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From Revolt to Nostalgia: Rethinking the Moroccan Postcolonial Malaise with Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Abdellatif Laâbi

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D.Phil. in Medieval and Modern Languages – Short Abstract

This thesis problematizes revolt and nostalgia in relation to individual and collective malaise in Morocco by analysing the expression of both concepts in the postcolonial works of three contemporary Moroccan Francophone authors: Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Abdellatif Laâbi. Weaving together the three writers' personal experiences and the broader political and historical context in Morocco, this thesis demonstrates that the two concepts can serve as productive mediums through which to probe a multifaceted Moroccan discourse of opposition and longing. Divided into six chapters and based mainly on close reading, the thesis builds upon a theoretical investigation of revolt and nostalgia in postcolonial studies to argue that their multi-layered and shifting meanings tend to be reduced respectively to a one-dimensional counter-discourse and a form of inefficient sentimentalism. Grounded in the political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, the following two chapters demonstrate that the writers' revolt is either strictly personal, connected to political activism, geared towards cultural decolonization, or concerned with transnational struggles, while being simultaneously performed in aesthetics through innovative strategies of formal transgression in theatre and poetry, for instance. Drawing on the work of Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is then analysed in the writers' late autobiographies, where its retrospective and prospective forms mourn lost spaces and long for uncertain futures, and subsequently in relation to exile, where it complicates the relationship with the homeland through the exilic-like experiences of wandering, travel, and incarceration. The final chapter probes how both concepts work together in poetry to rekindle past revolts and unsatisfied nostalgias, but often end up producing bitterness and disillusionment. This thesis ultimately argues for a critical reading of more recent Moroccan Francophone literature to acknowledge the oft-neglected signs of an ongoing

malaise, and further investigate the historical depth and the transformative power of both revolt and nostalgia in writing.

In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in North African literature not only through the wide influence of postcolonial studies and the revival of the concept of 'world literature', but also following the so-called 'Arab Spring' whose political and social impact has driven more attention to literatures from the Maghreb. In Morocco, the recent protests in the Rif region pointed to the persistence of a political and sociocultural discontent among the population. Furthermore, the role of Moroccan writers and intellectuals has been the subject of regular debates within a society which, more than sixty years after independence and despite several reform attempts, still suffers from economic inequality, high rates of illiteracy, and lack of individual rights and public liberties.

In order to better understand the persistent expression of individual and collective malaise in postcolonial Morocco, this thesis explores the concepts of revolt and nostalgia as developed in the writings of three eminent contemporary Moroccan Francophone writers: Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine (1941-1995), Abdelkebir Khatibi (1938-2009), and Abdellatif Laâbi (1942). The three writers belong to the '*Souffles* generation', named after the highly influential Moroccan journal of culture and politics founded by a group of poets and artists in 1966. Throughout its six years of publication, *Souffles* – and its Arabic counterpart *Anfas* –served as a transcontinental platform for experimental writing and postcolonial thought. On the cusp of the 'Years of Lead', a period of political and social turmoil marked by the state repression of opponents and activists, the journal also became the mouthpiece of one of the most powerful Moroccan far left organizations. Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi all belong to this generation of writers who vigorously sought to blow a wind of change through Moroccan postcolonial culture and politics. Their quasi-simultaneous involvement in *Souffles* marks their collective yearning for a unifying and

revolutionary project of cultural renewal around the pivotal question of rebuilding a Moroccan postcolonial identity.

The choice of these three writers is motivated by the fact that their respective and extremely diverse œuvres offer distinct yet complementary perspectives from which to analyse the expression of revolt and nostalgia as a response to personal, political, and sociocultural forms of discontent in postcolonial Morocco. Khaïr-Eddine is an iconoclastic poet whose explosive and disorientating texts are deeply influenced by a tormented life of misery, wandering, and exile. Khatibi is an eclectic thinker and prolific writer who worked across disciplines and literary genres, making one of the earliest and most fundamental contributions to postcolonial theory and to cultural decolonization in Morocco and beyond. Laâbi is an internationally acclaimed poet and former political activist on the Moroccan far left who served as the editor-in-chief of *Souffles*, spent eight years in prison during the Years of Lead, and published several poetic, narrative, and non-fictional works.

Based on the close reading of a wide corpus of works which includes poetry, drama, novels, autobiographies, and essays, the thesis sets out to interrogate how the three writers use revolt and nostalgia in their respective responses not only to strictly individual experiences and traumas, but also to broader forms of political and sociocultural discontent. The introduction of the thesis offers a definition and a brief history of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise, highlighting its persistent and multi-layered manifestations since independence. This opening section also introduces the three writers in relation to their contribution to *Souffles*, and argues for the relevance and viability of revolt and nostalgia in the Moroccan context where both concepts have a particular historical, sociocultural, and literary resonance.

The first chapter takes the form of a theoretical investigation of revolt and nostalgia in literary and postcolonial studies with the aim of pinpointing their polysemous and

unstable meanings. While revolt, as Camus warns, can easily slip into unnecessary destruction and chaos, nostalgia carries the risk of causing indefinite bitterness and melancholia. As a result of this antagonistic tension, the meanings of both concepts are at once unstable and open to strategic appropriations and biased interpretations. In postcolonial theory, for instance, the reductive reading of revolt and nostalgia as respectively a counter-discourse aimed at resisting (neo)colonial power and a dubious concept embedded in an inefficient sentimentalism has some evident weaknesses. While this reading suits the postcolonial project of rebuilding the nation and its subjects, it fails to grasp the many more complicated ways in which the two concepts can help us to analyse individual experiences, literary production, and intellectual discourse in the postcolonial context.

Chapter 2 probes the three writers' expression of revolt in their early works published in the 1960s and 1970s in relation to the political turmoil of the period. The chapter focuses on how their revolt interacted with local and international politics from various perspectives. Khaïr-Eddine's weaponized conception of writing is the result of a visceral revolt against authority, violence, and separation from his mother and southern homeland. While Khaïr-Eddine's political commitment can be thus understood as the extension of a personal and all-encompassing revolt, Laâbi's is embedded in a more direct opposition to the Moroccan regime and its authoritarian practices. His rebellious discourse, differently inflected by his personal experience as a political activist and prisoner, seeks to redefine poetry as an outcry of protest and resistance. Unlike that of Khaïr-Eddine and Laâbi, Khatibi's revolt is far more intellectualized in the sense that it firstly responds to the urgent necessity of decolonizing scientific disciplines, such as sociology, and goes on to rebel against the exclusion of popular forms of artistic and cultural creation. Ultimately,

Khatibi's and Laâbi's publications on the Palestinian question reinforce both the politics and aesthetics of revolt through radical thought and transcolonial identification.

Chapter 3 approaches the concept of revolt from an aesthetic perspective. The three writers all rebel, albeit in different ways, against dominant forms of literary and intellectual production, largely driven in the works of the previous generation by folkloric and ethnologically oriented descriptions of Moroccan society. On a formal level, this revolt is performed through a series of structural innovations and transgressive strategies operating at once within and by blurring the boundaries between literary genres. In poetry, these include the redefinition of the poem as the result of either successive movements of destruction and reconstruction, the transposition of the metaphor of the outcry in writing, or the subversive reworking of poetic forms derived from transcultural sources. In theatre, aesthetic revolt is embodied in the writers' rebellion against a certain idea of representation and in the redefinition of the play as an unsettling, polyphonic, and multi-layered performance influenced by both Artaud's cruel theatre and Brecht's distancing effect. The originality of the three writers' aesthetic revolt lies in their impressive ability to navigate in and between literary genres while sustaining a permanent dialogue with individual experiences and collective expression of malaise.

Drawing on the idea that revolt can also be understood, following Camus's thought and the etymology of the word itself, as a temporal return to a lost state of being, the next two chapters move on to discuss nostalgia. If the previously discussed revolt carried for a short time, at least in writing, a sense of collective action and solidarity, brilliantly exemplified by the short-lived yet intense adventure of *Souffles*, the Moroccan writer soon faced the returning shadows of his solitude. In the mid-1970s, Khaïr-Eddine is wandering in the streets of Paris, Laâbi languishing behind bars in Kenitra, while Khatibi is dealing with the aftermath of the closure of the Institut de sociologie in Rabat. In this context, the

eruption of nostalgia in the three writers' production corresponds to the urgent quest for a sense of being and belonging.

Building upon the work of Svetlana Boym, Chapter 4 focuses on the relationship between nostalgia and autobiography, which reveals a permanent tension between what has been tragically lost and what can be potentially recovered through writing. The inherent anxiety of autobiography offers a productive lens through which to analyse this tension, and becomes more exacerbated in the three writers' late autobiographical works. In his diary written in hospital a few months before his death, Khaïr-Eddine longs not only for an idealistic childhood cleared from its negative symbols, but also for a lost temporality that resists death through the nostalgic fusion of personal encounters, spaces, and memories. In contrast, Khatibi's late autobiography develops a more serene and reflective nostalgia which serves as a device for recovering foundational moments in the writer's trajectory, and as a desire for self-reconstruction through his interaction with alterity. Laâbi's personal nostalgia is either retrospective when it serves to trigger and organize the recovery of past linguistic and spatial elements, prospective when it mournfully invoke a fictional future threatened by the shadows of political and historical traumas, or counter-factural when it longs for missed opportunities that could have generated possible alternatives for both the self and the country.

Chapter 5 explores the concept of nostalgia in relation to exile. The reading of the three writers' exilic-like experiences of wandering, travel, and incarceration reveals another tension, this time between, in Boym's words, a restorative and a reflective nostalgia. While the former tries to recover a lost Moroccan homeland, the latter desperately thrives on the longing itself. With Khaïr-Eddine, this tension takes the form of a peculiar obsession with mobility as the sacred, pure, and authentic beauty of the southern homeland, repeatedly mourned from different perspectives, reactivates and problematizes

the writer's relation with a bygone Morocco. Far from Khaïr-Eddine's grueling experience of separation and wandering, Khatibi's encounter with foreign cultures paradoxically triggers another problematic manifestation of nostalgia. Travel, redefined here as a form of temporary and privileged exile, creates a discrepancy between the pleasure of looking at one's homeland in the deforming mirror of the other and the estrangement resulting from the confrontation with the unknown that reactivates longing through imagination and reveries. This discrepancy takes on a different form in Laâbi's writings from prison, which stage a tension between lost freedom and uncertain liberation. In the exile of incarceration, the isolated poet finds in nostalgia an expressive medium that resists confinement and bridges the gap between past and future by simultaneously recovering the sensorial world left behind and projecting into an elusive space of rebirth yet to come.

The final chapter analyses how the two concepts work together in poetry to resist individual and collective forms of discontent. The chapter takes Khatibi's acclaimed volume *Maghreb pluriel* as a model of critical thought that simultaneously rebels against dogmatic thinking and longs for a prospective Maghreb as a site of plurality, while warning against both the deficiencies of uncritical subversive thought and the risks of unproductive nostalgic evocations. When read from this perspective, the three writers' late poetry becomes a site of duality where a nostalgic memory underlies subversive poetics, while a rebellious desire supports nostalgic writing. Thus, Khaïr-Eddine's revolt is nostalgic for, although seeking renewal in the evocation of cosmic energy and the interaction with global politics, it remains trapped in the memory of past rebellions and unfinished struggles. In contrast, his nostalgia is revolted as it desperately rebels against the ambivalence of the past and the never-ending dialectics of loss and recovery. A similar ambivalence is present in Laâbi's poetry from the 1990s onwards as his failed reunion with the homeland not only re-enacts exile and separation but also complicates his struggle

against personal disillusionment. As a nostalgic rebel, Laâbi responds by celebrating a more tenacious and determinate revolt while desperately trying to expel or at least control a pervasive and always-returning nostalgia. Conversely, Khatibi's poetic work around the concept of 'aimance' offers a more elaborate use of both concepts, for it rebels against conventional modes of social relationships and rejects the logic of remembering and mourning in favour of infinite regeneration in the present and projection towards the future, while remaining connected with and deeply indebted to the nostalgic memory of the poet. This productive combination is at the core of Khatibi's reflections on poetic creation which becomes, in contrast to Laâbi and Khaïr-Eddine, a peaceful act rooted in nostalgic patterns and subversive poetics, and continually open to variation and circulation.

Ultimately, the thesis concludes that the negotiation of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise requires not only a skillful combination of the rebellious desire for change and the nostalgic evocation of loss, but also to operate beyond the necessarily closed loop of revolt and nostalgia: unfulfilled nostalgic desires create new forms of opposition, and disillusioned or failed revolts often trigger the return of nostalgia. One possible way out of this situation is to develop, against the tendency of recent Moroccan Francophone literature, which remains deeply inflected by the expectations of French readership and institutions, a self-critical approach to revolt and nostalgia. This needs to take into consideration both their transformative power and inherent deficiencies, and further investigate their historical depth and material resistance to individual and collective forms of discontent that, otherwise, would end up reinforcing bitterness and disillusionement.

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Introduction: Rethinking the Moroccan Postcolonial Malaise

A brief history of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise

On the 28th October, 2016, when Mouhcine Fikri, a 31-year-old fish-seller from Al-Hoceima in northern Morocco, climbed into a garbage truck to recover his 500 kilograms of swordfish confiscated by the authorities, the rubbish trash mechanism was turned on and crushed him to death. The footage of Fikri's tragic death, widely shared on social media, sparked a wave of protests in northern Morocco and gave way to what was later described as the 'Hirak', a word that originally means 'movement' in Arabic and has been used recently to describe popular uprising. The brutality of Fikri's death recalled the self-immolation of the vegetable seller Mohammed Bouazizi in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, which led to the outbreak of the so-called 'Arab Spring' five years earlier, but it also pointed to the persistence of a widespread postcolonial malaise in Morocco. This thesis aims to study the way in which three Moroccan Francophone writers have faced and negotiated this malaise from the 1960s onwards by mobilizing the concepts of revolt and nostalgia in their respective works. The combination of these two concepts in writing, as this study will demonstrate, reveals some of the challenges that have been facing the Moroccan writer since independence.

The notion of 'malaise' can be defined as 'a general feeling of discomfort, illness, or unease whose exact cause is difficult to identify'.[1] While the term is often used in an individual and pathological context, I would extend its meaning to designate both an individual and a collective feeling of dissatisfaction whose causes lie at the intersection of political, economic, and sociocultural factors. I chose the word malaise because it

[1] Definition from the *Oxford English Dictionnary.*

describes a deep and persistent feeling of discontent that is difficult to pin down and even more difficult to root out. In the specific context of Morocco, the expression of this malaise takes on various forms, from regular protests by unemployed youth in front of the Moroccan parliament in Rabat to broader demonstrations across the country, such as the one led by the '20 February' Movement during the Arab Spring of 2011, or the recent 'Hirak' in the Rif region, through heterogeneous and far less publicized manifestations of distress, discomfort, and bitterness, whether in oral, written, artistic, or performative form.

In the phrase 'postcolonial malaise', I use the word 'postcolonial' not only as a chronological term designating the post-independence period in Morocco, and as a reference to the effects of colonization on Moroccan culture and society, but also as a methodological tool that allows for a fruitful connection of Morocco's colonial past with its present and future. As evidenced by the debates that continue to surround its meaning and relevance, the term 'postcolonial' encourages critical questioning and invites us to probe multiple modes of engagement with history, geography, and textuality. In this thesis, it will serve as a connecting thread between the expression of malaise and literary and intellectual production in post-independence Morocco. The 'Moroccan postcolonial malaise' therefore designates the multi-layered manifestation of a widespread and ongoing feeling of discomfort, embodied in a series of long-delayed hopes and dashed expectations in Moroccan society, and voiced through doubt and disillusionment among Moroccan writers and intellectuals.

As evidenced by the recurring key demands made by popular protests in Morocco, which combine calls for political democracy, economic development, social justice, and cultural recognition, the causes of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise are difficult to identify for they remain grounded in an entangled succession of cross-cutting woes and failures since the country's indepence in 1956. Although this malaise is often understood

as affecting a geographically or socially limited segment of the population, public demonstrations and protests regularly signal its constant presence in people's everyday life. The Moroccan postcolonial malaise is paradoxical: it is a persistent expression of discontent and anger but not powerful enough to trigger radical change and concrete improvement.

One of the factors that deepens, or at least sustains, this malaise, is the discrepancy between official discourses, which promote the country's values of diversity, pluralism, and stability, and lived reality, which reveals outstanding issues of inequality, illiteracy, injustice, corruption, and lack of individual rights and public liberties. In official narratives, Morocco is often associated with the notion of 'exceptionalism', which has been extensively celebrated, but also challenged, including abroad, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.[2] While the idea that something sets Morocco apart from its neighbours fails to acknowledge the issues that have been persistently facing the country since independence, it is still grounded in well-known and often indisputable geographical, cultural, and political factors.

Located at the crossroads of Atlantic, Mediterranean, and African routes, the country's identity is as much marked by its Berber origins and Arabo-Islamic heritage as by the Western impact on its culture and history. The fourteen kilometres that separate the Moroccan city of Tangier from the southern coasts of Spain are regularly mentioned to emphasize the country's proximity to Europe. In recent years, this proximity came to light as the crisis of migration broke out in the Mediterranean and at the doors of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the northern coast of the country. More than sixty years after the end of the French and Spanish Protectorates (1912-1956), Morocco's relationship

[2] See for instance : *L'Exception marocaine*, ed. by Charles Saint-Prot and Frédéric Rouvillois (Paris : Ellipses, 2013); Younes Abouyoub, 'Peut-on parler d'exception marocaine ?', in *Tumultes*, vol. 38-39/1, 2012, pp. 93-113; J. Peter Pham, 'Moroccan Exceptionalism Deserves Support', in *The American Interest*, 5th August 2015, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/08/05/moroccan-exceptionalism-deserves-support> [accessed 20th March 2018].

with Europe has significantly evolved from that of a colonized country to that of an 'advanced' economic and political partner whose contribution has proven fundamental not only in commercial trade but also in managing the large flows of transit migrants. In recent years, the country has also assisted Europe in general, and France in particular, in the field of intelligence and counter-terrorism.

This proximity to Europe has not prevented the country from reinforcing its regional networks and global partnerships. A founding member in 1989 of the now-moribund Arab Maghreb Union, Morocco is also active within the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In early 2017, the country rejoined the African Union more than three decades after it left following a row on the conflict around the Western Sahara. If this decision has been widely described as a tactical move to draw more support for the country's position in this ongoing conflict, it also had the merit of bringing to light Morocco's often neglected African identity.

Besides this political and geographical opening, the country is also characterized by a form of ethno-religious and linguistic pluralism. The presence of Christianity is dated back to the second century, and Morocco is recognized as the former home of 'one of the largest and oldest populations of Jews in the Arab world, their presence stretching back to the pre-Islamic period' and their community numbering 'about 240,000 (2.7 percent of the total population)'[3] before World War II. Furthermore, the linguistic landscape in Morocco is particularly diverse and includes Amazigh, Hassani, Moroccan and classical Arabic, as well as French, Spanish, and English.

If diversity and pluralism seem thus inscribed in the country's identity, the concepts of stability and autonomy are commonly used when describing the history of Moroccan governance. In 1953, French anthropologist Robert Montagne notes that despite several

[3] Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p.2.

periods of unrest, the well-established power of Moroccan sovereigns has always maintained in the country 'un caractère d'autonomie qu'aucun autre pays des régions de civilisation arabe n'a su garder'.[4] Moroccan dynasties have not only survived a series of tribal insurrections and rebellions, but also shaped the political identity of the country around continuity, stability, and distinction from its closest neighbours. French historian and specialist of Morocco Pierre Vermeren argues that the country, 'contrastant avec une Algérie successivement révolutionnaire, tiers-mondiste, puis en proie au démon islamiste, […] donne l'image d'un havre de paix, de continuité dynastique et de stabilité politique'.[5] The current Alawite dynasty, whose historical and religious legitimacy rests on its claimed descent from the Prophet, has been ruling the country since the mid-seventeenth century. A symbol of unity, the King bears the spiritual title of 'the Commander of the Faithful' and his duties, as defined in the Moroccan Constitution, include the representation of the nation and the protection of the rights and liberties of people and social groups. Besides the legitimacy of a long-reigning monarchy, the stability of the country benefits from a rather peaceful electoral process and a multi-party system that allows the representation of a wide spectrum of ideologies, although some of these have been violently repressed by the regime. The current parties, however, suffer from a severe credibility crisis amid political powerlessness, ideological confusion, and programmatic weaknesses.

While the features detailed above are commonly accepted as constitutive elements of Moroccan identity, a closer look at the country's postcolonial history reveals the persistence of an undercurrent of malaise. Despite earlier demands, the diversity of Morocco's identity was only recognized in the reformed constitution of 2011. While the preamble of the previous version of 1996 introduced Morocco as a Muslim and African

[4] Robert Montagne, *Révolution au Maroc* (Paris : Editions France Empire, 1953), p.26.
[5] Pierre Vermeren, *Histoire du Maroc depuis l'indépendance* (Paris : La Découverte, 2002 ; repr. 2006), p.3.

state,[6] the new version adds that 'son unité est forgée par la convergence de ses composantes arabo-islamique, amazighe et saharo-hassanie, s'est nourrie et enrichie de ses affluents africain, andalou, hébraïque et méditerranéen'.[7] This new formulation, which identifies diversity as a factor of unity, uses an aquatic metaphor ('affluents') to emphasize the mobility and circulation of the various components of Moroccan identity. The question remains, however, of how these can be efficiently promoted and practically transmitted and preserved within Moroccan society. To cite one example, the recent and most welcome initiatives to reinvigorate the Jewish heritage in Morocco by renaming old 'mellahs' and refurbishing synagogues in Casablanca and Fez remain insufficient and paradoxically reveal the extent of cultural loss following the exile of Moroccan Jews.

Another belated recognition, also formalized in the new constitution, is that of Amazigh languages. Article 5 of the new constitution confirms Arabic as the official language, and adds that 'l'amazighe constitue une langue officielle de l'Etat',[8] implicitly suggesting its secondary position. This change, still described as historic, came as a sequel to previous initiatives, including the creation in 2001 of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) which promoted 'tifinagh' as the standardized script of Tamazight, currently displayed on official buildings and taught in primary schools. In a recent book about language politics and education in Morocco, Charis Boutieri, among others, rightly observes that while the choice of this ancient script instead of the French and the Arabic ones was driven by political reasons, namely avoiding the respective accusations of 'collusion with imperial agendas' and 'appropriation by an Islamic rhetoric', it also favoured 'an unfamiliar and rather obscure script that makes learning for both

[6] 'Maroc : Constitution du 13 septembre 1996', <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/ma1996.htm> [accessed 10th March 2018].
[7] 'Maroc : Constitution du 29 juillet 2011', <http://www.amb-maroc.fr/constitution/Nouvelle_Constitution_%20Maroc2011.pdf> [accessed 10th March 2018].
[8] 'Maroc : Constitution du 29 juillet 2011'.

amazighophone and arabophone speakers an arduous and protracted practice'.[9] As a result, the slow introduction of Tamazight as a language of instruction was met by scepticism from activists and educational bodies, making it 'more like cultural training for Moroccan students of arabophone backgrounds',[10] and moreover, it was left optional and supervised by insufficiently trained teachers. Needless to say, the malaise created by these serious shortcomings is compounded by the broader failures of the Moroccan educational system and the deep gaps between urban and rural areas in a country where adult illiteracy rate as of 2012 rises to about 30%, and 40% for females.[11]

Another facet of the Moroccan malaise has to do with the persistent shadows of the Years of Lead. This era of authoritarian rule, usually dated between the mid-1970s and early 1990s, followed two military coup attempts against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, and was marked by the regime's violent repression of its opponents, especially from the Moroccan Left. After independence, one of the earliest manifestations of this repression took place in March 1965 as protests led by high-school students denouncing a controversial educational reform turned the streets of Casablanca into a bloodbath. In June of the same year, a state of exception was declared, and in October, Moroccan charismatic Third World leader, head of the left-wing Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP), and the main opponent of the regime Mehdi Ben Barka was kidnapped in Paris and his body never found. The silence maintained around the uncompleted investigations and the still ongoing questions surrounding his torture and death have turned the Ben Barka affair into an unhealed wound not only in the Moroccan left but also in the Moroccan political body as a whole.

