstable form of belonging, hence the resistance and incomplete nationalisation. Many newly-independent African and Asian countries had difficulty achieving this reconfiguration of belonging, Geertz argued, because social beings were moved by two imperatives that happened to clash. First, individuals desired to be recognised “as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes and opinions matter”; secondly, individuals wanted to establish a modern state that would improve their wellbeing and realise the grand aims advocated by nationalist movements. The genuine national revolution consisted of combining these two imperatives as part of a unified national project and bringing people in along with their energies.

Therefore, young modernist intellectuals have turned to criticism and called for revolution when they felt excluded, and explained their marginalisation as the incompatibility of primordial sentiments and the development of a modern state. They had a sense of expectation about their roles that did not fit with what remained a profoundly patriarchal society, despite its modernisation; in fact, the combination of these two characteristics created what Hisham Sharabi referred to as “neopatriarchy”.⁹⁴⁰ Their re-integration, according to them, corresponded to a restored dynamic and a renewed sense of optimism that the national project was bringing people in rather than pushing them out (whether the cause of their exclusion or their return was effectively the case for the majority is another debate). The reconfiguration of social models has been tough for a generation that sought, above all, to be heard because they were the emerging generation, and to be listened to because they had the skills to take the nation forward. When they received assurances of public consideration, in their eyes, the integrative revolution had succeeded.

⁹³⁹ Geertz, “The integrative revolution” in *Old societies and new states*, 1963, 105-157.

⁹⁴⁰ Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy, a theory of distorted change in Arab society*, 1993.

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