[9] Charis Boutieri, *Language Politics and the Abandoned Educational Dream* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), p.166.
[10] Boutieri, p.170.
[11] UNESCO, <https://en.unesco.org/countries/morocco> [accessed 20th March 2018].

More generally, these dark years in the history of postcolonial Morocco saw a substantial series of arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, and forced disappearances, as well as several acts of torture and violations of human rights, including in the infamous desert prison of Tazmamart in south-eastern Morocco. In Moroccan minds, the Years of Lead is a period that has also been associated with the tragic and irrecoverable loss of a whole generation of intellectuals, activists, writers, poets, and scholars. Despite the creation in 2004 of the 'Equity and Reconciliation Commission' whose mission was to investigate the cases of human rights abuses during that period and compensate the victims and their relatives, the malaise has persisted within Moroccan society, and has even been rekindled every now and then by the arbitrary arrest of a journalist or a political or social activist. As Valérie K. Orlando rightly observes, 'Morocco's consciousness crisis over its contemporary identity manifests whenever questions about prisons, detention, torture, and abuse of human rights are discussed':[12] the painful past consistently casts its shadows on the successive attempts to rebuild the country and draw a line under previous wounds and failures.

The Moroccan postcolonial malaise stems also from the never-ending dynamics of hope and disillusionment, which creates an overwhelming stagnation in political institutions. In his seminal work *The Commander of the Faithful*, John Waterbury eloquently writes that

> what one finds in Moroccan politics is a constant jostling and rubbing of various political units, accompanied by an atmosphere of tension and crisis, that usually continues the maintenance of balance, or, if it is upset, tends towards its restoration.[13]

[12] Valérie K. Orlando, *Francophone Voices of the 'New' Morocco in Film and Print: (Re)presenting a Society in Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.53.
[13] John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970), p.6.

This political deadlock described by Waterbury in 1970 has been confirmed since then on a number of occasions. In 1998, for instance, the appointment by King Hassan II of the first 'alternance' government led by Abderrahmane Youssoufi, head of the Socialist opposition and himself a former political prisoner, was initially welcomed as a significant turn in Moroccan politics after the Years of Lead. While the government's agenda was to implement a series of urgent economic, social, and structural reforms, the whole experience turned out to be another episode in the history of Moroccan tactical politics. The initiative by the Moroccan monarch has been retrospectively described by many observers as a skilful and strategic way of securing his succession, crushing the opposition by bringing it within the political game, and marketing to the world a progressive image of both himself and the country.

Another episode in this pairing of hope and disillusionment is the striking difference between the widespread optimism that accompanied the new era of King Mohamed VI in 1999, and the more recent challenges faced by the Moroccan regime. After his accession to the throne, the Moroccan monarch gained popularity through a series of conciliatory moves, which included ousting the former right-hand man of his father Interior Minister Driss Basri, agreeing on the return to Morocco of former opponent and Marxist-Leninist leader Abraham Serfaty, and launching a number of social initiatives which quickly earned him the nickname of 'the King of poor people'. In her commentary on the early praise he received from the international press, including *The Times* and *The Washington Post*, Marvine Howe writes that 'in a barely a year, the king has succeeded in transforming Morocco's image from the remnants of an autocratic police state to an open society moving towards democracy'.[14] In 2004, the reform of the 'Moudawana' or the

[14] Marvine Howe, *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 13.

family code, which granted women more rights in negotiating their marriage and divorce, reinforced this positive dynamics driven mainly by social reform.

Under King Mohamed VI, Morocco has nevertheless faced several challenges, including on the level of security. In 2003, the terrorist attacks in Casablanca, the deadliest in Moroccan history, left an indelible trace across the country. Led by a group of young people from the slums of Casablanca, the bombings marked, according to some scholars, 'the end of Moroccan exceptionalism – the belief that the country was immune to the political trends of the Arab Middle East because of its Sufi heritage and open approach to Islam'.[15] Besides bringing to light the deprived social and economic condition of suburban areas, the attacks also questioned the stability of the country's political system. Moroccan political scientist Mohamed Tozy argues that in the aftermath of this event, 'la chaîne de confiance qui fondait la société était irrémédiablement rompue, ce qui n'a pas manqué de susciter plusieurs questions sur la capacité de la monarchie à gérer le risque islamiste et assurer le projet de transition politique'.[16] Although Morocco has since then developed an impressive ability to counter terrorism and improve its security structures, the country still remains under threat as the extremist discourse continues to flourish across the country, thriving on the poverty and vulnerability of marginalized areas.

In 2011, the Moroccan malaise became more severe as the spreading wave of the Arab Spring reached the country. In Morocco, the uprisings took the form of wide popular demonstrations, led by the rather inexperienced and controversial '20th February' movement. Pressed once again by the calls for social justice and economic inclusiveness, the Moroccan regime reacted with promptness and efficiency by proposing to reform the Constitution, in 'what some have touted as the "third way" for handling the unrest that

[15] Jack Kalpakian, 'Comparing the 2003 and 2007 incidents in Casablanca', in *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat. From 9/11 to Osama bin Laden's Death*, ed. by Bruce Hoffman and Fernando Reinares (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp.498-518 (p.498).
[16] Mohamed Tozy, 'La Fin de l'exception marocaine. L'islamisme marocain face aux défis du salfisme', in *Afkar/Idées* (December 2003), pp.63-67 (p.63).

swept the region'.[17] New elections were swiftly organized in 2012 and resulted in the nomination for the first time of a prime minister from the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD). A few years later, however, the failure of the PJD in conducting economic reforms and negotiating, if not anticipating, the 'Hirak' movement in the Rif region, only confirmed the predictions that the party 'would suffer the same fate as that suffered by the lead party – the USFP – in the alternance government appointed in 1998, which saw its credibility destroyed and popularity slump as a result of its experience'.[18] Within two decades, history was repeating itself as the sources of the Moroccan malaise remain imperfectly treated. As bold manifestations of this ongoing malaise, the recurring episodes of popular protest suggested that the Moroccan regime, in Michael Willis's words, 'had merely delayed rather than dealt with issues that were likely to return',[19] including problems of economic underdevelopment, social inequality, cultural integration, and poor education and healthcare.

In brief, rooting out the Moroccan postcolonial malaise requires a much more consistent, broader, and deeper approach, which seems to have been missing since independence. Although substantial improvements have been made on various levels, the manifold sources of this malaise persist as most corrective measures were undertaken so far either with a strategic political aim or as a response to the pressures of the street. In a critical analysis of the Constitution of 2011, three Moroccan scholars underlined a number of weaknesses in the new text, including not only 'the centrality and concentration of the monarch's power' as the King 'continues to retain major executive powers without

[17] Amy Hamblin, 'Morocco: The Struggle for Political Legitimacy', in *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat*, ed. by I. William Zartman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), pp.182-208 (p.199).
[18] Michael J. Willis, 'Evolution not Revolution? Morocco and the Arab Spring', in *The Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization*, ed. by Larbi Sadiki (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.435-450 (p.445-446).
[19] Willis, p.447.

accountability on the Moroccan political scene',[20] but also the limited achievements in the field of human rights, individual and collective freedoms, as well as sexual equality.

Ultimately, the Moroccan postcolonial malaise thrives on the constant deferral of a real, complete, and durable transformation of the country's political, economic, and sociocultural structures. Although a recurring discourse has presented Morocco as a country in transition, it is necessary to recognize that, despite several promises and expectations, this transition never came to complete fruition. As aptly summarized by Jane Hiddleston in her recent book on Francophone North African literary production since the 1980s, '"transition" in this context is not so much a shift from one state to another, then, but an ongoing movement whose end remains difficult to envision'.[21] This unfinished and always-delayed transition has become a distinguishing feature of Moroccan politics, as tellingly illustrated by the titles of two books by Vermeren, published respectively in 2001 and 2009: *Le Maroc en transition* and *Le Maroc de Mohammed VI: la transition inachevée*.[22] In the latter, released two years before the outbreak of the Arab Spring, Vermeren suggests that 'la transmission des valeurs islamiques, chérifiennes et patriotiques a […] pris le pas sur les vertus d'une transition vers la démocratie'.[23] In others words, the regime's strategy consisted in reinforcing the traditional and monarchical power in order to better control and supervise social and economic modernization. This apparently paradoxical process, in which tradition and modernization are both manipulated and subverted, sheds further light on the complexity of transition in Morocco. Incidentally, it also suggests that only an inclusive and nuanced approach can help the Moroccan subject to deal with his ongoing malaise.

[20] Mohamed Madani, Driss Maghraoui, and Saloua Zerhouni, *The 2011 Moroccan Constitution: A Critical Analysis* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2012), p.50.
[21] Jane Hiddleston, *Writing After Postcolonialism: Francophone North African Literature in Transition* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p.9.
[22] Pierre Vermeren, *Le Maroc en transition* (Paris : La Découverte, 2001) ; *Le Maroc de Mohammed VI : la transition inachevée* (Paris : La Découverte, 2009).
[23] Vermeren, *Le Maroc de Mohammed VI*, p.10.

Revolt and nostalgia in the Moroccan context

Contrary to what widespread popular protests might suggest, the Moroccan postcolonial malaise is not a unified nor a homogeneous expression but rather a superimposition of various levels of aspiration and dissatisfaction. In his introduction to *Le Maroc en transition*, Vermeren rightly observes that 'si l'on veut comprendre ce pays […], c'est bien sous l'angle des contrastes qu'il faut le faire : le Maroc est une juxtaposition de régions, de peuples, de villes et de couches sociales qui coexistent sans toujours se rencontrer'.[24] As a country of social and cultural disparities, Morocco has been facing as many expressions and degrees of malaise. Any response to the Moroccan postcolonial malaise needs to operate from more than one perspective, thus taking into consideration the contrasting and shifting realities of the country.

It is precisely this quest for nuance and complexity that has motivated the choice to study revolt and nostalgia as a potential response to the expression of political, sociocultural, and personal discontent in the Moroccan postcolonial context. As detailed in the theoretical section that follows, revolt and nostalgia are at once asymmetrical and complementary. While the former concept is defined by refusal and disobedience, the latter is related to loss and longing. A rebel seeks to resist authority and control while a nostalgic yearns for a lost world of representations and meanings. Revolt and nostalgia are mutually reinforcing in the sense that they provide two distinct yet interconnected ways of facing and dealing with the idea of malaise. Revolt aims to bring change through opposition and resistance while nostalgia substitutes for the present an alternative temporality that refers, as this study will develop, to either past or future. In doing so, both concepts offer a

[24] Vermeren, *Le Maroc en transition*, p.10.

potential way out from the discomfort and dissatisfaction contained in the notion of postcolonial malaise. In the title of the thesis, the phrase 'from revolt to nostalgia' refers to the process through which a subversive discourse, particularly manifest in Moroccan literary and intellectual production in the 1960s and 1970s, gives way in the subsequent period to nostalgic recollections of personal and collective memory, and to an intense longing for lost spaces and temporalities. This process, however, is not considered as a one-way or linear journey from revolt to nostalgia, but rather as a back and forth movement that also allows for the combination of and interaction between the two concepts.

The choice of revolt and nostalgia also finds its roots in Moroccan political history and culture, where both concepts have left traces and echoes in various contexts. While Vermeren unequivocally describes Morocco as 'un pays éloigné de la culture révolutionnaire et adepte de la soumission',[25] a brief look at the modern history of the country reveals numerous episodes of uprising and rebellion, including before the Franco-Spanish Protectorate. In this respect, Susan Gilson Miller rightly observes that 'tribal uprisings, the opposition of brotherhoods, and urban insurrections were a common feature of nineteenth century Morocco'.[26] Sultan Abd al-Rahman, for instance, who ruled the country between 1822 and 1856, faced a series of tribal rebellions and a fierce revolt of his own elite guard, Jaysh al-Wadaya. Under Muhammad IV (1859-1873), Moroccan cities were 'the setting for a host of oppositional activities, in the form of revolts, riots, and demonstrations against the regime and its increasingly intrusive tax collection system'.[27] This subversive tendency will continue under his respective successors, including Hassan I who faced a violent revolt against tax collection by the tanners in Fez, and Abdelaziz who had to handle tribal insurrections in southern Morocco, before being deposed by his brother

[25] Vermeren, *Le Maroc de Mohammed VI*, p.303.
[26] Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.35.
[27] Miller, p.31-32.

Abdelhafid. During the Protectorate, the Moroccan spirit of revolt took on a new dimension through anticolonial resistance, particularly embodied in the charismatic figure of Abd el-Krim El-Khattabi, the Riffian political and military leader who rebelled against the occupation of northern Morocco and inflicted a series of humiliating defeats on the Spanish army, including in the glorious Battle of Annual in 1921. French historian Charles-André Julien even describes Abd el-Krim's revolt as 'l'événement décisif qui provoqua le réveil du nationalisme marocain' and insists on how the Moroccan rebel was 'le symbole de la protestation musulmane contre le triomphe du matérialisme occidental'.[28] The subversive power of Abd el-Krim's figure remains intact, especially in northern Morocco where his portraits are regularly displayed during demonstrations and protests, including in the recent 'Hirak' movement.

After independence, this culture of revolt was overtly appropriated and promoted by the Moroccan Left. In the 1960s, the figures of Ahmed Agouliz (also known as 'Cheikh El Arab') and Mohamed Basri (nicknamed 'Fqih Basri'), two former members of the 'Armée de Libération Nationale', were at the centre of an insurrectional plot against King Hassan II, possibly also manipulated by the regime to squash the opposition. Mehdi Ben Barka, another key figure of Moroccan rebellion, writes in his introduction to *Option révolutionnaire au Maroc*:

> Les potentialités révolutionnaires de notre peuple ont besoin d'être traduites en forces effectives capables de balayer les derniers vestiges de domination coloniale et d'exploitation de notre pays, capables aussi de se mobiliser pour construire la société nouvelle conformément à nos options révolutionnaires.[29]

Despite repression and persecution, this revolutionary vision was shared and advocated by a large group of political activists including Abraham Serfaty, co-founder of the

[28] Charles-André Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche : Nationalismes musulmans et souveraineté française* (Paris : Editions Julliard, 1972[1952]), p.130.
[29] Mehdi Ben Barka, *Option révolutionnaire au Maroc* suivi de *Ecrits politiques 1960-1965* (Paris : François Maspéro, 1966), p.18-19.

underground Marxist-Leninist organization 'Ila al-Amam' and whose volume of interviews *L'Insoumis: Juifs, Marocains et rebelles*,[30] significantly promotes, including in its title, the close ties between citizenship, religious identity, and the Moroccan spirit of rebellion and disobedience.

If revolt is a recurring pattern in the history of Moroccan politics, nostalgia also has an evident influence on political and cultural discourse and is far from being alien to the distant history of the country. To cite one example, distinguished Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui notes in his *Histoire du Maghreb* that the glorious Almoravids, who ruled Morocco in the eleventh and first half of the twelfth centuries, exerted such a fascination on the following dynasties that, by the mid sixteenth century, 'il existait incontestablement chez les souverains de cette époque une nostalgie almohade'[31] which they tried to satisfy through military wars and territorial conquests.

This historical nostalgia travelling between Moroccan dynasties and driven by a continuing desire for territorial expansion and political domination is often associated with Muslim Spain, another frequent nostalgic trope in Moroccan imaginary. Al-Andalus, as Jonathan Holt Shannon argues in a recent study, 'serves as an important leg sustaining the project of a modern Morocco because of its links to a prestigious past, a refined high culture, and a hoped-for (utopian) future'.[32] In this sense, Moroccan nostalgia for Al-Andalus carries a longing for a great, powerful, and prosperous state, at once inscribed in a forgotten past and geared towards a desired yet out-of-reach future. This nostalgia for Muslim Spain is not only present in travel accounts written by Moroccans in the

[30] Abraham Serfaty and Mikhaël Elbaz, *L'Insoumis: Juifs, Marocains et rebelles* (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).
[31] Abdallah Laroui, *L'Histoire du Maghreb: Un essai de synthèse* (Casablanca : Centre Culturel Arabe, 2011[1970]), p.192.
[32] Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Performing al-Andalus: Music and Nostalgia Across the Mediterranean* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), p.87.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,[33] but also informs contemporary works of Moroccan literature. Two relevant examples here are *Le Morisque* and *Cintra*,[34] two historical novels in respectively French and Arabic by historiographer and political scientist Hassan Aourid. While the former work recollects the history of Moriscos or descendants of Spain's Muslim population expelled in the early seventeenth century, the latter longs for Al-Andalus as a territory of peaceful religious cohabitation between Muslims, Christians, and Jews (also know as 'Convivencia') which Aourid retrospectively uses to support Moroccan current politics of openness and tolerance. Both an inspirational and a lost space, Muslim Spain is also closely tied to the notion of 'Greater Morocco', a label that has been extensively championed during the years of anticolonial struggle. In the 1950s, for instance, Moroccan nationalist leader and head of the Istiqlal party Allal al-Fassi was among several voices calling for 'the return of "Greater Morocco" including, aside from the Sahara under Spanish control, Mauritania and Southwest Algeria',[35] and he actively militated in favour of a redefinition of the country's borders on this basis. Incidentally, this form of Moroccan irredentism based on the nostalgic recovery of lost territories was recently rekindled when the new secretary of the same party referred to Mauritania as a 'Moroccan territory', causing a diplomatic crisis between the two countries.[36]

Another form of Moroccan nostalgia, which might seem at once paradoxical and more problematic, is the one that longs for the colonial period and its supposed good deeds. In her anthropological study of the politics of food in Morocco, Stacey E. Holden mentions the non-isolated case of a butcher from Fez, disappointed by decreasing sales,

[33] See for instance Nizar F. Hermes, 'Nostalgia for al-Andalus in early modern Moroccan *Voyages en Espagne*: al-Ghassānī's Riḥlat al-wazīr fī iftikāk al-asīr (1690–91) as a case study', in *The Journal of North African Studies* 21:3 (2015), pp.433-452.
[34] Hassan Aourid, *Le Morisque* (Rabat : Editions & Impressions Bouregreg, 2011) and *Cintra* (Rabat : Tousna, 2016).
[35] Robert Rézette, *The Western Sahara and the Frontiers of Morocco* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1975) p.93.
[36] Nadia Lamlili, 'Maroc: la bourde de Hamid Chabat sur la Mauritanie provoque un tollé diplomatique' in *Jeune Afrique*, 26 décembre 2017, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/387520/politique/maroc-bourde-de-hamid-chabat-mauritanie-provoque-tolle-diplomatique/> [accessed 20th March 2018]

who 'look[s] back with nostalgia on French policies, leading his colleagues at Fez's municipal slaughterhouse to teasingly refer to him as a *himayya*, or protégé',[37] in reference to the Arabic word for 'Protectorate'. This highly evocative case reveals the extent to which post-independence disillusionment and underdevelopment have created in Moroccan minds a troubling contrast with the economic accomplishments under the French Protectorate, not only regarding economic policies but also in terms of practical achievements such as road and rail networks. It is also worth noting that some Moroccans nostalgically evoke the reign of King Hassan II and regularly long for his communication skills and charismatic leadership, as evidenced by the popularity of his recorded speeches on video-sharing platforms. This form of nostalgia, far from anecdotal, reveals a collective yearning for a lost incarnation of Moroccan power and a persistent lack of identification with the current ruling elites.

This nostalgia for a better past is also manifest in some accounts by Western visitors. During her visit to Tangier in 2001, Howe, for instance, feels a 'nostalgia for a lost golden age' as she mourns a city that is 'no longer the refuge of permissiveness and excess that had prevailed during the lax international interregnum and after'.[38] The new image of Tangier is largely due to the transformation of Moroccan society and the progressive rise of Islamism which interestingly hinges on an oppositional form of nostalgia, geared towards a lost theological order referring back to the Islamic Caliphate.[39] In *Islam et modernité*, Laroui draws a link between this nostalgia for the caliphate and the utopia of Arab union, as both delay the effective construction of the modern state: 'Comme la nostalgie du califat qu'elle remplace, l'utopie unioniste tient lieu de théorie de l'Etat

[37] Stacey E. Holden, *The Politics of Food in Modern Morocco* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) p.216.
[38] Howe, p.30.
[39] On the multiple historical meanings of this concept, see Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

légitime; par cela même, elle empêche une appréhension sérieuse de l'Etat réel'.[40] This two-folded expression of nostalgia, seeking either to recover a theocratic Islamic union or to rebuild a transnational Arab identity, is useful to understand some political discourses that play on the nationalist or religious emotions of Moroccan people.

Ultimately, nostalgia is also inscribed in Moroccans' experiences of exile, separation, and return. The relationship between the large Moroccan diaspora in Europe, for instance, and their homeland, builds on the affective link expressed through and reinforced by nostalgic remembering and evocation. A particularly telling case is that of Moroccan Jews whose most important contingent left Morocco in the 1960s to resettle in Israel, but remained deeply attached to their native land. Their intricate nostalgia, as some scholars have argued, is for Morocco not only as it is currently but also '*as an ideational entity*' or 'a desired homeland'[41] that no longer exists. Equally interesting is the fact that Jewish places in Morocco, 'even without living Jews', as Cory Thomas Pechan Driver rightly notes in a recent study, 'act as physical repositories for memory and power that allow negotiation of nostalgia and mean-making, as well as economic, moral, and spiritual capital'.[42] The recent initiatives by the Moroccan state to refurbish and reinvigorate these spaces across the country can be read as also a political response to the unsatisfied and persistent nostalgia that resulted from the loss of its Jewish community.

[40] Abdallah Laroui, *Islam et modernité* (Casablanca : Centre Culturel Arabe, 2009 [1987]) p.44.
[41] André Levy, 'A Community That Is Both a Center and a Diaspora: Jews in Late Twentieth Century Morocco' in *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places*, ed. by André Levy & Alex Weingrod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp.68-96 (p.90).
[42] Cory Thomas Pechan Driver, *Muslim Custodians of Jewish Spaces in Morocco: Drinking the Milk of Trust* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p.176.

Facing the malaise in Moroccan popular culture and Francophone literature

While revolt and nostalgia are embedded in Moroccan historical and cultural identity, the notion of malaise has been regularly voiced in both written and oral performance. During the Arab Spring, for instance, the protests revealed the figure of 'El Haqed' (also spelled 'L7a9ed'), a Moroccan rapper, activist, and member of the '20th February' movement, who was arrested and imprisoned after having openly criticized the monarch. Whereas most hip-hop singers in Morocco 'put the stress on cultural and social malaise rather than an explicit denouncement of the regime, the king or the palace',[43] the case of 'El Haqed' seemed to express a further form of discontent. The history of Moroccan music, nevertheless, is replete with expressions of political and sociocultural malaise. In the 1970s, the performance of popular bands such as 'Jil Jilala' and 'Nass el-Ghiwane' conveyed an implicit political message. 'Nass el-Ghiwane', whose members were all from poor neighbourhoods in Casablanca, combined elements from various Moroccan traditions, including Gnawa and Sufism, with transatlantic rock influences, to express the deep-seated malaise of a whole generation. Although they refused to acknowledge an overt political position, their focus on issues of social marginalization and demotion meant that 'the band was heard by many as criticizing King Hassan II's regime for its inability to maintain Moroccans' standard of living and cultural continuity'.[44] This parallel between hip-hop and popular music as two mediums for the expression of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise pinpoints not only the historical persistence of the latter but

[43] Samir Ben-Layashi, 'Feet on the earth, head in the clouds: what do Moroccan youth dream of?' in *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Mohammed VI*, ed. by Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.147-160 (p.150).
[44] Kendra Salois, 'Flees in the Sheepkin: Glocalization and Cosmopolitanism in Moroccan Hip-Hop', in *Islam and Popular Culture*, ed. by Karin van Nieuwkerk, Mark Levine, and Martin Stokes (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), pp.364-382 (p.371).

also the role of popular culture in voicing and channelling the discontent of Moroccan people.

The expression of the Moroccan malaise in popular culture is not limited to music but extends to other areas such as comedy. The most relevant figure here is Moroccan humourist Ahmed Snoussi, also known as 'Bziz', who has been banned for many years from national television due to his fierce critique of the Moroccan regime. While regularly taking part in public demonstrations and protests, 'Bziz' cultivated a scathing and irreverent style that became his hallmark and made him extremely popular. His primary targets, as rightly observed by Howe, have been 'the Power – the omnipotent Makhzen, or royal establishment, the excesses of the security services and corruption in the administration'.[45] As in some popular songs by 'Nass el-Ghiwane', Bziz's caustic performances use the creative potential and resources of Moroccan dialect to denounce political and social ills. The title of one his most popular skits, 'Bourchoix', is a combination of the French word 'bourgeois' and the word 'réchwa', which means 'corruption' in Moroccan dialect, to condemn the fraudulence and dishonesty of the ruling elites.

This acute attention to the semantic and lexical richness of Moroccan dialect is also present in the works of Larbi Batma, the front man of 'Nass el-Ghiwane' and Bziz's friend, notably in his autobiography *Al-rahil*, a vibrant record of social and cultural exclusion as experienced by a deprived artist in postcolonial Morocco. Lhoussain Simour suggests in a brilliant study that 'the postcolonial malaise of Casablanca recorded and saved by Batma's particular experience of life and writing seems to be at the genesis of *Al-rahil*'s significant preoccupation with the periphery'.[46] In Batma's autobiography, the translation of the Moroccan malaise into a narrative journey is visible not only in the spatial rendering of

[45] Howe, p.33.
[46] Lhoussain Simour, *Larbi Batma, Nass el-Ghiwane and Postcolonial Music in Morocco* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2016) p.49.

marginalized rural and urban areas but also in his shifting use of language, based on the combination of 'dejected and melancholic quotes and verses from Moroccan sayings, proverbs and songs spoken in Moroccan vernacular Arabic'.[47] With Batma's *Al-rahil*, which recalls Mohamed Choukri's controversial autobiography *Al-Khoubz Al Hafi*,[48] writing the self becomes an opportunity to reflect on and probe the Moroccan postcolonial malaise through a powerful and subversive reconnection with orality.

This linguistic dimension adds a further layer to the multiple ways in which the notion of malaise can be analysed in postcolonial Morocco. As mentioned earlier, the multilingual context of the country fosters richness and diversity, but it also creates separation, disconnection, and exclusion. While the Moroccan Arabic and Amazigh languages are commonly used in everyday life across the country, classical Arabic and more importantly French remain to a great extent the languages of educated and urban elites. This situation creates a linguistic hierarchy and a destructive sense of unease and exclusion among the unprivileged classes. In this respect, James McGuire rightly observes that the

> malaise associated with post-colonial bilingualism is characterized by an inventory of mostly negative and sometimes pathological qualifiers: marginal, anomalous, illegitimate, suffering, schizophrenic, treacherous, alienated, hybrid, separated from the Mother, and so on and so forth. For the bilingual individual, any act of writing carries with it all the complications of establishing a geopolitically-grounded language.[49]

In Morocco, these complications face artists, writers, and intellectuals alike. In their attempt to represent, think through, and respond to the Moroccan malaise, their choice of

[47] Simour, p.58.
[48] The novel was translated into French by Tahar ben Jelloun with the title *Le Pain nu* (Paris: Maspero, 1980).
[49] James McGuire, 'Forked tongues, Marginal bodies: Writing as Translation in Khatibi' in *Tongue and Mother Tongue: African Literature and the Perpetual Quest for Identity*, ed. by Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith & Daniel P. Kunene (Trenton & Samara: African World Press, 2002), pp.75-85 (p.75).

language paradoxically reinforces the latter by excluding certain segments of the population or by producing new forms of rupture and misunderstanding.

After the recent transformations brought about by the Arab Spring and its consequences, probing the Moroccan postcolonial malaise requires, I would argue, a look back at how writers, since the 1960s, have negotiated and responded to its early manifestations. A particularly relevant field of investigation is Moroccan literature in French as it superimposes a series of linguistic, political, and sociocultural debates.

It is well known that the first generation of Moroccan Francophone writers, including notably Ahmed Sefrioui,[50] focused on the rendering of local traditions and customs in a vein that was described as folkloric and ethnographic, leaving little space to reflect on historical transformations and social malaise. Abdelkader Chatt's *Mosaïques ternies*, for instance, published in 1930 and usually considered as the first Moroccan novel in French, is a meticulous description of the everyday life of Moroccan families in Tangier at the beginning of the twentieth century. As in Sefrioui's famous autobiography *La Boîte à merveilles*, the ethnographic aspect is manifest not only in the accumulation of social portraits and spatial descriptions but also in the use of a glossary that defines and translates into French words, expressions, and proverbs from Moroccan dialect. It would be nevertheless reductive to read Chatt's novel only as a fictionalized ethnography of Moroccan society. In his *Dictionnaire des auteurs marocains*, Moroccan critic Salim Jay rightly observes that in some passages, Chatt, driven by 'le goût de la critique sociale', becomes 'un observateur acéré du comportement des puissants'.[51] In a passage quoted by Jay, one of the characters laments that his old friends 'avaient honteusement troqué leurs

[50] See Ahmed Sefrioui, *Le Chapelet d'ambre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1949) and *La Boîte à merveilles* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954).
[51] Salim Jay, *Dictionnaire des auteurs marocains* (Casablanca: Eddif ; Paris: Editions Paris Méditerranée, 2005) p.131.

idéaux nobles et généreux de jadis contre les honneurs des emplois au Maghzen', and he goes on to denounce their new occupations, 'qu'ils avaient briguées auprès des hauts dignitaires de palais pour en abuser ensuite aux yeux de la masse ingénue et passive'.[52] If this overt and bitter critique of the ruling elite can be considered as an early expression of Moroccan political and social malaise, Chatt's striking silence about the French Protectorate and its violent effects creates another form of malaise, as the contemporary reader wonders how colonialism can be left uncriticized by a Moroccan author in this context.

In 1954, two years before independence, Driss Chraïbi's novel *Le Passé simple* further complicated the expression of this malaise in writing by throwing into question the traditional and patriarchal foundations of Moroccan society. Chraïbi's vehement attack against the Arab-Muslim identity of the country and his subsequent controversial statements about colonialism created a deep misunderstanding among his Moroccan readers. My contention is that the highly critical reception of Chraïbi's novel was also a spontaneous response to the malaise created by the discrepancy between the dividing effect of his critique and the collective quest for unity in the context of anticolonial struggle. This malaise, while originating in both the author's position towards his native land and the highly tense political atmosphere of the period, prefigures the subversive dynamics that would subsequently characterize Moroccan Francophone literature. The Chraïbi affair is revealing in the sense that it foregrounds for the first time in Morocco a confrontation between two forms of malaise born out of the paradoxical expectations of Moroccan people seeking simultaneously political independence and sociocultural unity. At the core of this double quest is the fundamental question of how to rebuild a national culture and identity liberated from both colonialism and patriarchy.

[52] Abdelkader Chatt, *Mosaïques ternies* (Casablanca: Wallada, 1990 [1930]) p.58.

This question is of key interest to the second generation of Moroccan Francophone writers, organized around the highly influential journal of culture and politics *Souffles*, created in 1966 by a group of Moroccan poets and artists. While acknowledging the contribution of the previous generation of North African writers, including Kateb Yacine, Mohamed Dib, and Driss Chraïbi, the journal sought to initiate a new cultural movement attentive to the concerns of the postcolonial era. In his prologue to the first issue, Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi insists on 'notre besoin d'une littérature portant le poids de nos réalités actuelles, des problématiques toutes nouvelles en face desquelles un désarroi et une sauvage révolte nous poignent'.[53] During its six years of publication, *Souffles* promoted cultural decolonization, launched its Arabic counterpart *Anfas* in 1971, and later became the mouthpiece of the Moroccan Marxist-Leninist movement. The journal is now recognized as a major poetry and cultural publication that served in the late 1960s and early 1970s 'as a conduit for experimental art and progressive politics in Morocco and beyond'.[54]

This study focuses on three eminent Francophone writers from the '*Souffles* generation': Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine (1941-1995), Abdelkebir Khatibi (1938-2009), and Abdellatif Laâbi (1942). The choice of these three writers is motivated not only by the peculiar diversity and the highly creative potential of their works, but also by the way in which they offer three distinct yet complementary perspectives from which to analyse the expression of personal, sociocultural, and political discontent, as mediated through revolt and nostalgia in literary and intellectual production. Khaïr-Eddine is a talented Berber poet who had a tumultuous life between his southern homeland in Morocco and voluntary exile in France. His works, which weave together poetry, theatre, and narratives, are often described as convoluted, disruptive, and disorientating. Khatibi is a distinguished thinker

[53] Abdellatif Laâbi, 'Prologue', in *Souffles* n°1 (Rabat, 1er trimestre 1966), pp.3-6 (p.4).
[54] Olivia C. Harrison & Teresa Villa-Ignacio, *Souffles-Anfas. A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p.1.

and a prolific writer who studied sociology at the Sorbonne, resided in Morocco, and produced a wide range of interdisciplinary works in semiology, philosophy, literary theory, and art criticism. Besides his friendship with Jacques Derrida, he is recognized for his pioneering contribution to the field of postcolonial theory and early efforts at rethinking the space of the Maghreb. Abdellatif Laâbi is a poet, writer, political activist, and editor-in-chief of *Souffles* for the period 1966-1972. He spent eight years in prison and now lives between Morocco and France where he published several volumes of poetry, narratives, prison letters, as well as political and cultural essays. As this study will demonstrate, the three writers experienced various levels of discontent, from Khaïr-Eddine's tormented life serving as a driving force for his political opposition, to Laâbi's overt militantism and poetics of resistance, through Khatibi's intellectual contribution to the decolonization of national culture and scientific knowledge. Writing in the early 1960s, including in *Souffles*, Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi all voiced various forms of malaise, and participated, albeit to different degrees, in the renewal of Moroccan literature and culture.

In his prologue to the first issue, Laâbi points out the stagnation and misunderstandings that surround the proliferation of Moroccan literary production, and ironically writes that 'puisque les brochures touristiques parlent d'une "terre de contrastes", on trouverait sur le plan littéraire de quoi satisfaire toutes les curiosités, toutes les nostalgies'.[55] Laâbi's scathing critique of both the widely publicized – and still in use – image of Morocco as a country of diversity and the persistent nostalgic and exotic influences on its literature establishes the ground for the contribution of the new generation of Moroccan Francophone writers. For the '*Souffles* generation', the malaise that has surrounded North African literature originates in the double fact that it was tailored to a

[55] Laâbi, 'Prologue', p.3.

Western readership and profoundly disconnected from the issues and concerns of the postcolonial era.

Laâbi's prologue, however, despite calling for a radical renewal of North African literature, responds only partially to the ongoing malaise, for it overtly admits two fundamental and persistent issues. On the one hand, the new generation of Maghrebi writers are still caught in 'le dépaysement linguistique' as they write in a foreign language. On the other hand, their work is condemned to remain out of reach of the very population it is intended to serve and address. While Laâbi's answer to the first issue is rather convincing as he invokes the expansion of multilingualism and champions the correspondence between the chosen written language and the writer's inner world, his reflections on the second problem reveal a striking sense of helplessness and discomfort. Not only is the possibility of translating the texts back to national language, in his words, not taken seriously, but the Moroccan poet is also left alone with the disempowering reality of a persistent social and cultural malaise:

> L'analphabétisme d'un côté, les apparences de culture réduisent à un résidu presque dérisoire le nombre de lecteurs. Ceci est un autre paradoxe mais il renvoie à un état social global qui ne trouvera pas son dépassement dans des raisonnements ou par un acte magique.[56]

Although Laâbi vigorously celebrates the autonomy of the North African writer and his right to reinvent language, the postcolonial malaise is still unsolved as the revolutionary discourse conveyed by his generation remains for the most part, in Orlando's words, 'contained in university campuses' and 'elusive for the general public'.[57] Illiteracy, cultural disintegration, and the failure of education, experienced as early as the mid-1960s, hinder both the socio-cultural development of Maghrebi societies and the total fulfilment of their intellectual, literary, and poetic figures. This, however, requires some nuancing as most

[56] Laâbi, 'Prologue', p.5.
[57] Orlando, *Francophone Voices*, p.53.

works discussed in this study have not only fruitfully engaged with Moroccan politics, but also contributed to Moroccan cultural and literary renewal.

Having said that, the issues raised by Laâbi's prologue in 1966 remain topical today, which is, I would argue, further evidence of the harrowing persistence of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise. Throughout the study, I conceive of this malaise as both an individual and a collective phenomenon. It can be either related to a strictly personal experience, driven by shared sociocultural or political concerns, or transformed from an individual discontent to a collective disillusionment. In the following chapters, the three writers' literary, poetic, and intellectual production is considered from both an individual and a collective perspective.

This study intends to make a contribution to a broader movement that seeks not only to extend knowledge about Morocco but also to offer new insights into Maghrebi literature in French, which is increasingly translated into English.[58] In their introduction to the first Anglophone anthology from the journal *Souffles-Anfas*, editors Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio pinpoint this growing interest in translation and suggest that it 'can be attributed to Western curiosity about North African cultures following the recent upheavals in the region as well as the burgeoning market for "world literature"'.[59] Besides cultural curiosity and literary marketing, I would argue that Morocco's complex and multi-layered identity constitutes a fertile ground for the understanding and interpretation of the ongoing transformations in the Maghreb. It is by shedding light on the specific manifestations of revolt and nostalgia in the works of three major Moroccan writers that one can get a sense of the frustrations and aspirations that have accompanied and shaped

[58] See for instance Laâbi's recent bilingual anthology *In Praise of Defeat*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Archipelago Books, 2016), Khatibi's poem *Class Warrior – Taoist Style*, trans. Matt Reeck (Middle Town: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), and the long-awaited volume *Plural Maghreb*, trans. P. Burcu Yalim (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
[59] Harrison and Villa-Ignacio, *Souffles-Anfas*, p.8.

the postcolonial history of the Maghreb. If the Moroccan malaise can serve as a paradigm for the problems currently facing Maghrebi societies and intellectuals, revolt and nostalgia can help us to better understand the various forms of political opposition and cultural change in the region.

In order to assess the viability and productive potential of revolt and nostalgia for the study of literary and intellectual production, the first chapter provides a thorough theoretical overview of the two concepts. It focuses on how both concepts were defined and used not only in literary theory, but also in philosophy and cultural studies. Drawing on the works of Albert Camus, Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud, and Svetlana Boym, I argue that revolt and nostalgia need to be understood as manifold and dynamic concepts that operate on both individual and collective levels while resisting categorization and often offering unstable and shifting definitions. This instability is further investigated in postcolonial theory by exploring how revolt and nostalgia were approached in the works of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. This analysis reveals that both concepts have often been either dismissed, reduced to specific meanings, or exclusively used for specific political or cultural ends. My contention is that revolt and nostalgia would gain from a broader and more nuanced definition that pays closer attention to their interpretative role and to the way in which they can improve our understanding of individual and collective loss, as well as various forms of political opposition and cultural resistance. A 'critical' reading of both concepts consists in using them not only as objects of study but also as perspectives from which to probe postcolonial discourses around notions of repetition, relationality, and transitionality, all at the core of the dynamics of aspiration and disillusionment that constitutes the Moroccan malaise.

The rest of the study is organized in five chapters based on a close reading of Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's works: the first two chapters are dedicated to revolt, the following two focus on nostalgia, while the final chapter offers a combined study of both concepts. Chapter 2 explores the representations of revolt in a selection of early works by the three writers and the way in which they approach the concept from personal, political, and intellectual perspectives. Read in relation to the political context of the 1960s, these contrasting perspectives redefine revolt as a dynamic process that often uses violence, provocation, and poetic creativity to resist authoritarianism.

Chapter 3 focuses on aesthetic revolt by exploring its formal and structural manifestations as they are developed by the three writers in poetry and drama. In this chapter, I argue that Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi elaborate a subversive aesthetics that hinges on the creation of unsettling structures and the use of various techniques of destruction, reconstruction, and experimentation, influenced by the dramatic theories of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht.

Building on the idea that revolt incorporates in its etymology both the notion of temporal return and, following Camus, the quest for a lost state of being, Chapter 4 moves on to discuss nostalgia in autobiography. In this chapter, I demonstrate that nostalgia, far from being a negative process, plays a fundamental yet subtle role in reshaping autobiographical discourse by creating an intermediary space of remembering and mourning in which the Moroccan writer struggles to recollect idealistic spaces, rebuild lost temporalities, and negotiate the anxiety of searching for and redefining a sense of self between past, present, and future.

Chapter 5 explores the interaction between nostalgia and exile. By focusing on the exilic-like experiences of Khaïr-Eddine's wandering, Khatibi's travel, and Laâbi's incarceration, this chapter demonstrates that nostalgia helps the Moroccan postcolonial

writer to resist the malaise generated by separation, to reinforce his affective and sensorial connection with the homeland, but remains caught in the never-ending dynamics of exile and return.

In Chapter 6, which draws on Khatibi's concept of 'double critique', I offer a combined critical reading of revolt and nostalgia as they are conceptualized together in a selection of poetic writings by the three writers. Here, poetry is conceived of as a dynamic site which allows for a fruitful dialogue between the two concepts, as nostalgic representations underlie subversive poetics while rebellious desires fuel the return of nostalgia.

Ultimately, then, I argue that the Moroccan postcolonial malaise needs a writing that operates at once within and beyond what I define as the necessary closed loop of revolt and nostalgia, in reference to the way in which unfulfilled nostalgic yearnings rekindle refusal and opposition, while disillusioned or failed revolts fuel the return of nostalgia, and so on. My contention is that one potential way out of this closed loop is a writing that benefits from the historical depth and the productive potential of both concepts while keeping them at a critical distance. This effort seems lacking in recent Moroccan Francophone literature, which is more concerned with responding to the expectations of French readership and institutions, than with elaborating a self-critical approach to revolt and nostalgia in writing.

Chapter 1: Theories of revolt and nostalgia

Introduction: Towards a critical reading

In the closing pages of Chraïbi's novel *Le Passé simple*, the narrator-hero Driss Ferdi boards a plane to Paris, leaving behind the Moroccan patriarchal society led by his father against whom he directed his fierce anger and revolt throughout the narrative. As the plane leaves Casablanca, Driss notes: 'Pas un gramme de mon passé ne m'échappe, il défile, il est simple : j'ai joué, j'ai gagné. Je m'étais révolté, pauvre, révolte de pauvre, et l'on *ne se révolte pas, pauvre*'.[60] When he subsequently imagines the life he might have in France and considers the perspective of becoming indifferent to his home country, the narrator immediately rectifies: 'Je ne crois pas. Je suis Marocain et en quelque sorte le Maroc m'appartient. Il faut savoir être patient, logique. Je me révolterai demain, voilà tout'.[61] The reflection of Chraïbi's narrator calls for the necessity of a combined reading of revolt and nostalgia in Moroccan literature. In this plane that flies across a transitory space between the Moroccan homeland and French exile, revolt and nostalgia are already coexistent, connected in the mind of the narrator, and simultaneously conveyed to his readers. On the one hand, Driss's revolt is depicted as an ongoing process, located in both the past ('je m'étais révolté') and the future ('je me révolterai demain'), inscribed in a social condition marked by poverty and oppression ('*on ne se révolte pas, pauvre*'). On the other hand, nostalgia is more discreetly expressed in the narrator's clinging to his own past ('pas un gramme de mon passé ne m'échappe') and also in his clear-cut reaffirmation of his Moroccan identity and sense of belonging ('Je suis Marocain et en quelque sorte le Maroc m'appartient'). As this excerpt reveals, revolt and nostalgia operate simultaneously on

[60] Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passé simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954), p.259.
[61] Chraïbi, p.259.

geographical, temporal, and ontological levels. Chraïbi's narrator stands in this provisional space-time where a first revolt is yet to be completed and a deeper nostalgia is still to emerge.

The concepts of revolt and nostalgia are challenging in many ways. At first glance, they might seem to work in opposition. While revolt is usually about rejection, separation, and change, nostalgia thrives on the dream of return and the yearning for objects, experiences, spaces, and times which have been lost or left behind. It has also become commonplace to ascribe to the two concepts a particular meaning: revolt is too quickly mixed up with revolution and often associated with the dynamics of historical and socio-political change, while nostalgia is usually reduced to a sentimental longing that takes on vague forms. At the core of both concepts is a peculiar instability, a persistent tension that draws on the circulation and transformation of their respective meanings. Reading revolt and nostalgia together requires us not only to bear in mind this tension but also to investigate its forms and consequences in literary and critical discourse.

It is also worth noting that each concept can be redefined in relation to the other. While Camus reminds us that 'chaque révolte est nostalgie d'innocence',[62] Svetlana Boym rightly observes that 'nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress'.[63] Each revolt can be seen as a form of nostalgia and, comparably, each nostalgia is also a form of revolt: the apparent opposition between the two concepts entails an underlying connection that questions our everyday conception of space, time, and the self. As a result, it is more productive to extend the understanding of revolt and nostalgia beyond dichotomy, simplification, and instrumentalization.

By analysing revolt and nostalgia, this introduction aims to elaborate a critical reading of both concepts in relation to issues of representation, contestation, and remembrance as

[62] Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985 [1951]), p.139.
[63] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p.xv.

raised and discussed in literary and postcolonial theory. Needless to say that cultural production remains the vehicle that embodies and shapes peoples' hopes and aspirations. 'Forms of popular rebellion and mobilization', observes Bhabha, 'are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional cultural practices'.[64] The idea of revolt becomes more concrete when transcribed into literary, artistic, and intellectual forms of creation. As will be demonstrated through the works and trajectories of the three Moroccan writers, opposition is not just an attitude but also a practice embedded in cultural production. More importantly, the act of creation itself embodies the ideas of struggle, resistance, and persistence. As Camus puts it in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, creation is 'le bouleversant témoignage de la seule dignité de l'homme : la révolte tenace contre sa condition, la persévérance dans un effort tenu pour stérile'.[65] The act of creation can be read as an uncertain revolt against the self and the world, an open-ended quest for dignity and recognition. At the same time, the uncertainty and endlessness of creation may have something to do with the always-returning shadows of nostalgia, all these unsatisfied and persistent desires for alternative worlds that constantly rekindle the creative impulse. To a certain extent, writing can be seen as the locus of an ongoing dialogue between revolt and nostalgia. The writer works to resist, oppose, and rethink the world while simultaneously dealing with individual and collective desires, aspirations, and disillusionments. The cultural formation of writers and intellectuals is made possible through their interaction with spaces and memories. In Morocco as in other postcolonial contexts, artistic and intellectual production are shaped not only by commitment and resistance, but also through geographical mobility and temporal displacement. To cite one example, Edward Said writes in the opening pages of his autobiography *Out of Place*:

[64] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p.29.
[65] Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987 [1942]), p.156.

> Along with language, it is geography – especially in the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging, and travel itself – that is at the core of my memories of those early years. Each of the places I lived in – Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, the United States – has a complicated, dense web of valences that was very much a part of growing up, gaining an identity, forming my consciousness of myself and of others.[66]

If Said's highly influential contribution to postcolonial theory can be read as a form of intellectual revolt against hegemonic discourses and cultural practices developed by the West, the sense of nostalgic displacement is at the core of his formation as an intellectual. The 'complicated, dense web of valences' developed in his works bears the marks of his self-constitution between the nostalgic relationship with language and geography, and the rebellious exercise of critical thinking. It is my contention that, following Said's experience, any critical reading of revolt and nostalgia needs to take into consideration their combined role in the formation of postcolonial intellectuals, writers, and scholars.

This introduction offers a detailed definition and theoretical overview of each concept, followed by an analysis of the ways in which revolt and nostalgia have been understood and treated by postcolonial theorists. The opening section on revolt draws on the work of Camus, Kristeva, and Foucault, while nostalgia is approached mainly through Freud and Boym. The subsequent critical reading of the two concepts in postcolonial theory focuses on the works of Fanon, Said, Spivak, and Bhabha. My main aim is to shed light on the challenging complexity of revolt and nostalgia in postcolonial contexts, and reveal how both concepts have often been dismissed, reduced to specific meanings, or used for particular aims. Throughout my reading, I argue for a broader and more complex understanding of revolt and nostalgia as a way to approach the dynamics of contestation and longing in postcolonial literary texts.

[66] Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p.xvi.

Revolt between repetition and contradiction

Framing a precise and stable definition of the word 'revolt' is no easy task. The concept is not only related to other words such as upheaval, uprising, subversion, and rebellion, but it also embodies an internal contradiction that makes it even more difficult to identify what could be and could not be considered as a 'true' revolt. In the first pages of *L'Homme révolté*, Camus dwells on what he calls 'le vrai drame de la pensée révoltée':

> Pour être, l'homme doit se révolter, mais sa révolte doit respecter la limite qu'elle découvre en elle-même et où les hommes, en se rejoignant, commencent d'être. La pensée révoltée ne peut donc se passer de mémoire : elle est une tension perpétuelle. En la suivant dans ses œuvres et ses actes, nous aurons à dire, chaque fois, si elle reste fidèle à sa noblesse première ou si, par lassitude et folie, elle l'oublie au contraire, dans une ivresse de tyrannie ou de servitude.[67]

Camus's reflection aptly illuminates the inherent tension at play in the concept of revolt. Rebellious thought at once perpetuates life and embodies a risk of negating it by slipping into tyranny and terror. The rebel is simultaneously driven by the honourable impulse of his revolt and constrained by its internal limitations. Each form of revolt entails the challenge of remaining faithful to its origins by sustaining the initially unwavering rebellious impulse and avoiding the risk of falling into destruction, oppression, and chaos. As a result, any definition of revolt needs to take into consideration that the term encapsulates an antagonistic tension between its realization and its negation, an embedded risk of negative reversal. Interestingly, this tension is grounded in the etymology of the word 'revolt' itself, derived from the Latin 'revolvere' and the Italian 'rivoltare', both of which literally designate the act of turning or rolling back. If revolt can be defined as 'a refusal to obey or conform' or 'an attempt to end the authority of a person or body by

[67] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.37.

rebelling', that is by 'tak[ing] violent action',[68] these acts of refusal or rejection may often create new forms of power and authority, calling in their turn for new rebellions. As a result, the act of revolt constitutes an endless repetition, a paradoxical regeneration that constantly annihilates and recreates its original impulse.

Camus acknowledges this acute tension and writes in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*:

> en face de la contradiction essentielle, je soutiens mon humaine contradiction. J'installe ma lucidité au milieu de ce qui la nie. J'exalte l'homme devant ce qui l'écrase et ma liberté, ma révolte et ma passion se rejoignent alors dans cette tension, cette clairvoyance et cette répétition démesurée.[69]

The concept of revolt remains inextricably tied to contradiction and repetition. The rebel is one who continually asserts his freedom against the absurdity of the world. Revolt is a challenging concept not only because it combines the ideas of opposition and repetition, carrying the risk of falling into abuse and destruction, but also because it performs an uncertain activity since 'il n'y a qu'une action utile, celle qui referait l'homme et la terre'.[70] In Camus's thought, revolt is a movement that is at once defined by its necessity and mindful of its limitations. This paradox of revolt is precisely what constitutes, fuels, and sustains the rebellious impulse: an act of opposition grounded in an epistemology of limits.

The unstable meaning of revolt is also due to its regular associations with and differentiations from other related concepts. One of these is 'revolution', which carries a modern historical and political weight, as evidenced by its recent use to describe the Arab uprisings and the 'Hirak' movement in northern Morocco. 'Whereas "revolt" has a longer historical range than modernity', argues Bülent Diken, 'the concept of revolution is a modern answer, *the* answer of modernity, to the question of inequality, injustice and

[68] Definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
[69] Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.121.
[70] Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.120.

irrationality'.[71] The complexity of revolt originates in the fact that it is usually understood as a philosophical concept operating not only in but also across specific historical periods. At stake in the difference between revolt and revolution is a temporal separation: 'while revolt is always *a* revolt, a singular logic among logics, revolution always points towards a specificity, a specific temporality that interrupts history, which is then universalized: hence *the* French Revolution, *the* October Revolution and so on'.[72] The singularity of revolt lies in the fact that it does not seek to interrupt history but on the contrary to develop an ethics of resistance and contestation that works both within and beyond history. In *L'Homme révolté*, Camus makes the following distinction between the two movements associated, respectively, with revolution and revolt:

> En théorie, le mot révolution garde le sens qu'il a en astronomie. C'est un mouvement qui boucle la boucle, qui passe d'un gouvernement à l'autre après une translation complète […] elle est l'insertion de l'idée dans l'expérience historique quand la révolte est seulement le mouvement qui mène de l'expérience individuelle à l'idée.[73]

Whereas revolution is a complete turnover that cyclically regenerates itself with one revolution giving birth to another and changing the course of history, revolt is an incomplete yet productive process that builds on the individual experience to foreground the idea of change. While revolution is driven by ideologies and by the logics of political change and historical transformation, revolt remains ambiguous and uncertain:

> Alors que l'histoire, même collective, d'un mouvement de révolte, est toujours celle d'un engagement sans issue dans les faits, d'une protestation obscure qui n'engage ni systèmes ni raisons, une révolution est une tentative pour modeler l'acte sur une idée, pour façonner le monde dans un cadre théorique.[74]

[71] Bülent Diken, *Revolt, Revolution, Critique: The Paradox of Society* (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), p.121.
[72] Diken, p.122.
[73] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.140.
[74] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.140.

And yet it is the uncertainty and complexity of revolt that make it outlive the historical dynamics of revolutions. As Camus suggests, revolt always survives the diversion and failure of revolutions, for 'quand la révolution, au nom de la puissance et de l'histoire, devient cette mécanique meurtrière et démesurée, une nouvelle révolte devient sacrée, au nom de la mesure et de la vie'.[75] While revolution is grounded in history and fuelled by the insatiable desire for power and change, with the permanent risk of falling into tyranny and chaos, revolt can occur on an individual level and remains, at least in Camus's thought, driven by the persistent defence of life, passion, and regeneration. A recent anthology assessing the legacy of *L'Homme révolté* fifty years after its publication rightly argues that Camus 'veut croire de toutes ses forces qu'il est encore possible d'arracher la révolte à l'emprise de la révolution, que l'aboutissement de la révolte dans la terreur n'est ni le dernier mot de l'Histoire ni une fatalité'.[76] Although Camus's attempt to 'save' revolt from revolution has been widely discussed and criticized, it still points today to the unavoidable separation between the two terms.

This semantic and philosophical separation was central to the notorious schism between Camus and Sartre. Francis Jeanson's scathing review of *L'Homme révolté* in *Les Temps modernes*[77] and Sartre's subsequent critique of Camus are not only grounded in a political dispute between the two French intellectuals about Stalinian Communism and their respective positions towards the Communist party, but also fuelled by their divergence over the notion of revolt itself. In his earlier book dedicated to Baudelaire, Sartre elaborates in his turn a clear-cut differentiation between the figures of the revolutionary and the rebel in a passage which is worth quoting at length:

[75] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.380.
[76] Denis Charbit, '*L'Homme révolté*. Grandeur et servitude de la fonction intellectuelle' in *Albert Camus 19.* L'Homme révolté *cinquante ans après*, ed. by Raymond Gay-Crosier (Paris-Caen : Lettres Modernes Minard, 2001), pp.11-53 (p.24).
[77] Francis Jeanson, 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', *Les Temps Modernes*, 79 (mai 1952), pp.2070-90.

> Le révolutionnaire veut changer le monde, il le dépasse vers l'avenir, vers un ordre de valeurs qu'il invente; le révolté a soin de maintenir intacts les abus dont il souffre pour pouvoir se révolter contre eux. Il y a toujours en lui les éléments d'une mauvaise conscience et comme un sentiment de culpabilité. Il ne veut ni détruire ni dépasser mais seulement se dresser contre l'ordre. Plus il l'attaque, plus il le respecte obscurément ; les droits qu'il conteste au grand jour, il les conserve dans le plus profond de son cœur : s'ils venaient à disparaître, sa raison d'être et sa justification disparaîtraient avec eux. Il se retrouverait soudain plongé dans une gratuité qui lui fait peur.[78]

Sartre's reflection grounds the distinction between revolt and revolution in the subject's relationship to the world. The revolutionary works to concretely transform the world by defending new values and opening up alternative spaces of thought and action. Conversely, the rebel is less concerned with future transformation than with opposition and rejection in the present: his very identity is defined by and tied to the forms of power and authority he contests. The disagreement between Camus and Sartre sheds light not only on the inherent instability of revolt as a philosophical concept, but also on how it could be understood as a bi-dimensional process aimed at once at transforming the outer world and redefining the identity of the subject. A fruitful combination of Camus's and Sartre's readings would consist in thinking revolt and revolution together, beyond their apparent opposition, 'in the form of a disjunctive synthesis, for if revolt without revolution is an impotent act, revolution without revolt can always be "colonized" by *realpolitik*'.[79] Between the original impulse of opposition and resistance that characterizes revolt (Camus) and the concrete dynamics of political rupture and transformation associated with revolution (Sartre), the rebel has always to find a way towards the (re)construction of his individual and collective subjectivities. The tension involved in this quest, as will be developed in the following chapters, is perfectly illustrated by the distinct levels of opposition and forms of political engagement of Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi.

[78] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris : Gallimard, 1996 [1947]) p.50.
[79] Diken, p.123.

This connection of revolt to both private and public spaces is at the core of Julia Kristeva's reflections on the concept. In a modern world marked by the rise of what French intellectual Guy Debord famously described as 'la société du spectacle', a society that uses the power of mass media to inhibit psychic life and alienate subjects from their own bodies, Kristeva advocates the fundamental need for revolt. In *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, she starts by tracing back the etymological origins and semantic evolution of the word 'revolt' to reveal 'la *plasticité* du terme tout au long de son histoire et sa dépendance du *contexte historique*'.[80] The dynamic way in which meanings of revolt have evolved throughout history and been reshaped by political events (such as the French Revolution) and scientific contexts (such as the notion of revolution in astronomy) informs Kristeva's call for 'la nécessité d'une culture-révolte dans une société qui vit, se développe et ne stagne pas'.[81] While building upon Camus's individual revolt and focusing on its intimate forms, Kristeva reads the concept as a continuing process, an ongoing 'experience' that resists the failure of rebellious ideologies in the twentieth century and the distortion of subjective space under the persistent influence of the culture of show. Drawing on Freud's legacy, she stresses how psychoanalysis has promoted revolt as a way towards happiness and pleasure: 'Aucun de nous ne jouit sans affronter un obstacle, un interdit, une loi qui nous permette de nous mesurer, autonomes et libres. La révolte qui se révèle accompagner l'expérience intime du bonheur est partie intégrante du principe de plaisir'.[82] Kristeva's significant association of revolt and pleasure enhances the role of the concept in the process of self-realization. This dimension is further developed in her reading of Freud's overt use of the word 'revolutionary' to describe his own work, not in a political or a moral sense, as she argues, but rather as a reference to the ability of psychoanalytic investigation

[80] Julia Kristeva, *Sens et non-sens de la révolte. Pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse I.* (Paris : Fayard, 1996), p.13.
[81] Kristeva, p.21.
[82] Kristeva, p.20.

to ‘re-tourner le sens conscient’[83] and challenge temporality by looking into the unconscious, that is the hidden, the invisible, the out-of-time.

Beyond the field of psychoanalysis, Kristeva’s approach to revolt is informative in the way it illuminates the inner practice of the concept and elucidates its transformative and performative potential in exploring the intimate self. This is clearly expressed by the three interconnected figures of revolt she draws from Freudian thought, reading the concept as respectively ‘transgression de l’interdit’, ‘répétition, perlaboration, élaboration’, and ‘déplacement, combinatoires, jeu’.[84] However, Kristeva’s effort to understand revolt as a transgressive, repetitive, dynamic, and most importantly an empowering and revitalizing act of self-assertion remains disconnected from large-scale politics and limited to the individual level. In her more recent book *L’Avenir de la révolte*, she defends her position by noting not only that revolt has failed in politics due to strategic agreements and compromises between political parties, but also that modern society has reached ‘un point de non-retour à partir duquel justement il nous faut *re*-tourner aux petites choses: *ré*-volte infinitésimale, pour préserver la vie de l’esprit, et de l’espèce’.[85] The question that remains unanswered in Kristeva’s thought is how this return to the intimate self as an infinitesimal revolt could be transcribed in politics and extended to a collective level.

The limitations of Kristeva’s reading of revolt question more broadly the efficiency of those discourses that call for an intimate revolt as a response to social, cultural, and political repression. On the subject of sexual liberation, for instance, Michel Foucault argues that such discourses are not only illusionary but also work as systems of power that paradoxically restrain the dynamics of revolt. As he argues, this type of discourse acts as

[83] Kristeva, p.38.
[84] Kristeva, p.40.
[85] Julia Kristeva, *L’Avenir de la révolte* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), p.18.

> un formidable outil de contrôle et de pouvoir. Il se sert, comme toujours, de ce que disent les gens, de ce qu'ils ressentent, de ce qu'ils espèrent. Il exploite leur tentation de croire qu'il suffit, pour être heureux, de franchir le seuil du discours et de lever quelques interdits. Et il aboutit en fait à rabattre et à quadriller les mouvements de révolte et de libération…[86]

From a Foucauldian perspective, revolt needs to be grounded, beyond this allegedly liberating discourse, in an effective and multi-layered opposition to the representations and structures of power. Thus, in *Surveiller et punir*, he insists that prisoners' revolt, for instance, is directed not against the material conditions in prison but rather against the prison itself as an institution of power:

> Il s'agissait bien d'une révolte, au niveau des corps, contre le corps même de la prison. Ce qui était en jeu, ce n'était pas le cadre trop fruste ou trop aseptique, trop rudimentaire ou trop perfectionné de la prison, c'était sa matérialité dans la mesure où elle est instrument et vecteur de pouvoir;[87]

Revolt can be understood as a physical movement that operates in human bodies against the material body of power that is prison. In doing so, revolt challenges the subject's concrete and immediate relationship with authority, and embodies a horizontal form of counter-power. Discipline, according to Foucault, works precisely to stop and control this dynamics by offsetting 'les effets de contre-pouvoir qui en naissent et qui forment résistance au pouvoir qui veut la dominer: agitations, révoltes, organisations spontanées, coalitions — tout ce qui peut relever des conjonctions horizontales'.[88] By isolating, excluding, and separating prisoners, prison creates a hierarchical system that prevents the incremental and horizontal dynamics of revolt. Moreover, Foucault's work interestingly reveals the close ties between power and revolt. Expressions of revolt not only resist and work against power but also inflect its forms and configurations. As a result, power

[86] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p.259.
[87] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p.35.
[88] Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p.221.

relations are constantly interacting with and being remodelled by their opposing forces. As Foucault details:

> Ces points de résistance sont présents partout dans le réseau de pouvoir. Il n'y a donc pas par rapport au pouvoir *un* lieu du grand Refus – âme de la révolte, foyer de toutes les rébellions, loi pure du révolutionnaire. Mais *des* résistances qui sont des cas d'espèces : possibles, nécessaires, improbables, spontanées, sauvages, solitaires, concertées, rampantes, violentes, irréconciliables, promptes à la transaction, intéressées, ou sacrificielles; par définition, elles ne peuvent exister que dans le champ stratégique des relations de pouvoir.[89]

This reading of revolt as a set of specific movements driven by distinct strategies towards the power promotes a multi-layered and relational understanding of the concept that suits the diverse and intricate context of Moroccan culture and politics. Foucault goes even further when he describes these forms of resistance as often 'mobiles et transitoires'[90] since they impact individual and social bodies by creating divisions, unities, and reconfigurations, just as the network of power relations penetrates and reshapes political institutions and apparatuses. Revolt should not be understood as a one-dimensional and monolithic movement of opposition to power but rather as an expandable series of movements that not only depend on and operate against power structures, but also mimic and reproduce their operational modes. As Foucault summarizes in one of his interviews, 'dès lors qu'il y a un rapport de pouvoir, il y a une possibilité de résistance', and this possibility needs to be 'aussi inventive, aussi mobile, aussi productive que lui [le pouvoir]. Que, comme lui, elle s'organise, se coagule et se cimente. Que, comme lui, elle vienne d'en bas et se distribue stratégiquement'.[91] The mimicry of power structures and practices allows for the emergence of an efficient, dynamic, and creative revolt. Foucault's emphasis on multiplicity, mobility, and strategy hints at the necessity of rethinking revolt beyond the realm of discourse as a manifold process that works alongside the structures of power in

[89] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. I. La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p.126.
[90] Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, p.127.
[91] Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, p.267.

order to challenge their influence. This vision of revolt, as this study will demonstrate, is particularly relevant to the works of the three Moroccan writers that approach the concept from multiple and intersecting perspectives.

Nostalgia between loss and ambivalence

If revolt is about a dynamic and multifaceted act of opposition, nostalgia embodies an uncertain quest for unity, meaning, and plenitude. In his reading of Kafka in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus refers to the persistent series of hazy and distant signs that emanate from the castle and keep K.'s hope alive as 'la nostalgie des paradis perdus'.[92] This nostalgia, although referring to a lost paradise, is still fundamental to the narrative. The vague object of nostalgia is lost, but this loss is precisely what rekindles K.'s hope and sustains Kafka's writing. Fiction and nostalgia are perhaps closer than they seem at first glance. In her recent book *La Nostalgie: Quand donc est-on chez soi?* Barbara Cassin contends that while her passion for Homer, Odysseus, and the Mediterranean, has aroused her interest in nostalgia, the concept itself – like the name ascribed to the author of the *Odyssey* – is not exactly what we think it might be. Nostalgia is 'comme l'origine, une fiction choisie qui ne cesse de donner les indices pour qu'on la prenne pour ce qu'elle est, une fiction, adorable, humaine, un fait de culture'.[93] Cassin's reference to both Homer and fiction is particularly significant as it situates the concept of nostalgia in literary history and pinpoints its creative potential in the process and genealogy of writing. In literature, nostalgia can be read as a 'fiction' in the sense that it opens literary spaces for imagination and re-creation, combining various forms of evocation and remembering, and evading, as revolt, strict and one-dimensional definitions.

[92] Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.179.
[93] Barbara Cassin, *La Nostalgie: Quand donc est-on chez soi ?* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard/Pluriel, 2015 [2013]), p.12.

The complexity of the concept resonates in the very history of the term. If 'nostalgia' initially refers to a medical condition identified in the seventeenth century, the coining of the term has been the subject of extensive debates. Some accounts credit French doctor Jean-Jacques Harder with inventing the term in 1678. According to other sources, it is a Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer, who first used the word in 1688[94] to describe 'le mal du pays' suffered by civilians in Switzerland and France, and by Louis XIV's Swiss mercenaries, wandering far from their homeland. In his early doctoral thesis devoted to the effects of nostalgia on young patients, Hofer defines nostalgia as 'a disorder of the imagination', and notes that 'nerve fibers that store impressions of one's native land are in constant motion'.[95] Hofer's foundational definition interestingly foregrounds the fictional and dynamic aspects of nostalgia. As a 'disorder' that distorts imagination and puts the human body 'in constant motion', nostalgia is more about mobility and fiction than about stability and reality. This is confirmed from the late nineteenth century onwards with the evolution of nostalgia from 'a pathology to an emotion of wistful longing for the past'.[96] In his *Histoire de la nostalgie*,[97] André Bolzinger notes that Hofer's thesis was subject to subsequent revisions in the eighteenth century which opened the way to endless debates about the paternity of the term. In his comment, Bolzinger writes that

> en dépit de ces turbulences, le néologisme a vécu sa vie comme un personnage de roman. Il a d'abord prospéré dans le champ médical, il mène aujourd'hui une sorte de seconde vie en tant que phare éditorial dans l'espace médiatique.[98]

Composed of revision, substitution, oblivion, decline, and return, the history of nostalgia contains something of an intricate fiction operating across interconnected territories of

[94] Hofer's thesis is dated 22 June 1688.
[95] Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), p.21-22.
[96] Wilson, p.22.
[97] André Bolzinger, *Histoire de la nostalgie* (Paris: Editions Campagne Première, 2007).
[98] Bolzinger, p.50.

linguistic performance, military history, and civil medicine, through to popular media and literary creation.

The complexity of the concept is further manifest in its etymology, since the word 'nostalgia' bears the ideas of duality and contradiction. A combination of the Greek terms 'nostos', which means 'return', and 'algia', which refers to pain and suffering, 'nostalgia' can be literally understood as 'the pain of homecoming' or 'homesickness'. As Cassin aptly suggests, the term includes both 'la souffrance qui vous tient quand on est loin et les peines qu'on endure pour rentrer'.[99] As with Odysseus who faces an always-delayed return and once in Ithaca, does not identify his homeland, struggles to be recognized by his people, and eventually stays only for one night before leaving again, nostalgia is a continuing process that operates before, during, and even after homecoming. It marks the double pain of longing for the homeland and suffering from estrangement during and upon return. This complexity is compounded by the inherently paradoxical nature of nostalgia, another common point with revolt. Philosopher and theologian Ralph Harper observes that

> nostalgia combines bitterness and sweetness, the lost and the found, the far and the near, the new and the familiar, absence and presence. The past which is over and gone, from which we have been or are being removed, by some magic becomes present again for a short while.[100]

At stake in nostalgia is an intricate negotiation of opposing feelings and references, a contradictory struggle with not only the returning past, but also the travelling present and the fantasized future.

This complex combination of reality and fiction is central to Freud's contribution to the understanding of nostalgia. In his oft-quoted essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', Freud defines mourning as 'the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some

[99] Cassin, p.17.
[100] Ralph Harper, *Nostalgia: an Existential Exploration of Longing and Fulfilment in the Modern Age* (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), p.120.

abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on'.[101] In other words, mourning performs a work on both realist and abstract grounds. As Freud observes, the subject's opposition to loss 'can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis'.[102] This tension between reality and hallucination, loss and wish-fulfilment, is similarly central to the dynamics of nostalgia, although Freud's essay does not overtly refer to the concept. If mourning and melancholia are about a loss that is either grounded in or withdrawn from consciousness, nostalgia can have elements of both movements. Like mourning, nostalgia is usually associated with the loss of a beloved object or its abstraction, and it comparably performs a long and painful work of grief. Like melancholia, however, nostalgia can fiercely resist this grief to the point of making the nostalgic subject lose contact with the world and plunge into a state of undefined loss. Nostalgia is ambivalent in the sense that it works between mourning and melancholia to complicate both the perception of loss and the process of recovery through remembrance, evocation, and longing. In his reading of the notion of the uncanny, Freud dwells on the same ambivalence. Drawing on E. T. A. Hoffmann's fantasy tales, he demonstrates how the initially antonymic words 'homely' ('*heimlich*') and 'uncanny' or 'unhomely' ('*unheimlich*') are in fact inter-related. For the uncanny can be defined as 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well-known and had long been familiar'.[103] Nostalgia thrives precisely on this transformation of the homely and the familiar into something that is left behind, removed from one's eyes, only to reappear in

[101] Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, Vol. IV (1914-1916)), p.243.
[102] Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p.244.
[103] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. from the German by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.124.

the present. The features of the uncanny, namely the 'unintentional return'[104] and the 'inner compulsion to repeat',[105] both resonate in nostalgia; the object of nostalgia, an ambivalent construct that has long been familiar to the self and eventually became estranged from it, constantly returns and fuels the never-ending process of longing.

Defined from this perspective, nostalgia performs an uncertain quest, grounded like revolt in repetition, for a lost object or its fictional representation. Building on Freud's reading of the quest for the sexual object and his much-quoted formula that 'the finding of an object is always a refinding of it',[106] Lacan writes:

> Il est clair qu'une discordance est instaurée par le seul fait de cette répétition. Une nostalgie lie le sujet à l'objet perdu, à travers laquelle s'exerce tout l'effort de la recherche. Elle marque la retrouvaille du signe d'une répétition impossible, puisque précisément ce n'est pas le même objet, ce ne saurait l'être.[107]

What is most interesting here, beyond the specific discussion of sexual desire, is the idea that nostalgia is not only a fundamental element in the subject-object relationship but also the driving force for a repeated quest condemned to failure as the found object – if indeed there is one – never totally corresponds to its lost counterpart. In other words, nostalgia is an open-ended confrontation with the irrecoverable.

Nostalgic subjects, like rebels, deal with the temporal transformation of subjects, objects, spaces, feelings, and memories. Central to the concept of nostalgia, according to Cassin, is 'le rapport entre le nouveau et l'ancien, la manière dont le nouveau devient ancien et l'élan habitude, bref le temps comme ligne et cycle'.[108] Nostalgia thrives on both the linear and cyclic definition of time, on how things used to be and how they become

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[104] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.144.
[105] Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.145.
[106] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1966), vol. VII, p.222. Quoted in Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.53.
[107] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Livre IV 'La Relation d'objet' (1956-1957) (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), p.14-15.
[108] Cassin, p.30.

transformed and reconstructed. Rather than being simply ensnared in the past or experienced in the present, nostalgia is about relationality, connection, and resonance in the in-between. In his book *Yearning for Yesterday*, one of the first seminal studies of the concept, Fred Davis rightly argues that

> the ability to feel nostalgia for events in our past has less to do with how recent or distant these events are than with the way they contrast – or, more accurately, the way we make them contrast – with the events, moods, and dispositions of our present circumstances.[109]

This contrasting pattern, as will be analysed in Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's works, is what makes nostalgia a dynamic concept open to variations and reconfigurations. It is a form of mediation between past and present, a constant reading of the past in the light of the present, and vice-versa.

A fundamental contribution to this reading of nostalgia as a complex, multi-layered, and dynamic concept is the foundational work of Boym. In her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym points to the double-edged nature of the concept which she compares to 'a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life', adding that 'the moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface'.[110] If early nostalgia was a curable disease of an afflicted imagination, modern nostalgia is a challenging concept tied up with new understandings of time and space, and shaped by the emergence of pivotal notions such as modernity and progress, which often come up in political and sociocultural debates in Morocco. In her dissection of nostalgia, Boym refers to German historian Reinhart Koselleck's two notions of 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation', which designate the respective processes of assimilating the past into the present through evocation and remembering, and

[109] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday. A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), p.11-12.
[110] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xiv.

making the future present by directing the self towards the yet-to-be-revealed. The modern concept of progress has reduced the temporal distance between experience and expectation, giving shape to a new global narrative directed towards the future but marked with divergence and discrepancies between individuals, groups, and nations. Drawing on this idea, Boym contends that 'nostalgia, as a historical emotion, is a longing for that shrinking "space of experience" that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations'.[111] In other words, nostalgia is a reaction not only to spatial separation and geographical displacement, but also to temporal division. Nostalgia works against modernity by embodying what Boym defines as an 'off-modern' reflection, namely a reflection that involves the exploration of 'sideshadows and back alleys rather than the straight road of progress'[112] emphasized by the expansionist and accumulative logic of capitalism. The nostalgic subject resists global narratives and challenges the linear conception of time by longing for the particular, the outdated, all the things left either behind or to one side.

Boym further develops the temporal grounding of the concept by distinguishing between 'retrospective' and 'prospective' forms of nostalgia, both particularly relevant to this study. While noting in her introduction that nostalgic discourses often break out in the aftermath of social movements and revolutions, Boym sets out to explore a nostalgia that is 'not always for the ancient regime or fallen empire but also for the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became obsolete'.[113] Only a broad and transhistorical understanding of nostalgia can help us to elucidate the complexity of the concept. On the one hand, retrospective nostalgia – the most commonly used form of the concept – deals with both the realized and unrealized past: it works to evoke, mourn, and reappropriate the fading realities of what was left behind. On the other hand, prospective nostalgia is concerned with the yet-to-come: it longs for the representations of what might occur in the

[111] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.10.
[112] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xvii
[113] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xvi

future or what might have occurred in the past and transformed the future. As Boym argues elsewhere, prospective nostalgia 'recovers unforeseen pasts and future anteriors that can still transform our present'.[114] Boym's reading points to what I propose to define as the temporal and creative potential of nostalgia, a complex process of recovery and reconstruction launched in the present but operating in the in-between: between past and future, reality and fantasy, the visible and the invisible. Unsurprisingly, then, nostalgia becomes, like revolt, the locus of various strategies of evocation, appropriation, and even manipulation.

Boym's work also identifies two fundamental manifestations of nostalgia which will prove useful in the study of exile in the three Moroccan writers: the first is 'restorative' and focuses on the desire to reconstruct the home while the second is 'reflective' and thrives on the pain of loss. Boym notes that 'if restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space'.[115] The merit of these two categories lies in the fact that they turn nostalgia into an active concept, associated with dynamic movements of reconstruction, conquest, and celebration, as well as spatial and temporal transformation. As seen with revolt, nostalgia is a multifaceted concept that resists categorization and remains radically open to redefinition. In postcolonial contexts, where notions such as identity and history become at once unstable and more complex, the evocative power of nostalgia is emphasized. As a result, postcolonial narratives often combine various forms of nostalgia and include hybrid and multi-layered representations of longing and remembering.

[114] Svetlana Boym, *The Off-Modern* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), p.39.
[115] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.49.

Revolt and nostalgia in postcolonial theory

In the field of postcolonial theory, the complexity of revolt and nostalgia has often been dismissed or minimized. Both concepts have been consistently used to evoke specific meanings and particular settings. Revolt is usually read in the context of anticolonial struggle as a form of counter-violence, or analysed as the locus of wider intellectual and discursive shifts in the aftermath of colonialism. Nostalgia, meanwhile, is often considered as a negative or at least suspicious concept either referring to a lost native origin or conveying desires for imperial glory and colonial expansion. In what follows, I analyse how both concepts have been approached and described by postcolonial theorists, and how this description is grounded in specific historical, spatial, and ideological discourses.

a. Revolt as a 'transformative possibility'

The concept and praxis of revolt have been a central topic in the field of postcolonial theory. The critique of colonialist thought inaugurated by Said has opened the way for deeper studies of colonial discourse. As part of a broader interest in the workings of power, colonial discourse studies 'have tried to locate and theorise oppositions, resistances and revolts (successful and otherwise) on the part of the colonised'.[116] Besides political forms of resistance, this effort has shed light on what was defined as a 'counter-discourse', a term coined by Richard Terdiman[117] and 'adopted by post-colonial critics to describe the complex ways in which challenges to a dominant or established discourse (specifically

[116] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p.48.
[117] Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

those of the imperial centre) might be mounted from the periphery'.[118] In postcolonial theory, revolt takes on a broader meaning that covers not only forms of anticolonial struggle but also the production and circulation of counter-discourses. The notion of revolt is also grounded in the agency it provides to the people against whom colonial or neo-colonial power is exerted. In a book arguing that the world is haunted by 'specters of revolt', Richard Gilman-Opalsky astutely defines revolt as 'a transformative possibility both structurally and economically bound to all social, political, and economic systems maintained against the interests of the people they confine'.[119] This transformative aspect is precisely what constitutes the praxis of revolt in postcolonial contexts, namely the possibility of disrupting and resisting systems of control and oppression. In doing so, it provides a useful lens through which to assess the significance and impact of revolt in the Moroccan context.

However, despite the polysemous nature and transformative power of the word 'revolt', the concept has often been reduced to a single and a specific meaning. A relevant example here is Fanon's understanding of revolt. In *Les Damnés de la terre*, while advocating the use of violence in anticolonial struggle, Fanon quotes a long passage from Aimé Césaire's play *Et les chiens se taisaient* in which a revolted slave, 'Le Rebelle', murders his master. Not only is the identity of the character entirely defined by his revolt but the relationship between subjectivity and revolt is emphasized in his discourse: 'Mon nom: offensé; mon prénom: humilié; mon état: révolté;'[120] Revolt is what reconfigures the subject's identity and constitutes his response to humiliation and offence. In Fanon's reading of Césaire, revolt is also significantly associated with the act of killing as a

[118] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p.56.
[119] Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Specters of Revolt. On the Intellect of Insurrection and Philosophy From Below*, (London: Repeater Books, 2016), p.15.
[120] Aimé Césaire, *Et les chiens se taisaient*, quoted in Franz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris : La Découverte, 2002 [1961]), p.83.

necessary counter-violence, for, as Sartre observes in his influential preface to *Les Damnés de la terre*, 'en le premier temps de la révolte, il faut tuer'.[121] If this representation of the rebel as a subject who murders to reclaim freedom and agency must be evaluated in the specific context of colonial crimes and anticolonial struggle, it still demonstrates that Fanon's revolt stems from and is grounded in an unavoidable violence. Fanon's reading of the concept needs also to be understood alongside the discourse of colonial power on revolt and insurrection. Fanon notes for instance that British colonial and Kenya-based psychiatrist J. C. Carothers interprets the Mau Mau Uprising in the 1950s in Kenya as 'l'expression d'un complexe inconscient de frustration dont la réédition pourrait être scientifiquement évitée par des adaptations psychologiques spectaculaires'.[122] If colonial discourse seeks to reduce the African rebel to a biologically and psychologically downgraded subject, and to control his revolt through violent manipulation and discipline, Fanon's counter-discourse responds by insisting the anticolonial revolt be grounded in the same violence. For Fanon, this violent revolt is fundamental to life and survival. As he writes in *Peau noire masques blancs*, 'ce n'est pas parce que l'Indochinois a découvert une culture propre qu'il s'est révolté. C'est parce que "tout simplement" il lui devenait, à plus d'un titre, impossible de respirer'.[123] Fanon's revolt is less concerned with reclaiming a cultural identity than with recovering the right to live in dignity. It is the denial of life and of corporeal agency through colonial oppression and violence that produces revolt as a proportional counter-violence. Fanon's use of the word 'revolt' is motivated by the urgent necessity of striking back at the colonizer's violence and rebuilding the humanity of the colonized from the very empowering act of revolt.

In contrast to Fanon's radical and rather unequivocal understanding of revolt in the context of anticolonial struggle, major postcolonial theorists have been particularly

[121] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Préface', in Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre,* pp.17-36 (p.29).
[122] Fanon, *Les Damnés de la* terre, p.291.
[123] Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952), p.183.

attentive to the way in which the concept has become the locus of semantic shifts and discursive circulation and manipulation. In his critical reading of T. E. Lawrence's writings on the Arab Revolt of 1916, Said notes for instance how this episode 'acquires meaning only as Lawrence designs meaning for it'.[124] In contexts of domination and submission, the orientalist gaze not only conveys but also inflects and reshapes historical events. By 'interspersing his knowing experience between the reader and history' and taking on 'the power to be – for a brief time – the Orient',[125] Lawrence 'reduces the entire narrative of the revolt (its momentary successes and its bitter failure) to *his* vision of himself'.[126] Said's discussion of Lawrence's account of the Arab Revolt demonstrates how the concept of revolt itself is transformed by the British writer from an intricate historical event into a biased narrative and a product of a personal experience based on discursive and manipulative strategies.

Similarly, in his discussion of a text on Arab revolutions by British American historian Bernard Lewis, Said is attentive to Lewis's' reductive definition of the word 'thawra', which is often used in Arabic to designate both 'revolt' and 'revolution'. Said observes that Lewis's association of the word with the image of 'a camel rising and generally with excitement (and not with a struggle on behalf of values)'[127] serves as a condescending and essentialized representation of the Arab, and works to devalue the very idea of revolt. Said also notes that Lewis's 'slighting' account of the word does not allow readers to recognize that 'innumerable people have an active commitment to it, in ways too complex for even Lewis's sarcastic scholarship to comprehend'.[128] On the one hand, the root 'th-w-r' refers in classical Arabic to several meanings including rising, anger, appearance, and even quest, which makes Lewis's selective approach questionable at the very least. On the other hand,

[124] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p.242.
[125] Said, *Orientalism*, p.243.
[126] Said, *Orientalism*, p.242.
[127] Said, *Orientalism*, p.315.
[128] Said, *Orientalism*, p.315.

by repositioning 'revolt' alongside words such as 'struggle', 'values', and 'commitment', Said seems more interested in highlighting the ethical and political dimensions of revolt than in acknowledging the semantic diversity of the word itself. Faced with an orientalist discourse that works to offset or at least to distort the challenging complexity of the word 'revolt', Said primarily seeks to restore its political and moral meanings in relation to the Arab subject.

Said's effort to uncover the tension that surrounds the reading and understanding of revolt in colonial and postcolonial contexts continues in *Culture and Imperialism*. Once more, revolt becomes the locus of a detailed discursive critique. In his discussion of Kipling's account of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 in his novel *Kim*, Said chooses to use 'the ideologically British designation' that is 'Mutiny' while noting that Indian writers refer to the same historical episode as a 'Rebellion'.[129] This lexical separation not only alludes to the tension that surrounds the reception of revolt in the Indian colonial context, but also supports Said's reading of the Mutiny as 'a clear demarcation' that 'reinforced the difference between colonizer and colonized'.[130] Said observes that Kipling's account of Indian revolt and British counter-revolt is astutely voiced by an Indian soldier 'who views his countrymen's revolt as an act of madness'[131] and 'whose more likely nationalist and aggrieved counterpart is never seen in the novel'.[132] What is most compelling here is how a narrative strategy is used by Kipling to reduce anticolonial rebellion to madness, and how the standpoint (the Indian soldier) from which the historical event is conveyed to the readers influences the understanding of revolt. By investigating the semantic and narrative reconstructions of revolt, Said's work helps us to elucidate the dynamics of representation and manipulation that surrounds the writing of revolt in colonial history.

[129] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p.146.
[130] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.147.
[131] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.147.
[132] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.148.

This reading of revolt as a complex and manifold process resonates profoundly in the work of Bhabha, notably in his reading of Ranajit Guha's elaborations on the specificity of rebel consciousness. In his article 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', Guha analyses how the consciousness of the rebel has been omitted from historical writings. 'Historiography', he writes, 'has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion'.[133] This omission hinges on various techniques including the assimilation of rebellion to natural phenomena and its explanation through political and economic factors, and in each case 'insurgency is regarded as *external* to the peasant's consciousness'.[134] Radical historiography also fails to identify the specificity of rebel consciousness by reducing it to a few individual leaders and elites, and by assimilating peasant revolts to a historical continuum built on an ideal moment. In his reading of Guha, Bhabha argues that what historiography fails to grasp is precisely the sense of agency located in the contradiction inherent to rebel consciousness and manifest in its combination of sectarianism and militancy, territoriality and generalization, solidarity and betrayal. While Guha considers peasant rebels as, in Rudrangshu Mukherjee's words, 'conscious agents working to overturn a power structure that they considered alien, exploitative and oppressive',[135] Bhabha sees rebel consciousness as a site of contradiction and hybridity. In doing so, he redefines revolt as an ambivalent praxis with an inherent power reinforced by the circulation of its contradictions.

This redefinition of revolt as a circulation of signs is further developed in Bhabha's original reading of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 through the distribution of 'chapatis' (flat breads) across rural rebellious areas. The use of 'chapatis' illustrates Bhabha's interest in

[133] Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. by Ranajit Guha & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.45-86 (p.46).
[134] Guha, p.47.
[135] Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt, 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance* (Wimbledon: Anthem Press, 2002), p.xiv.

'the temporality of repetition that constitutes those signs by which marginalized or insurgent subjects create a collective agency'.[136] The repeated circulation of 'chapatis' reproduces the sense of repetition already present – as seen earlier – in the concept of revolt itself. Drawing again on Guha's reading of 'chapatis' as a symbol of the transmission of rebel agency, Bhabha notes that 'whether we take the chapatis as historical "myth" or treat them as rumour, they represent the emergence of a form of social temporality that is iterative and indeterminate'.[137] For Bhabha, revolt is also an iterative process that builds on the circulation of meaning and the emotions it evokes. As he suggests, 'the indeterminate circulation of meaning as rumour or conspiracy, with its perverse, psychic affects of panic, constitutes the intersubjective realm of revolt and resistance'.[138] The circulation of 'chapatis' is a perfect illustration of how the praxis of revolt can be redefined and rethought in a colonial context. By generating a 'cultural and interpretative undecidability produced in the "present" of the colonial moment',[139] 'chapatis' encourage us to reconsider the dynamics of revolt from a new perspective. Initially Indian signs, 'they become the circulating signs of an "English" panic, disavowed by the official discourse of imperial history, represented in the language of indeterminacy'.[140] Revolt is redefined here as a form of semiotic or textual performance based on the repetition, circulation, and reception of the sign in a colonial context.

However, despite its original insight, Bhabha's reading has been rightly criticized for obscuring the fact that the Indian Mutiny was essentially about armed resistance and violent repression. If the sign that is 'chapatis' works as 'the bearer of rebel agency', notes Benita Parry, Bhabha

[136] Bhabha, p.199.
[137] Bhabha, p.200.
[138] Bhabha, p.200.
[139] Bhabha, p.206.
[140] Bhabha, p.207.

> somehow omits to recollect that the rebellion issued as an armed struggle, and was disarmed and repressed by exorbitant military force. The effect of moving agency from the subject-as-insurgent-actor to textual performance is to defuse resistance as practice directed at undermining and defeating an oppressive opponent.[141]

While agreeing with Parry's critical remarks, I would argue that her divergence from Bhabha's reading demonstrates that the understanding of revolt in colonial contexts is the locus of a persistent tension not only inherent to the concept and embedded in the opposition between the colonizer and the colonized, but also fuelled by the unavoidable separation between the textual and the political. Although postcolonial theory is attentive to the transformation and circulation of revolt in colonial and post-colonial contexts, it struggles to take on board the interconnections and differences between historical, narrative, and political forms of revolt.

b. For a 'critical nostalgia'

Similarly, postcolonial theory seems to reinforce the widespread understanding of nostalgia as a negative or at least a dubious concept. Nostalgia, as Boym observes, 'is something of a bad word, an affectionate insult at best', often considered as 'an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure'.[142] In colonial contexts, where identities and relationships are often built around opposition, resistance, and self-assertion, speaking of nostalgia often amounts to denying the subject's present agency and responsibility. From the perspective of the colonized, nostalgia is often reduced to the common and simplistic idea that a better pre-colonial condition was lost and

[141] Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Material Critique* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p.66.
[142] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xiv.

needs to be recovered through remembrance and longing. In colonial discourse, the view of nostalgia is no less negative. As Patricia M. E. Lorcin aptly observes,

> when associated with European imperialism, nostalgia brings to mind a rose-colored reminiscence of lost empire, understood as a response to a diminished global position. It is a regressive sentiment that circumvents the real issues of colonialism and obscures the extent of its violence.[143]

Whether referring to the 'loss of empire' or that of 'socio-cultural standing',[144] colonial nostalgia reinforces the negative perception of the concept and the suspicion that surrounds its reception.

In postcolonial contexts, nostalgia is more broadly associated with what has been stolen, expropriated, and silenced, and thus carries a particular sense of fear and threat. This is all the more true for postcolonial subjects who came to experience exile and separation. For generations of immigrants exiled for personal or political reasons, nostalgia can also be 'a taboo' in the sense of 'the predicament of Lot's wife, a fear that looking back may paralyze you forever, turning you into a pillar of salt, a pitiful moment to your own grief and the futility of departure'.[145] Looking back is either considered as a suspicious attempt to evade the present in the quest for an illusory past or heritage, or feared as a risk of opening up old wounds and rekindling new conflicts.

As a result of this suspicion, nostalgia is often seen as opposed not only to the present but also to reality. In his reading of Césaire's relationship with the African continent, Gregson Davis writes that 'Africa, he [Aimé Césaire] soon grasped, was not the distant, dimly conceived continent of nostalgic dreams, but a vital part of his own environment'.[146] Here, nostalgia is at once associated with 'distance', 'dimness', and

[143] Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia. European Women's Narratives of Algeria and Kenya 1900-Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.8-9.
[144] Lorcin, p.9.
[145] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xv.
[146] Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.75.

'dreams', and opposed to what supposedly constitutes the 'vital part' of Césaire's 'own' environment. According to Davis, Césaire had to reject nostalgia in order to connect with reality. Césaire's writings, however, seem not to exclude nostalgia but rather to use it as a relevant medium to reclaim power and celebrate identity and friendship. His collection *Ferrements,* for instance, includes a poem entitled 'Nocturne d'une nostalgie' in which nostalgia is described as '[une] rôdeuse'[147] that exhumes and rekindles a series of striking images from the poet's homeland. In *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Césaire's depiction of his grand-mother's deprived place culminates in 'une nostalgie de matelas',[148] an evocative image that metaphorically embodies his people's yearning for dignity and agency. Finally, in a poem written in tribute to his friend Léon Damas, Césaire writes: 'je vois les négritudes obstinées | les fidélités fraternelles | la nostalgie fertile | la réhabilitation de délires très anciens'.[149] As suggested by the word 'fertile', nostalgia refers here to the productive dialogue between Césaire and his soulmate Damas, as well as their collective intellectual production in the Negritude movement. This nostalgia carries not only a sense of empowerment embedded in the ethics and politics of friendship, but also an awareness of its own flaws and limitations, as suggested by Césaire's reference to obstinacy. A similar form of this remembering will be studied in Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's nostalgic evocations of their friends and fellow intellectuals.

Nostalgia is also, at times, rejected as a non-efficient and irrelevant quest for historical origins. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon's opposition to a rigid definition of black identity hinges on the necessity of getting rid of the persistent yearning for authentic and static origins. Although he often quotes Césaire and praises the dynamics of reinvention at play in his writings, Fanon still criticizes the nostalgic impulse of Negritude

[147] Aimé Césaire, 'Nocturne d'une nostalgie', in *Ferrements* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960), p.20.
[148] Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1971 [1939]), p.55.
[149] Aimé Césaire, 'Léon G. Damas, feu sombre toujours' in *Moi, laminaire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), p.17-18.

and its concentration upon the question of race. In a rather cynical passage, he mocks the quest for racial origins as 'une nostalgie du passé' and a search for 'ce paradis perdu des origines',[150] in reference to Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank's concept of the birth trauma and the human craving for a return to the tranquillity of the mother's womb. What Fanon seems to denounce in nostalgia is the unproductive return to the fantasies and myths of the past in opposition to the active recreation of black identity and the end of social suffering in the present. It is noteworthy that Fanon's second reference to nostalgia in the same book is also an indictment of the concept, this time from the perspective of the white man: 'Le Blanc civilisé garde la nostalgie irrationnelle d'époques extraordinaires de licence sexuelle, de scènes orgiaques, de viols non sanctionnés, d'incestes non réprimés'.[151] While associated with irrationality, nostalgia is rightly evoked to condemn the sexual reification and oppression of the black subject. In Fanon's discourse, nostalgia is what shapes the colonial representation of the black as limited to the genital, to the biological, in brief as an object of unsanctioned corporeal oppression. Thus, in the racialized colonial context, nostalgia remains a negative concept that either performs an unproductive quest for origins or rekindles racist and sexual fantasies projected onto the black.

This Fanonian negative perspective on nostalgia is further developed in a passage from *Les Damnés de la terre* in which the Martinican author comments on the so-called 'guerre de jazz'. The term refers to the dispute between those who defend the modern forms of jazz (such as the bebop) and those who claim that traditional jazz is and remains the only true form of this music. In a section discussing jazz and Negritude, Fanon fiercely criticizes the traditionalist position – adopted by white jazz specialists – for promoting a static and primitivist conception of black identity. He writes with a touch of irony: 'C'est

[150] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p.97.
[151] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p.133.

que le jazz ne doit être que la nostalgie cassée et désespérée d'un vieux nègre pris entre cinq whiskies, sa propre malédiction et la haine raciste des Blancs'.[152] Unsurprisingly, nostalgia is once again used with negative connotations of despair, curse, and racial determinism. Fanon's discourse suggests a clear opposition between nostalgia, associated with essentialism and primitivism, and creativity, serving the reinvention of both jazz music and black subjects. At the core of Fanon's reflection is the idea that nostalgia works against the reinvention of black identity and creation. Beyond the debate about jazz music, Jeremy F. Lane contends that Fanon's primary concern is that a national culture freed from Western influence 'should not reflect the fetishization of national tradition; it should not be purely backward-looking, nativist, or primitivist, but should, rather, reflect decolonized peoples' active engagement in the historical dialectic'.[153] This comment shows how nostalgia is again reductively understood as a backward-looking activity rather than a dynamic concept that can, following Boym, work across historical periods and help us to reconnect past, present, and future.

It is noteworthy that postcolonial theorists, in their effort to deconstruct the strategies of oppression and silencing exerted on the colonized, often make a point of rejecting nostalgia or keeping it at a distance as if the concept was inherently incompatible with their critical project. One revealing illustration of this tendency is Spivak's oft-quoted essay 'Can the Subaltern speak?'[154] In her opening disclaimers, Spivak insists that her choice to explore the example of the Hindu law should not be understood as 'a nostalgic investigation of the lost roots of [her] own identity' but rather as 'an accident of birth and

[152] Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p.231.
[153] Jeremy F. Lane, 'Leaving the South: Frantz Fanon, Modern Jazz and the Rejection of Négritude', in *American Creole: The Francophone Caribbean and the American South*, ed. by Martin Munro and Celia Britton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp.129-146 (p.139).
[154] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp.271-313.

education [that] has provided [her] with a *sense* of the historical canvas'.[155] Nostalgia is not only associated with the reductive idea of a lost identity but also read from a deterministic perspective as opposed to the accidental and historical grounding of postcolonial discourse. Spivak's defensive position against nostalgia is made more evident as she insists that her 'chief project is to point out the positivist-idealist variety of such nostalgia'.[156] Although Spivak hints at the existence of other types of nostalgia, she leaves these out of her essay and considers the concept as a perverse or spurious device that distorts social reality by idealizing the process of its recovery and reproducing Western fantasies. The Indian interpretation of the rite of widow sacrifice is based on a 'nativist argument' ('The women actually wanted to die') which is but 'a parody of the nostalgia for origins':[157] self-immolation and death are redefined as the extreme, displaced, yet internalized forms of nostalgia. It is more productive to read Spivak's suspicion towards nostalgia in the wider context of her critique of 'reverse ethnocentrism', a term that refers to both the patronizing Western interest in retrieving the native's information and the latter's will to reverse the colonized/colonizer opposition. As argued by Robert Young, Spivak's critique of reverse ethnocentrism consists in pointing out that

> those who evoke the 'nativist position' through a nostalgia for a lost or repressed culture idealize the possibility of that lost origin being recoverable in all its former plenitude without allowing for the fact that the figure of the lost origin, the 'other' that the colonizer has repressed, has itself been constructed in terms of the colonizer's own self-image.[158]

If the fact that the lost origins of the colonized have been constructed or at least transformed by the colonizer's modes of representation is understandable, the rejection of the very concept of nostalgia on the ground that it embodies a risk of idealization or the

[155] Spivak, p.281.
[156] Spivak, p.281.
[157] Spivak, p.297.
[158] Robert Young, *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p.168.

perpetuation of colonial structures and categories of thought is questionable at the very least. For nostalgia is once more too quickly associated with notions such as 'nativism', 'essentialism', and 'revisionism'. As a subaltern critic and postcolonial intellectual, Spivak is far more concerned with exploring social and concrete reality than with uncovering the potential role of nostalgia and nostalgic discourse in reshaping this reality. As she openly admits, her paper is not only 'committed to the notion that […] a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism'[159] but it also 'operates on the notion that all such clear-cut nostalgias for lost origins are suspect, especially as grounds for counterhegemonic ideological production'.[160] Spivak's reading of nostalgia is reductive in the sense that it remains limited to the notion of 'lost origin' and overdetermined by the critique of imperialism and anticolonial ideology.

In contrast to Spivak's dismissive stances, Bhabha's consistent use of the notion of the uncanny to characterize culture suggests at first sight a deeper engagement with the concept of nostalgia. In Bhabha's theory of hybridity and ambivalence, the past is restaged and the origin is reinscribed in an ongoing dynamics of recreation and contradiction. The notion of home is subject to division (homeland / land of exile), repetition (exile as a repetition of previous life), and difference (exile as a transformation of previous life). It turns out, however, that Bhabha also excludes nostalgia, not for its inefficiency or out of suspicion like Spivak, but rather because his theory of hybridity is precisely concerned with what happens *between* loss and nostalgia, not *in* loss and nostalgia. A relevant illustration of this argument can be found in his reading of the trope of 'invisibleness' in two poems by Indian poet Adil Jussawalla, who 'writes about the "missing person" that

[159] Spivak, p.291.
[160] Spivak, p.307.

haunts the identity of the postcolonial bourgeois',[161] and Guyanese author Meiling Jin, who describes slave descendants' experience of being 'invisibilized'.[162] Bhabha considers that:

> The elision of identity in these tropes […] is not an ontology of lack that, on its other side, becomes a nostalgic demand for a liberatory, non-repressed identity. It is the uncanny space and time *between* those two moments of being, their incommensurable differences – if such a place can be imagined – signified in the process of repetition, that give the evil eye or the missing person their meaning'.[163]

For Bhabha, the trope of invisibleness reveals less lack and nostalgia than an intermediate, hybrid, and most strikingly abstract position. As suggested by his evocation of 'a nostalgic demand' as a 'becoming' of an absent subjectivity, Bhabha is more interested in the transformation of nostalgic moments and spaces than in nostalgia itself.

In another passage dedicated to the narration of nation from the perspective of Salman Rushdie's works, Bhabha notes 'the emergence of a hybrid national narrative that turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive "anterior" and displaces the historical present – opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects'.[164] In Bhabha's conception, the nation is narrated in a temporally dynamic process where past and present are never quite identical with what they actually are. As a result, this shifting context that defines Bhabha's aesthetics of transformation and interstitiality leaves little space for either retrospective or prospective nostalgia. As he overtly puts it, hybridity is 'to dream not of the past or present, nor the continuous present; it is not the nostalgic dream of tradition, nor the Utopian dream of modern progress; it is the dream of translation, […] the act of living on borderlines'.[165] The problem is that nostalgia thrives precisely on liminality, separation, departures, and dreams of return, hence the difficulty of approaching and investigating the

[161] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.45.
[162] Bhabha, p.46.
[163] Bhabha, p.53.
[164] Bhabha, p.167.
[165] Bhabha, p.226.

concept in the unstable realm of borderlines. As will be developed in the Moroccan context, nostalgia can also be approached as an object of investigation that contains in itself postcolonial aspirations and disillusionments.

The tension surrounding the acceptance and rejection of nostalgia resonates, albeit in a different form, in Said's non-theoretical book *After the Last Sky*, a collaborative work with Swiss-German photographer Jean Mohr about Palestinian people. One critic sceptically writes that 'while there may be a tone of nostalgia in *After the Last Sky*, to view it as merely nostalgic would be to trivialize both the work and what Said has to say there'.[166] While reducing Said's work to a mere form of nostalgic writing would be reductive, reducing nostalgia itself to a trivial form of expression is more than questionable.

On the one hand, not only are Said's comments on Mohr's photographs infused with a persistent and deep sense of personal nostalgia (and at times of melancholia), but Said becomes even the conveyor of other nostalgias, the nostalgic mouthpiece of Palestinians' longing for their homes. In a passage evoking the two cities of Acre and Jaffa, Said writes:

> I know many natives of these two coastal cities with excruciatingly nostalgic recollections of their homes, their adolescent pastimes, their family life and communal pleasures all left behind. But they do exist […] with a solidity and durability that can be recaptured now and again.[167]

Here, a complicated nostalgia connotes pain and pleasure, loss and recollection, solidity and instability, individual and collective memories. More importantly, nostalgia represents

[166] Arif Dirlik, 'Placing Edward Said: Space Time and the Travelling Theorist', in *Edward Said and the Post-Colonial*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft and Hussein Kadhim (Huntington, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2001), pp.1-29 (p.13).
[167] Jean Mohr and Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p.136.

a repetitive process ('now and again') that questions the unstable nature of Palestinian identity and its precarious relationship with the homeland.

On the other hand, Said fiercely resists nostalgia which he contrasts to the necessity of engaging with the present. In a note about the photograph of two Palestinian women ironing, Said writes that 'we are represented addressing our world as a secular place, without nostalgia for a lost transcendence. Here are people doing their utmost to address the everyday material world with purpose and grit'.[168] The Palestinians' everyday anxiety leaves little space for nostalgic recollection and, instead, requires a constant and enduring work *in* the present. While their past is, in Said's words, 'irredeemable and inaccessible',[169] the present needs to be saved from a similar end: 'You learn a certain kind of caring for and attention to your immediate situation if you know that in time it too can become the place you will have lost forever'.[170] As a result, Said's work at once excludes nostalgia for the inaccessible past and works to prevent a potential nostalgia for the present itself were it to become in its turn lost and irredeemable. It is at once Said's use of and resistance to the nostalgic impulse that allows for the representation of Palestinian people and the narration of their aspirations and concerns.

This tension that surrounds Said's ambivalent treatment of nostalgia in *After the Last Sky* has been aptly described as his 'exercise of "critical nostalgia", in which representation and narration converge to allow recognition of the excluded'.[171] It is precisely this concept of 'critical nostalgia' that seems lacking in postcolonial theory. Nostalgia can be considered, beyond idealization and suspicion, as a productive phenomenon that serves both the reconstruction and critique of postcolonial subjectivity.

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[168] Mohr and Said, p.146.
[169] Mohr and Said, p.149.
[170] Mohr and Said, p.150.
[171] Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom, 'Introduction. Emancipation and Representation', in *Edward Said. A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation*, ed. by Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), pp.1-22 (p.13).

A recent anthology addressing nostalgia in the experimental literature of the early twentieth century considers the concept of nostalgia as 'an interpretative stance, one that mediates the interplay between the individual and the collective, continuity and rupture, memory and desire, escapist fantasy and social critique'.[172] The interpretative and mediating role of revolt and nostalgia is of particular importance to the Moroccan postcolonial context where sociocultural issues and political failures require a functional reading of both concepts. My contention is that the dynamics of aspiration and disillusionment in postcolonial Morocco can gain from the fact that both revolt and nostalgia operate in a transitory moment between change and stability, loss and recovery, exile and return. The reconsideration of both concepts as interpretative tools in Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's works helps us to better understand not only their individual expression of discontent and personal evocations of lost spaces and temporalities, but also their collective yearning for political and sociocultural change. While postcolonial theorists have tended to circumscribe the meaning and praxis of both revolt and nostalgia, mainly to deconstruct hegemonic discourses and to recover the voices of the colonized and the subaltern, a broader critical study that builds on the creative and transformative potential of both concepts can open up new perspectives on postcolonial literary and intellectual production.

[172] Tammy Clewell, 'Introduction: Past 'Perfect' and Present 'Tense': The Abuses and Uses of Modernist Nostalgia', in *Modernism and Nostalgia*, ed. by Tammy Clewell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.1-22 (p.1)

Chapter 2: Voices and Politics of Revolt

From Chraïbi to Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi: Francophone voices of revolt in postcolonial Morocco

The question of revolt in Moroccan postcolonial literature is often dated back to Chraïbi and his eminent novel *Le Passé simple*, published in 1954 on the cusp of independence. This explosive fictional work, published at the time of anti-colonial struggle and largely inspired by the author's personal life, offered a genuine and unprecedentedly fierce critique of Moroccan social, cultural, and political patterns. From a literary perspective, Chraïbi's revolt not only subverted the use of French as the language of the colonizer but also played on 'the disruption of those dynamics of representativity that identify writing with a person, a "voice" or a place'.[173] As shown by Nicholas Harrison, the novel at once includes elements of social, cultural, and linguistic provocative transgression, 'makes a display of [this] transgressing',[174] and 'frustrate[s] the search for a reliable and authentic Moroccan "voice"'.[175] Besides Harrison's warning against the risk of confusing descriptive and political representations in *Le Passé simple*, I would like to retain from his reading that the dynamics of revolt developed by Chraïbi should not be reduced to a one-way and simplistic definition. Chraïbi's revolt instead needs to be understood as inherently complex from both a historical and a literary perspective. Drawing on this reflection, I would argue that the Moroccan postcolonial discourse of revolt constitutes a multifaceted and encompassing movement, with distinct forms of transgression playing out on various levels and oscillating between different tones.

[173] Nicholas Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p.111.
[174] N. Harrison, p.145.
[175] N. Harrison, p.112.

Interestingly, Chraïbi's revolt and the subversive project of his novel *Le Passé simple* were discussed in both *Souffles* and the early works by the three Moroccan writers. The fifth issue of the journal featured an article by Laâbi entitled 'Défense du *Passé simple*', in which he praises Chraïbi as 'un commenceur' who succeeded in elaborating 'un diagnostic selon sa révolte et non d'après les schèmes économico-sociologiques préétablis',[176] thus propelling the Moroccan novel into the age of modernity. In his first novel *Agadir*, Khaïr-Eddine comparably pays tribute to Chraïbi, 'mon ami l'écrivain qui a quitté le pays avant moi, il a su donner le ton à cette querelle traditionnelle qui me déprime, me décalque […]'.[177] Similarly, Khatibi argues that '*Le Passé simple* vaut par son esprit d'agitation et appartient à cette littérature subversive qui brise les illusions',[178] although he refuses to identify the novel with the reality of Moroccan society. These intertextual echoes not only attest to the appropriation by the three writers of Chraïbi's legacy but also define his pioneering discourse of revolt as a pivotal moment in Moroccan postcolonial literature.

Further to this gathering around the figure of Chraïbi as the literary father of Moroccan revolt, I would argue that Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi offered in their respective early works distinct forms of revolt which, once brought together, help us to better understand the complexity of oppositional discourses in postcolonial Morocco. In this chapter, my aim is to probe these distinct yet interconnected forms, discuss their triggering factors and key manifestations, and demonstrate that they constitute a dynamic and multifaceted revolt tied up with the political context and open to four levels of interpretation. While Khaïr-Eddine's revolt transforms personal traumas into a radical form of political struggle, Laâbi's finds its sources in a genuine combination of poetic creativity and political activism. In contrast, Khatibi's revolt uses sociology and Marxist theory to offer a broader and more intellectualized understanding of revolt in relation to the project of cultural

[176] Abdellatif Laâbi, 'Défense du *Passé simple*', in *Souffles* 5 (Rabat, 1967), pp. 18-21 (p.20).
[177] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Agadir* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1967), p.100.
[178] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin* (Paris : Editions François Maspéro, 1968), p.80.

decolonization. Finally, the Palestinian question represents for Khatibi and Laâbi a transnational form of revolt, redefined as a direct and engaged confrontation which extends the discourse of opposition and fuels the struggle against local and global forms of political disillusionment.

By focusing on the period of the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter seeks to emphasize the link between the early production of the three writers and the context of political turmoil not only in Morocco but also in the Arab world. The aim is not to follow a strictly chronological treatment of Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's works published in this period but to gain a clearer understanding of the significance of revolt in their early production and the many ways in which the concept has inflected their interaction with political and cultural issues. The aesthetic forms of revolt in the works of the three writers are discussed here only insofar as they serve to illustrate and engage with the political context, and will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

It is noteworthy that the four applications of revolt detailed above have always interacted with one another. The heated debates that followed the publication of *Le Passé simple* have revealed a deep-seated conflict between anticolonial revolt, embodied by the nationalist position, and cultural revolt against patriarchal society, developed throughout Chraïbi's novel. The same conflictual relationship is manifest in contemporary Morocco between those who call for a radical political, social, and religious reform, and those who see in such calls a continuation of the Western influence and a form of neo-colonial dominance. My contention is that the Moroccan postcolonial malaise thrives precisely on the continuation of this conflict which mirrors the deep wounds and fractures of the Moroccan social body. In this respect, it is striking to see substantial differences in the three writers' individual approaches to revolt during this early period. While Khaïr-Eddine and Laâbi opt for a head-on confrontation with the Moroccan regime, the former from

France in his works of prose and poetry and the latter at home through writing and political activism, Khatibi favours an indirect and more reflective approach to resist authoritarian and dogmatic discourses. As this chapter will demonstrate, the intersection of these distinct strategies allows for a more complex understanding of the concept of revolt in the works of the three writers.

Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine: From ontological to political revolt

It is Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's texts that embody the most radical and extreme forms of revolt, shaped by a tormented personal life. Born in 1941 in a small village located in the Anti-Atlas, near the southern city of Tafraout, Khaïr-Eddine faced in his childhood a series of traumas: the absence of his father, a retail trader who moved to Casablanca, the separation from his homeland as he joined his father in 1952, and his father's repudiation of his mother back home. According to Jean-Paul Michel, this later event can be considered as the triggering factor of the poet's revolt: 'On peut dater de là une révolte contre le père, la famille, la religion, les autorités établies qui déterminera profondément la destinée du poète'.[179] Khaïr-Eddine's all-encompassing revolt is firstly a response to the difficult circumstances of his chaotic personal life and its harmful impact on his psyche and body. Khaïr-Eddine transforms his personal torments into a broader expression of political and sociocultural discontent. His work, I would argue, is the perfect illustration of how individual and collective forms of malaise are combined and conveyed in writing.

One of Khaïr-Eddine's first poems, *Nausée noire*, starts with an uncompromising self-portrait: 'Un prisme ouvert posé au hasard des chardons | et nulle | cause pour vivre'.[180] While the metaphor of the prism points to the inner split and dislocation resulting from the

[179] Jean-Paul Michel, 'Note bio-bibliographique', in Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009 [1967]), pp.137-141 (p.139).
[180] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.23.

passage through successive traumas, the phrase 'au hasard des chardons' refers to the poet's understanding of these traumas as random and cruel episodes of pain and suffering. The poet's malaise is not only psychological but also physical. His body is regularly described as deeply affected and altered. In his first poetry collection *Soleil arachnide*, Khaïr-Eddine refers to his 'corps de fiente et d'écume'[181] and his 'peaux succinctes'.[182] The body is permanently evoked as an object of disgust and contempt that needs to be purified and regenerated. I would describe Khaïr-Eddine's revolt firstly as ontological and visceral, for it is at once rooted in his very subjectivity and deeply marked by the pains of his personal life. His resistance echoes that of Job in the Biblical text, defined by Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Negri as 'a refusal as profound as the pain that one has endured: an ontological refusal that follows an ontological pain'.[183] Khaïr-Eddine's poetic voice uses revolt to respond to and expel a deep-seated feeling of unease and anxiety. The literary text becomes at once a reflection of and a response to the writer's malaise.

Khaïr-Eddine's revolt, however, grows beyond its individual sources to become closely attuned to the collective malaise in 1960s Morocco. As rightly suggested by Moroccan scholar Abdellah Baïda, Khaïr-Eddine's subversive writing is a permanent quest for 'des expressions et un style aptes à rendre compte du malaise du peuple, sans le trahir'.[184] After his first move to Agadir in 1961, only one year following the terrible earthquake that levelled the city,[185] Khaïr-Eddine worked for two years as a surveyor for the Department of Social Security and carried out investigation work amongst the survivors. In his first work of prose *Agadir*, published in 1967 and largely inspired by his experience in the southern city, the earthquake becomes a metaphor for the collective post-independence

[181] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.42.
[182] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.50.
[183] Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009), p.12.
[184] Abdellah Baïda, *Les Voix de Khaïr-Eddine* (Rabat : Editions Bouregreg, 2007), p.179.
[185] The Agadir earthquake occurred on 23rd February 1960 and caused between 12,000 and 15,000 deaths.

disillusionment. Starting from the first pages, the narrator thinks of writing to his superior and 'lui signaler le peu de chances que j'ai de redonner vie aux gens d'ici […] Lui dire que toute tentative de rétablissement serait vaine;'[186] The violence of the earthquake is conflated with that of the Moroccan regime, most notably the repression of student protests in Casablanca in 1965. The malaise of the writer finds a continuation in that of the Moroccan people faced with a terrible outbreak of violence and repression. In a striking passage, Khaïr-Eddine evokes

> les nuits de couvre-feu, les ronrons de camions bâchés pleins de cadavres, les enterrements anonymes, les petits matins tremblants, du sang asséché sur la route, moi et mon vélomoteur, les jeunes gens battus par les militaires, les perquisitions, les fouilles, les fausses identités, les grèves permanentes, les rafles.[187]

As evidenced by the position of the word 'moi', the Moroccan subject is literally caught in the grip of the repression machine, surrounded by violence and horror in a public space where individual and collective forms of malaise are brought together to trigger a radical and all-encompassing revolt.

Throughout his early works, Khaïr-Eddine consistently transformed his genuinely individual and solipsistic anger into a form of political struggle. This shift from the individual to the collective coincides with Camus's conception of revolt in *L'Homme révolté* as, in Charles Forsdick's words, 'a means of transforming individual resistance into collective solidarity'[188], summarized in his oft-quoted statement 'Je me révolte donc nous sommes'[189]. Khaïr-Eddine's revolt draws on personal traumas and anxieties to elaborate a radical discourse of dissidence that uses destructive strategies and seems at moments chaotic and anarchistic. Interestingly, French author and activist Daniel Guérin contends

[186] Khaïr-Eddine, *Agadir*, p.12.
[187] Khaïr-Eddine, *Agadir*, p.99-100.
[188] Charles Forsdick, 'Camus and Sartre: the great quarrel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*, ed. by Edward J. Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.118-130 (p.121).
[189] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.38.

that ‘anarchism can be described first and foremost as a visceral revolt. The anarchist is above all a man in revolt. He rejects society as a whole along with its guardians’[190]. If Khaïr-Eddine never openly considered himself as an anarchist, his revolt targeted a wide range of political and cultural symbols. As he explains in one of his interviews in 1968, ‘il ne s’agit pas de défendre une idéologie particulière dans un livre, mais de faire une œuvre de contestation, de contestation radicale’[191]. Khaïr-Eddine’s revolt derived its strength from this peculiar ability to work on several fronts and promote a radical and often vitriolic discourse of dissidence and disobedience.

One recurring target of Khaïr-Eddine’s early revolt is the Moroccan monarch. If nearly every work from the period of the 1960s and 1970s includes a ruthless critique of King Hassan II, Khaïr-Eddine’s revolt crystallizes in his poem *Le Roi* where the figure of the king becomes the focal point of his wrath. While the sacred body of the monarch is provocatively associated with crime (‘sa tête assassine’[192]), violence (‘son eczéma d’orages’[193]), illness (‘tes noms de variole’[194]) and death (‘le leader des creuseurs d’abysses’[195]), the poet’s pejorative portrait of the King culminates in the metaphor of ‘hydre de l’ère’[196] which denounces the longevity and regenerative power of Moroccan monarchy. Published one year after Casablanca’s bloody riots, the poem holds the King responsible for the deaths caused among young demonstrators with whom Khaïr-Eddine identifies himself: ‘le roi m’exécute | de par sa livrée de plomb’[197]. Unlike Jean Déjeux who contends that the poet ‘décrit à sa façon une situation en l’exaspérant et en se sentant

[190] Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: from Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p.13.
[191] Abdellatif Abboubi, *Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine. Le temps des refus. Entretiens 1966-1995* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 1998), p.27.
[192] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.65.
[193] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.66.
[194] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.72.
[195] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.70.
[196] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.66.
[197] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.66.

directement atteint par ce qu'il dénonce comme opprimant',[198] I would argue that this strategy of identification works rhetorically rather than emotionally to reinforce the discourse of revolt by portraying a poet who stands with the popular masses and shares their pain and tragedy. A different strategy is adopted in *Histoire d'un bon Dieu*, a violent text in which Khaïr-Eddine depicts the Moroccan monarch as a deposed God wandering in the streets and reflecting on his crimes: 'J'ai tabassé les pauvres et les fidèles. J'ai fait couler leur sang. J'ai emprisonné les hommes et les femmes qui ne voulaient pas de moi;'[199] As the head of the state admits his responsibility and descends into misery and helplessness, Khaïr-Eddine's use of 'je' allows him to explore the personality of the monarch and realize, in writing, a political justice that remains inaccessible in practice. Thus, Khaïr-Eddine's aesthetics at once attest to and challenge the stagnation of Moroccan politics.

As suggested by the title of *Histoire d'un bon Dieu*, Khaïr-Eddine's acerbic critique of royal power is often combined in his early works with a violent revolt against religion, another of his favourite targets. The divine constitutes alongside the political regime and the figure of the father what Baïda calls a 'trilogie de la peur',[200] namely a three-fold authoritarianism which Khaïr-Eddine regularly attacks in his works. This involves a systematic and often excessive critique of religious beliefs, practices, and officials. In *Agadir*, for instance, the narrator rejects the foundational discourse of divine judgment after death[201] while the narrative of *Histoire d'un bon Dieu* instead champions 'la religion de l'esprit'[202] and ends up with the symbolic disappearance of a mosque and a provocative yet absurd act of religious disobedience: 'Je fis le ramadan sans oublier de gruger quelques

[198] Jean Déjeux, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Sherbrooke: Editions Naaman, 1974), p.421.
[199] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Corps négatif* suivi de *Histoire d'un bon Dieu* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p.95.
[200] Baïda, p.227.
[201] 'Les morts ne pensent pas quoi qu'on dise ils ne sont pas interrogés ni ne bougent ils ne grattent pas la plaque de schiste dont on les enferme et personne ne descend du ciel pour les questionner sur leur croyance passée' in Khaïr-Eddine, *Agadir*, p.94.
[202] Khaïr-Eddine, *Corps négatif*, p.152.

rats qui s'étaient avancés vers moi tout cuits'.[203] Khaïr-Eddine's whimsical association of the act of fasting, one of the five sacred pillars of Islam, with the dreadful image of the narrator eating rats serves to undermine religious practice by using the disalienating power of irony.

Khaïr-Eddine's transgressive stances become more harsh and intense when directed against religious representatives. In *Agadir*, the character of the imam is depicted as a powerless official shamefully serving the regime and confusing the figure of the monarch with God. In Khaïr-Eddine's novel *Moi l'aigre*, published in 1970, religious officials are identified with a set of pejorative and caustic designations, including 'tragédiens de l'Islam',[204] 'crocos en djellabas',[205] 'fonctionnaires du paradis et de l'enfer',[206] 'le fquih flic du Dieu vengeur et vandale',[207] and 'le taleb, vrai sorcier élu par les âmes mortes'.[208] These scathing and grotesque descriptions not only throw into question the legitimacy of religious officials but also denounce, as suggested by the phrases 'fonctionnaires du paradis' and 'flic du Dieu', their manipulation of religion for political and personal purposes. In the central play, the character of the imam is mauled by the bourgeois assembly and violently mistreated by the monarch who criticizes his lack of theological knowledge:

> Qu'est-ce qu'a voulu dire le Coran? L'as-tu bien lu au moins ? Non. […] On t'a appris le Coran, un point c'est tout, mais tu ne l'as pas assimilé. […] Tu te gargarises des mots théologiques depuis ton enfance mais tu n'as jamais essayé d'en approfondir le sens. On t'a fait avaler des textes et tu les as rejetés sans les avoir digérés.[209]

[203] Khaïr-Eddine, *Corps négatif*, p.188.
[204] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Moi l'aigre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), p.18.
[205] Khaïr-Eddine, *Moi l'aigre*, p.20.
[206] Khaïr-Eddine, *Moi l'aigre*, p.143.
[207] Khaïr-Eddine, *Moi l'aigre*, p.143.
[208] Khaïr-Eddine, *Moi l'aigre*, p.145.
[209] Khaïr-Eddine, *Moi l'aigre*, p.77-78.

The aesthetic choice of theatrical form allows Khaïr-Eddine at once to stage his anger and to perform his resistance to the power of religious authorities. In the passage above, the monarch's critique articulates Khaïr-Eddine's revolt against traditional methods of religious teaching in Morocco which use mainly violence and rote learning while dismissing the deep meanings and nuances of the sacred texts. It is worth noting that Khaïr-Eddine's period at the Koranic school was another traumatic experience of violence and alienation, and his fierce attacks against religious symbols can also be read as a radical response to the devastating impact of this personal experience. In one of his interviews in 1969, Khaïr-Eddine calls to 'évincer les fantoches, liquider tout esprit conservateur qui ignore la ligne de l'avenir, éliminer l'Islam tel qu'il est pratiqué et imposé. Chacun doit être libre de croire ou de ne pas croire'.[210] His revolt, as suggested by this statement, also provides the ground for a religious reform to eradicate political expediency, modernize teaching methods, and protect public liberties.

The troubling radicalism of Khaïr-Eddine's attitude towards political and religious authorities not only bears the traces of his difficult personal circumstances but also carries a strong willingness to resist an ongoing individual and collective malaise. A man in revolt, Khaïr-Eddine mobilizes the inner roots and deep energy of his anger to frame a discourse of political and cultural dissent. His conception of revolt as an extensive and overarching process combines the ontological and the political, and works to legitimize a provocative redefinition of writing. Khaïr-Eddine's project is founded on the idea that 'écrire est une arme'.[211] The originality of his revolt lies in the conflation of the visceral and the political as his personal circumstances continually fuel his 'weaponized' conception of writing. Khaïr-Eddine's subversive aesthetics serve at once to convey his personal discontent, to challenge Moroccan political authoritarianism, and, as will be discussed in detail in the

[210] Interview by Monique Hennebelle, in *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique* 5 (Juin 1969); reproduced in Déjeux, p.426.
[211] Abboubi, p.22.

following chapter, to turn literary form into a material space of contestation that bears the marks of destruction and resistance.

Abdellatif Laâbi: Poetic creativity as political revolt

Laâbi's revolt, in contrast to the personal roots of Khaïr-Eddine's dissidence, is closely tied up with political activism. Born in Fez in 1942, Laâbi worked as a high-school teacher in Rabat and took part in 1963 in the creation of the Moroccan University Theatre in which he developed 'une sensibilité très forte pour le militantisme culturel'[212]. Although Jacques Alessandra suggests that 'la rupture avec le monde de l'artisanat paternel a en quelque sorte été à l'origine de sa trajectoire d'écrivain',[213] Laâbi's revolt, unlike that of Khaïr-Eddine, is less influenced by the circumstances of his personal life than driven by the prominence of political activism. Besides his role as the editor-in-chief of *Souffles*, Laâbi was a leading figure in the far left and co-founded with Serfaty in 1970 the Marxist-Leninist underground movement 'Ila al-Amam' ('Forward' in Arabic).

In Laâbi's early works, published alongside his activity in *Souffles*, revolt can be defined as primarily political in the sense that it conceives of the act of writing as an urgent and radical response to the abuses of the Moroccan regime, culminating in the bloody repression of student protests in Casablanca in March 1965, and the failure of pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism in the aftermath of the humiliating defeat in the Six-Day War in June 1967. The far-reaching impact of the later event haunts Laâbi's first work of prose, *L'Œil et la Nuit* (1969), which includes a fierce indictment of Arab deficiencies: 'O naïfs. Nos frères. […] Cela fait des siècles que nous sommes tombés en panne. Que nous tournons en rond […] La rumeur des fraternités de plomb. La sauvage course pour la possession et

[212] Jacques Alessandra, *Abdellatif Laâbi, traversée de l'œuvre* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2008), p.17.
[213] Alessandra, *Abdellatif Laâbi*, p.16.

l'orgueil'.[214] As suggested by Laâbi's use of the first person plural 'nous', the defeat of 1967 sparked a tidal wave of shock and despair and was seen by many as a destructive blow to the Arab collective body. This physical impact is described in Laâbi's first poem *Race* which accumulates a series of striking images referring, as in Khaïr-Eddine's texts, to inner split and to physical harm: 'c'est que nous sommes seuls Vidés Contrebattus';[215] 'nous nous sentons séparés';[216] 'JE | cancéreux';[217] 'Nudité | ma stature'.[218] The use of both 'je' and 'nous' suggests that repression and humiliation have affected not only the poet but also his global vision of the Moroccan and Arab subject. The successive references to disease, nakedness, separation, and emptiness portray a subjectivity inhabited by loss and powerlessness. This representation of individual and collective violence as a prelude to the poet's revolt is developed in Laâbi's poems from *Le Règne de Barbarie*, a collection written between 1965 and 1967. Self-alienation ('ma face qui ne me ressemble plus'[219]), the loss of a sense of identity ('le nom perdu | cloué à d'autres himalayas'[220]), and the sensorial detachment from the outer world ('la dissolution de l'œil | le partage des sens'[221]) work as triggering factors for a revolt primarily concerned with the need to recover a sense of self as a physical and social being. In doing so, Laâbi's dynamics of revolt echo Camus's statement that 'le révolté […], dans son premier mouvement, refuse qu'on touche à ce qu'il est. Il lutte pour l'intégrité d'une partie de son être'.[222] The core of the poem becomes the reflected image of both the undermined subject and his project of individual and collective reconstruction.

[214]Abdellatif Laâbi, *L'Œil et la nuit* (Paris: La Différence, 2003 [1969]), p.145.
[215] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Race: Itinéraire oral* (Casablanca: Editions Atlantes, 1967), p.1.
[216] Laâbi, *Race*, p.1.
[217] Laâbi, *Race*, p.14.
[218] Laâbi, *Race*, p.14.
[219] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2006), p.31.
[220] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.44.
[221] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.59.
[222] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.32.

The originality of Laâbi's revolt lies, I would argue, in the way in which it redefines the literary space as the locus of a political awareness served by poetic creativity. In other words, Laâbi's political revolt seeks to perform – through writing – the concept of 'engagement' in a Sartrian sense. If 'la littérature engagée' can be defined, in Benoît Denis's words, as 'une pratique littéraire associée étroitement à la politique, aux débats qu'elle génère et aux combats qu'elle implique',[223] this close bond is guaranteed by the multiple ways in which Laâbi's poetry records, embodies, and resists the malaise of the Moroccan subject without necessarily espousing Khaïr-Eddine's weaponized conception of writing. In one of his later interviews, Laâbi argues that

> dans la création, on n'est pas engagé comme dans l'Armée du Salut, on est d'abord engagé dans sa fonction, celle d'un créateur qui a pour souci de maîtriser la réalité dans laquelle il baigne afin de transformer la conscience qu'on en a.[224]

While Khaïr-Eddine writes often in an outburst of anger to undermine the political and sociocultural order, Laâbi seeks to get hold of it and navigate through its complexity. This effort is evident in the titles of his early works and the way they use the values of struggle and hope to resist the representations of authoritarian power and oppression. While in *L'Œil et la Nuit* the eye symbolizes the poet's omniscience and ability to see through the obscure fate of the Moroccan and Arab nations, the titles of *L'Arbre de fer fleurit* and *Sous le bâillon le poème* conceive of poetry as an underlying space that blossoms and emerges out of the repression and the silencing of the poet. In an interesting study, Alessandra notes that the titles of Laâbi's works are 'performatifs. Ils veulent agir sur le public en s'intégrant dans un horizon d'attente où la création littéraire et poétique constitue une réponse possible

[223] Benoît Denis, *Littérature et engagement : de Pascal à Sartre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), p.9.
[224] Abdellatif Laâbi, *La Brûlure des interrogations. Entretiens réalisés par Jacques Alessandra* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1985), p. 22.

au délire rationnel des Pouvoirs'.[225] The performative dimension of Laâbi's revolt draws on his individual experience as a political prisoner and militant to resist collective violence and repression, and uses a series of innovative strategies of opposition and backlash that attest to the creative energy of his poetry.

One of these strategies, which I would call 'inversion', is a discursive technique that consists in appropriating and subverting symbols of authoritarianism and oppression by reusing them in a different context. In his long poem *L'Arbre de fer fleurit*, written behind bars, the power balance between the prosecutor and the prosecuted is inverted as the latter suddenly becomes 'le maître et le possesseur'[226] and Laâbi warns in capital letters: 'nous verrons | QUI EST PRISONNIER DE QUI | QUI JUGERA QUI | QUI CONDAMNERA QUI'.[227] The real prisoner, Laâbi's verse suggests, is not the political militant who struggles behind bars for freedom and justice, but rather the prosecutor and the torturer who operate within the confines of their violent and inhuman techniques. Laâbi's revolt draws on this creative reversal to restore the prisoner's dignity and uncover the ideological narrowness of his enemies. Similarly, in his poem 'Etat de violence', Laâbi diverts the specific vocabulary of torture by reusing it to promote the virtue of patience, as he writes: 'creuse ta patience | mets-lui des bandelettes | du scotch sur les oreilles'.[228] The infamous toolkit of torture ('bandelettes', 'scotch') is astutely used in a contradictory context to reinforce the poet's ability to support humiliation and oppression. More than a rhetorical device, Laâbi's technique of inversion performs a self-centred resistance against the devastating impact of torture. While initially operating on an individual level, this expression of revolt expands to denounce the broader forms of collective repression and

[225] Jacques Alessandra, 'Remarques sur le langage des titres chez Abdellatif Laâbi', in *Psychanalyse et texte littéraire au Maghreb, Etudes littéraires maghrébines n°1,* ed. by Charles Bonn et Yves Baumstimler (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1991), pp.173-180 (p.180).
[226] Abdellatif Laâbi, *L'Arbre de fer fleurit* (Paris : P.J. Oswald, 1974), p.30.
[227] Laâbi, *L'Arbre de fer fleurit*, p.33-34.
[228] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.41.

humiliation exerted by the Moroccan regime against the political body of its opponents. Laâbi's use of the imperative form ('creuse'; 'mets') allows him to address not only himself but also the unified body of his political fellows, thus creating a sense of solidarity and collective resistance in writing.

The other technique that attests to the simultaneously poetic and political impulse of Laâbi's revolt consists in replacing the figures and symbols of authoritarian power by those pertaining to popular masses or to the poet himself. This technique, which I will designate as 'substitution and regeneration', works to topple the political order and promote an alternative configuration in writing. When Laâbi writes in *Race*: 'la septième décade du dernier soleil | me verra monarque',[229] 'l'homme parlera | son règne arrivera',[230] and 'proférateur je suis | édifiant à l'insoumission | un royaume',[231] he is symbolically substituting the Moroccan subject for the figure of the King. Against the reign of monarchical autocracy, he celebrates that of popular disobedience. Rather than engaging, like Khaïr-Eddine, in a head-on and ad hominem confrontation with the figure of the monarch, Laâbi uses the poem to promote the possibility of appropriating the power. This technique of substitution is also visible in Laâbi's yearning for alternative spaces where the struggle for power can be reinforced and regenerated. In *Race*, one of the sections includes eleven occurrences of the word 'ailleurs' and towards the end of the poem, the ideas of substitution, transformation, and regeneration become the driving force for Laâbi's revolt as he writes:

[229] Laâbi, *Race*, p.12.
[230] Laâbi, *Race*, p.13.
[231] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.25.

ainsi je me redécouvre
au tréfonds de l'embryon
égal à ma stature
œuf d'infinis
million de possibilités
gestation de peuples
de continents
humanité frétillante
et voix
m u t a n t
j'échappe
je survis
personne ne m'a intimé l'ordre de ce scalp
c'est moi
séparé
pour reprendre
dans un climat ardent de genèse protohumaine
lors d'espaces inabordables[232]

The lexical field of birth, regeneration, and survival ('embryon', 'oeuf', 'gestation', 'survis', 'reprendre', 'genèse') is combined with references to the infinite ('infinis'; 'million de possibilités') and the unreachable ('espaces inabordables') as a way to emphasize the limitless possibilities of revival and reconstruction. Laâbi's outcry of revolt, accentuated by the broken lines and the indented fragments in the passage, responds to violence and separation by celebrating the energy of renewal and transformation. This process is manifest in the typography of the key word 'mutant' as its separated letters suggest an incremental metamorphosis that progressively generates a new humankind out of anger and protest.

[232] Laâbi, *Race*, p.22.

It is noteworthy that Laâbi's revolt draws its strength not only from this poetic intervention that seeks to invert or transform the external order of things but also from the way in which it submits the poet himself to the same dynamics of regeneration. In the above passage, the 'je' of the poet is the centre from which emanates the impulse of transformation, reaching out to 'peuples', 'continents', and to this 'humanité frétillante' that carries a collective sense of vigour and energy. Here again, revolt is a creative process that connects the individual to the collective. Laâbi writes elsewhere that

> l'artiste ne sera plus un chef d'orchestre ou un guide ambulant, mais un bloc irradiant, enraciné, de réalité. Son expression n'est pas un recul mais une manière de réagir physiquement, de répondre aux différentes secousses qui parviennent jusqu'à lui, qui en font l'épicentre du malaise.[233]

Laâbi's oppositional discourse is closely bound to this fundamental redefinition of the poet as an embodied centre of revolt and resistance. The seismic metaphor of his stance and his insistence on the poet's physical presence in and interaction with the world articulate his conception of poetry as a space where revolt is performed through aesthetic form. As will be developed in the following chapter, Laâbi's aesthetic revolt is based on a constant dialogue between poetic form and political content. The expression of individual and collective malaise is both recorded and processed through aesthetic experimentation: the poem becomes a living body concerned as much with revealing forms of individual violence and humiliation as with spreading a collective message of solidarity. In a short text written from prison in January 1976, Laâbi defines his everyday resistance in these terms: 'Ecrire, ne pas s'arrêter. A chaque page triompher de ce malaise, de ce sentiment d'inanité qui me paralyse par à-coups'.[234] This sense of firm determination and strong political commitment constantly helps Laâbi to reinvent the expression of his revolt against

[233] Abdellatif Laâbi, 'A propos du *Polygone étoilé* de Kateb Yacine', in *Souffles* 4 (Rabat, 1966), pp.44-46 (p.45).
[234] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.99.

Moroccan authoritarianism while processing new forms of individual and collective discontent.

Abdelkebir Khatibi: Intellectual revolt, Marxism, and decolonization

With Abdelkebir Khatibi, the concept of revolt becomes at once richer and more complex. Khatibi's erudition and eclectic knowledge contribute to a broader and more intellectualized understanding of the many ways in which revolt can be used to rethink and tackle the Moroccan postcolonial malaise. After completing his degree in sociology at the Sorbonne, Khatibi worked as the director of the Institut de sociologie in Rabat in the period 1966-1970 and developed a prolific œuvre in which the idea of revolt takes on a much more developed form.

Khatibi's conception and practice of revolt are substantially different from those of Khaïr-Eddine and Laâbi. Unlike the former, his revolt is not inflected by the circumstances of his personal life, and unlike the latter, is not driven by an overt political activism. Although Khatibi joined in the 1960s the movement of communist students, organized around the powerful National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM), his short-lived political activities did not equal the far-reaching impact of his intellectual and cultural production. Khatibi's revolt, as I will demonstrate in this section, can be described as intellectual in the sense that it builds on concepts drawn from sociology and Marxist theory with the aim of contributing to the process of decolonizing Moroccan culture and scholarship. In Khatibi's early sociological works, this process is driven, I would argue, by what Julia Kristeva calls 'une culture-révolte', namely an effort that promotes a lively sense of intellectual progress and development. The absence of this culture of revolt, warns Kristeva, 'reviendrait à laisser se transformer cette vie en une vie de mort, c'est-à-dire de

violence physique et morale, de barbarie'.[235] Khatibi's 'culture-révolte' is manifest in his substantial effort to decolonize scientific knowledge and defend popular art.

Khatibi's significant contribution to the decolonization of sociology is developed around the intellectual appropriation of the critical, scientific, and methodological foundations of knowledge in postcolonial Morocco. In an annex to his *Bilan de la sociologie au Maroc*, an early historical and bibliographical overview of sociology as a discipline in Morocco covering the period 1912-1967, Khatibi insists on 'la nécessité d'une réappropriation des moyens de recherche et d'une définition précise des orientations de cette recherche dans le cadre national ou plus largement dans le cadre maghrébin'.[236] While acknowledging the role of French colonial power, driven by Lyautey's ideology, in producing a detailed and meticulous knowledge of Moroccan society, Khatibi's intellectual revolt is manifest in his call to challenge the consequences and legacies of the Protectorate, a period during which sociology was mainly used to serve the immediate French interests.

This fundamental call is relaunched on several occasions, including in his foreword to the collective volume *Etudes sociologiques sur le Maroc,* published in 1971, one year after the Moroccan government decided to close the Institut de sociologie on the pretext that it was encouraging political insurrection. Despite the devastating effect of this decision, Khatibi insists that only 'une appropriation du temps, de l'espace et du savoir'[237] can help Moroccans to promote and develop 'une sociologie critique et au service de l'opinion publique'.[238] Khatibi's insistence on the fundamental relationship between, on the one hand, knowledge, space, and time, and on the other, between sociology and Moroccans, perfectly illustrates the dynamics of his intellectual revolt as it reconnects a scientific

[235] Kristeva, *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, p.15.
[236] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Document 2: Charte de l'Association des chercheurs en sciences humaines', in *Bilan de la sociologie au Maroc* (Rabat: Publications de l'Association pour la Recherche en Sciences Humaines, 1967), pp.62-63 (p.62).
[237] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Avant-propos' in *Etudes sociologiques sur le Maroc* (Rabat: Société d'études économiques, sociales et statistiques, 1971) [no page number].
[238] Khatibi, 'Avant-propos'.

discipline with the geography, the history, and the people it is meant to serve. In the same foreword, Khatibi goes on to argue that

> le savoir occidental qui habite souvent notre conscience et se loge dans notre pratique doit être relativisé, ré-interprété, compris dans l'histoire qui l'a sécrété. Il faudra opposer à ce savoir dominant et possessif une théorisation critique, capable de faire de nous des sujets conscients à la fois de leurs possibilités créatrices et de la fragilité de tout discours purement nationaliste.[239]

Rather than rejecting the Western knowledge developed during the colonial period in the field of sociology, Khatibi's intellectual revolt relies on a much deeper and critical work of contextualization and reinterpretation that can serve to create a new Moroccan intellectual elite. This form of revolt, unlike those of Khaïr-Eddine and Laâbi, draws on a lasting effort to promote intellectual autonomy and independence from hegemonic and dominant discourses. According to British sociologist Anthony Giddens, sociology has 'a subversive and critical character', for it 'deals with problems of such pressing interest [...], problems which are the objects of major controversies and conflicts in society itself'.[240] In the post-independence years, Khatibi uses the subversive potential of sociology to recover Moroccan postcolonial identity in its social, cultural, and political dimensions.

Khatibi's culture of revolt is also expressed in his methodological approach. While Khaïr-Eddine and Laâbi develop a striking and often provocative counter-discourse directed mainly against the centres of authoritarian power, Khatibi has recourse to a broader approach concerned with the development of a cultural mode of opposition and reconstruction, and benefiting from the combined inputs of several disciplines including sociology, philosophy, semiology, and popular culture. A relevant example of this all-encompassing effort is Khatibi's reworking of the concept of class struggle in both sociology and semiology with the aims of enlightening the masses, dismantling the deep

[239] Khatibi, 'Avant-propos'.
[240] Anthony Giddens, 'The Scope of sociology', in *Sociology: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Suton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp.9-12, p.9.

logic of authoritarian discourses, and promoting alternative approaches to the Moroccan postcolonial malaise. Khatibi finds in Marxist theory a relevant framework to articulate the subversive dynamics of decolonization. In one of his articles significantly entitled 'Etat et classes sociales',[241] he lays the foundations of a Marxist sociology focused on the process of neo-colonial expropriation:

> il faudra montrer comment les hiérarchies, les classes, les institutions, la domination étrangère prolétarisent le fellah, en lui enlevant sa terre, comment la ville échappe à la majorité des habitants, et comment des populations entières dépossédées de leur espace vital sont offertes par l'émigration au Capital étranger.[242]

Khatibi's attention to popular classes and their exclusion from urban and rural centres reveals the close relationship between his intellectual revolt and what he describes as 'le problème des processus d'oppression'.[243] The sociologist as a rebel intellectual is one who unveils the social and institutional strategies of domination and oppression. Khatibi's Marxist sociology was therefore described as a 'sociologie de l'engagement',[244] namely a discipline 'dominée par la logique du dévoilement de ce qui est dissimulé et occulté, de la correction d'une réalité sociale déformée ou appauvrie, de la transformation de la société'.[245] This subversive effort to uncover and transform a social reality through sociological research benefits not only from the fact that Marxism and sociology are often considered to investigate the same social issues,[246] but also from the definition of Marxism, in Serge Jonas's words, as 'une démarche critique, l'utilisation d'une méthode dialectique

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[241] First published in *Sociologie des mutations* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1970); republished under the title 'Etat et classes sociales' in *Etudes sociologiques sur le Maroc*, pp.3-15.
[242] Khatibi, 'Avant-propos'.
[243] Khatibi, 'Etat et classes sociales', p.13.
[244] Hassan Rachik and Rahma Bourqia, 'La sociologie au Maroc', in *SociologieS*, Théories et recherches, 18th October 2011, <http://sociologies.revues.org/3719> [accessed 25th March 2016].
[245] Rachik and Bourqia.
[246] '[…] le marxisme et la sociologie se préoccupent presque des mêmes problèmes et ont presque les mêmes points de vue: des types différents de société dans l'histoire, des structures de classes, de la culture (ou de l'idéologie), du changement social', in T.H. Bottomore, 'Marxisme et Sociologie', in *L'Homme et la Société* 10 (1968), *Colloque de Cerisy: Marx et la sociologie*, pp.5-11 (p.6).

et la saisie de la totalité'.[247] In the article mentioned above, Khatibi applies the dialectical and totalizing aspect of Marxism to frame an overarching critique, respectively, of the former colonizer for his strategies of social hierarchization, the neo-colonial nationalist elite for its dismissal of the class struggle, and the Moroccan bourgeoisie and the State for their collusive attempts to control political power.

This dialogue with Marxist theory as a basis for intellectual revolt is clearly manifest in Khatibi's *La Blessure du nom propre,* an iconoclastic volume published in 1974 and which combines original readings of Moroccan popular proverbs, tattoos, Arabic calligraphy, and narratives. This intersemiotic study extends the area of Khatibi's intellectual revolt by challenging the theoretical disregard of Moroccan popular culture. In his foreword, Khatibi posits that 'se mettre à l'écoute de la culture populaire est une forte intervention idéologique' which consists in 'ouvrir, dans le corps qui parle, le procès historique, par lequel une lutte de classes se déroule *aussi* à l'intérieur du texte'.[248] By investigating various forms of popular culture in an intersemiotic dialogue that seeks to reveal their evocative potential and subversive impact on social relationships, Khatibi echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of language as, in Maria Yaguello's words, an 'expression des relations et luttes sociales, véhiculant et subissant l'effet de cette lutte, servant à la fois d'instrument et de matériau'.[249] Popular systems of signs contribute to intellectual revolt by challenging preconceived stereotypes and structures of meaning, and by promoting variation and mobility in artistic creation.

Throughout the volume, Khatibi provides several examples of how semiotic systems from popular culture resist authoritarian discourses and hegemonic structures by turning

[247] Serge Jonas, 'Sociologie marxiste et conditions pratiques et théoriques de la recherche', in *L'Homme et la Société* 10 (1968), *Colloque de Cerisy : Marx et la sociologie,* pp.111-116 (p.111).
[248] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La Blessure du nom propre* (Paris : Editions Denoël, 1974), p.22.
[249] Maria Yaguello, 'Introduction', in Mikhaïl Bakhtine (V. N. Volochinov), *Le Marxisme et la philosophie du langage* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), pp.9-18 (p.16).

the sign into 'l'arène où se déroule *la lutte des classes*'.[250] Some popular proverbs, for instance, 'gomme[nt] les interdits religieux'[251] by using an impressive range of allusions and veiled references to banned erotic practices. Some others challenge what Khatibi calls 'le rire doxologique',[252] namely the laughter submitted to public opinions and consensus, by celebrating the transgressive power of humour that disrupts social hierarchies and spreads the pleasure of sharing and listening to proverbs in society.

The subversive potential of the tattoo lies in the way in which it challenges not only the relationship between the signifier and the signified but also the Islamic ban on figurative representation. Khatibi suggests that 'la religion, en se liant à la logographie, a poussé le tatouage dans le champ du profane et de l'impur', and he significantly considers his study of the tattoo as a transgressive return to these 'archi-écritures refoulées'[253] that shape people's imagination. The tattoo is a creative sign that resists dogmatic discourses and defies the strategies of censorship and repression exerted on popular culture. Like the proverb, it serves as a source for pleasure, this time arising from 'une décision de défiguration, à savoir la subversion sur le corps musulman des interdits qui le nouent':[254] the body of the tattooed becomes a textual composition driven by the circulation of random and unnamed signs. In other contexts, the tattoo carries a historical meaning, as suggested by the body of a Moroccan prostitute who bears the marks of European tattoos made by colonial soldiers, and therefore carries on her skin 'l'histoire sémiologique de la colonisation'.[255] In this case, the tattoo becomes a narrative medium that recounts the history of colonial domination and the circulation of signs between past and present.

[250] Yaguello, 'Introduction'.
[251] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.50.
[252] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.49.
[253] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.66.
[254] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.83.
[255] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.105.

Similarly, Khatibi praises the iconic calligraphy for cunningly circumventing the Islamic prohibition of figurative representations. Arabic calligraphers have succeeded in creating 'un répertoire général des signes'[256] that simultaneously builds on the richness of Islamic art and subtly transgresses the dogmatic interpretation of the sacred text. While the Arabic novel at the beginning of the twentieth century 'a désacralisé encore plus la langue du Coran',[257] the Arabic sign was itself caught between the very act of writing which generates meaning and the articulation of a mystical and divine 'parole'. By operating in this in-between, calligraphy desacralizes the divine and plays on both the reproduction of writing and the destruction of the sign to subvert the dogmatic conception of religion:

> Fissure du signe, double écriture, déguisement de la voix divine: la mise en scène calligraphique est une fiction transie, réduite pour idolâtrer la répétition à faire éclater l'ordre de la langue et à émettre souverainement l'artifice du geste et du regard.[258]

By reading the divine from a semiotic perspective, Khatibi invites his readers to engage differently with the sacred. His use of the words 'déguisement', 'fiction', and 'mise en scène' reveals an attempt to reconsider the sacred from the perspective of artistic creation and performance. Khatibi's revolt against dogmatic thought is performed through this intellectual shift from the fixity of the sacred sign to the creative gesture of the calligrapher. As a result, Khatibi's intellectual revolt redefines the divine as the locus of a sensorial if not mystical and Sufist quest that seeks to reveal the multi-layered nature of the sacred while playing with the circulation of meanings between the realms of religion, art, and language.

[256] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.70.
[257] Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin*, p.40.
[258] Khatibi, *La Blessure*, p.185.

Rebels beyond Morocco: Palestine as a transcolonial metaphor for revolt

As suggested by Khatibi's interest in Islamic art as a ground on which dogmatic approaches can be challenged and transgressed, the concept of revolt developed in the 1960s and 1970s also operates beyond Moroccan boundaries. In *Le Roman maghrébin*, published in 1968 and considered as one of the earliest studies of the North African novel, Khatibi contends that

> une des conditions de l'édification d'une culture nationale décolonisée est de faire justement éclater les rapports unilatéraux unissant la métropole à ses anciennes colonies, de multiplier les contacts avec le monde extérieur, de faire jouer d'autres circuits et de promouvoir une collaboration effective entre pays du Tiers Monde.[259]

Khatibi's call to foster transnational dialogue and efficient collaboration between the former colonized countries as a step towards the construction of a postcolonial culture was brilliantly developed in the pages of *Souffles*. The journal included contributions from the Maghreb, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, offering 'a unique window into the political and artistic imaginaries of writers and intellectuals from the Global South'.[260] A relevant example of this transnational dialogue is the way in which the Palestinian question has inspired Moroccan and North African authors.

In this respect, Olivia C. Harrison argues that Palestine works in the Maghreb as 'a metaphor of the colonial'[261] that encompasses both historical forms of colonization and new forms of neo-colonialism in post-independence states. Reciprocally, and as evidenced by the prominence of the Palestinian question in *Souffles,* especially after 1967, the

[259] Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin*, p.14.
[260] Harrison & Villa-Ignacio, blurb.
[261] Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb. Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford: University Press, 2015), p.2.

Maghreb constitutes 'a privileged site of transcolonial identification with Palestine'.[262] Drawing on Harrison's reflection, I would argue that the Palestinian question works more specifically as a metaphor for revolt that serves to renew the local dynamics of opposition and to reinvent a transcolonial discourse of resistance beyond the Moroccan setting. In what follows, this argument is developed from the perspective of two works often dismissed by critics: Laâbi's anthology *La Poésie palestinienne de combat* and Khatibi's pamphlet *Vomito blanco*. The first volume introduces and translates a selection of poems by eminent Palestinian poets such as Mahmud Darwich, Samih Al Qassim, and Fadwa Touqan, while the second offers what Harrison aptly summarizes as 'primarily an exercise in moral indignation aimed at the Israeli state as well as Western hypocrisy, and in particular the French left's unwavering espousal of Zionism and its dismissal of Palestinian rights'.[263]

Both volumes draw on the idea of struggle to develop an original and often provocative discourse of revolt. The violence of Khatibi's text and Laâbi's preface to the anthology is a direct response to the politics of repression and exclusion experienced by the Palestinians. Khatibi, who is perfectly aware of the criticism he might receive, presents his work as 'un essai libre' and 'une percée ponctuelle dans la morale politique'.[264] The singularity of *Vomito blanco* lies not only in the fact that it is 'the first text that attests to the centrality of Palestine-Israel in Khatibi's thought'[265] but also in this liberated and provocative stance assumed by the author. This is emphasized by his choice of the pamphlet, a polemic genre which he metaphorically compares to 'un acte de piraterie'.[266]

[262] O. Harrison, p.3.
[263] O. Harrison, p.102.
[264] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Vomito blanco. Le sionisme et la conscience malheureuse* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1974), p.3.
[265] O. Harrison, p.102.
[266] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.43.

Similarly, the word 'combat' in the title of Laâbi's anthology redefines poetry as a site of fight and confrontation, and serves as an overt reference to the Palestinian struggle, in opposition to what the Moroccan poet denounces in his preface as 'des considérations généreuses mais le plus souvent abstraites et théoriques sur "l'engagement"'.[267] Laâbi is clearly taking a revolutionary and activist stand as he rejects the conceptual and theoretical approach to the Palestinian cause. The same subversive dimension is present in the genesis of Khatibi's pamphlet. In his foreword, Khatibi reveals that the original impetus for his book arose from 'deux envies de vomir'[268] following two events: the massacre of Palestinian refugees by Jordanian troops in what was named the 'Black September' of 1970, and the surge of Western racism in the aftermath of the Palestinian attack on the Israeli Olympic team during the Summer Olympics in Munich in 1972. This violent metaphor of vomit, which describes writing as an act of rejection and discharge, serves to coin the eponymous term 'vomito blanco', used by Khatibi to denounce the failure of the French left in dealing with the Palestinian question:

> c'est que sa voix [la voix de la gauche française] est malade d'elle-même et de sa propre idéologie, que sa parole ne peut s'énoncer sans que soit traumatisée sa pensée politique : j'appelle ce traumatisme le *vomito blanco*, fièvre blanche qui fait avaler tout de travers : châtiment, péché, poison de la culpabilité.[269]

Khatibi's use of a medical vocabulary and his insistence on the notion of trauma emphasize the subversive aspect of his intervention. Khatibi's text can be considered as a literally vomited text, conveying the author's wrath and taking the form of 'a visceral response'[270] to the Palestinian question, with an extremely 'urgent and incendiary tone'.[271] Interestingly, Khatibi uses the same metaphor again when he refers to the expelling of the

[267] Abdellatif Laâbi, *La Poésie palestinienne de combat* (Paris: P.J. Oswald, 1970), p.27.
[268] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.1.
[269] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.2-3.
[270] O. Harrison, p.102.
[271] O. Harrison, p.101.

Palestinians from their lands in 1948 as he redefines Zionism as 'une mystique du vomissement'.[272] Against the territorial eviction of Palestinians, significantly described in the Arab World as 'an-Nakba' (the Disaster or the Cataclysm), Khatibi's revolt produces a literally ejected text which expels anger, fury, and exasperation.

Laâbi's anthology and Khatibi's pamphlet stage a peculiar revolt based on intense confrontation and radical engagement. In his preface, Laâbi exhorts Arab poets to stand 'aux premières lignes, hurlant à la face de l'ennemi le poème-cri de guerre'.[273] This weaponized redefinition of poetry, which recalls Khaïr-Eddine's conception of writing, is emphasized by the end of the preface as Laâbi establishes a striking parallel between Palestinian poets and combatants, unified in the same revolutionary movement: 'les rafales des combattants en même temps que les poèmes de Darwich, Al Qassim, Az-Zayad et de tous les poètes palestiniens, se répondent nuit et jour en un dialogue hautement poétique et révolutionnaire'.[274] This symbolic dialogue that conflates armed and poetic struggle for liberation is what drives Laâbi's reading and translation of Palestinian poetry. The poem is considered by Laâbi as a revolutionary act of creation that acknowledges the identity of Palestinians, voices their concerns, and contributes to their struggle. The poet as a translator performs a subversive act of recovery and transmission that draws on the collective energy of Palestinian combatants and poets to pass on their lessons of resistance.

In Khatibi's pamphlet, revolt as a radical confrontation is manifest in a series of violent and caustic attacks on eminent figures and intellectuals: Sartre 'verse des larmes, sans pouvoir les essuyer avec sa dialectique éblouie',[275] Memmi 'ennuie pompeusement…et

[272] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.33.
[273] Laâbi, *La Poésie palestinienne*, p.28.
[274] Laâbi, *La Poésie palestinienne*, p.29.
[275] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.21.

liquide […] l'existence du peuple palestinien',[276] while Deleuze and Guattari are successively described as 'les deux chanteurs de charme gauchiste'[277] and 'deux cow-boys de la psychanalyse'.[278] Khatibi's satirical and almost grotesque portraits of French intellectuals reveal a deep-seated malaise about what was largely perceived in the Arab world as a form of Western injustice towards the Palestinians, exacerbated in France by the rather ambiguous position of French leftist intellectuals. Drawing on excerpts from a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* on 'The Israeli-Arab Conflict',[279] Khatibi argues that Sartre in particular has failed to recognize the relationship of colonial domination that defines the condition of Palestinians and, by using a discourse 'obéiss[ant] à un langage double et à une morale double, sinon trouble',[280] has been ultimately blinded by Zionist colonial strategies. In a recent book about Arab intellectuals' engagement with Sartre, Yoav Di-Capua rightly argues that Khatibi's pamphlet 'falls under the category of engaged intellectual commentary and does not represent systematic historical study'.[281] One should note, however, that Khatibi is more concerned with unveiling the inconsistencies of the French left and raising awareness in France about the Palestinian cause than in tracing the history of Sartre's engagement with this question. His rebellious pamphlet is first and foremost an urgent response to the historical events of the period and to the necessity for Arab intellectuals to express their solidarity with the Palestinians.

The conception of Palestine as a metaphor for revolt and a conduit of subversive discourse is also manifest in Laâbi's and Khatibi's transcolonial approach to the Palestinian question. Laâbi, for instance, is very attentive to the way in which the

[276] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.102.
[277] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.28.
[278] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.147.
[279] 'Le conflit israélo-arabe', ed. by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Temps Modernes* 253 bis, 1967.
[280] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.67.
[281] Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Sartre & Decolonization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018), p.28.

Palestinian question informs and gets informed by global movements of decolonization. He astutely uses the anthology of Palestinian poetry as a pretext to denounce the cultural and political deficiencies of Arab countries, notably 'le bureaucratisme régnant dans les instances culturelles […], la répression officielle, les problèmes scandaleux de l'édition […], ceux de la distribution inter-arabe'.[282] As a result, the Palestinian question serves as a mirror reflecting the ongoing issues in Arab countries and extending Laâbi's involvement in the process of cultural decolonization. More specifically, Palestinian poetry works as an inspiring model for the process of decolonization. By using popular material, such as the 'mawawils' or the traditional pieces of Arabic vocal music, Palestinian poetry, according to Laâbi, helps its Arab counterpart to recover 'sa fonction […] de communication de masse'[283] and to promote the voice of the Arab people rather than the views of their intellectual and literary elites. Transcolonial echoes of Palestine as a metaphor for revolt are also manifest in Laâbi's use of the dichotomy 'colonizer/colonized' to describe the cultural strategies of domination exerted on the Palestinians. According to the Moroccan poet, only a 'poésie de combat' can provide an effective response to Zionism, and contribute to the reconstruction of a national identity in Palestine. A similar form of poetry would help Morocco and former colonized countries to promote cultural renewal and regeneration.

In *Vomito blanco*, Khatibi's approach to the Palestinian question extends the debate to the philosophical ground by using, once again, the Marxist concept of class struggle as a counterpoint to the discourse of identity and origin regularly used to describe the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For Khatibi, class struggle in the region can lead to the emergence of alternative ideals and to the creation of a new humankind, liberated from the

[282] Laâbi, *La Poésie palestinienne*, p.27.
[283] Laâbi, *La Poésie palestinienne*, p.28.

dictatorship of 'toute identité folle'[284] and open to otherness and exchange. Drawing on recurrent references to Derrida, Michaux, Bataille, and Nietzsche, Khatibi contends that only an expansion and an acceleration of the dynamics of class struggle in the Middle East can open a way out of the conflict. Interestingly, he redefines class struggle as a disruptive force which builds upon the concepts of mobility and difference: 'la lutte des classes n'est pas simplement une dialectique entre dominateurs et dominés, mais bien cette question illimitée d'introduire un désordre permanent dans l'existence des hommes et de leur communication'.[285] Direct applications of this 'désordre permanent' can be traced not only in Khatibi's celebration of Palestinian resistance as a disruptive movement directed against the West, but also in his conception of the pamphlet as a rebellious genre. According to the author, '[…] pour être quelque peu convaincant, un pamphlet doit décentrer toute notion de totalité, de centre et d'origine'.[286] This process of decentralization extends Khatibi's intellectual revolt developed, as seen previously, through his effort to decolonize sociology and to promote popular and neglected artistic forms in Morocco. *Vomito blanco* can be read as an extreme representation of the way in which a disruptive and rebellious thought can be implemented simultaneously in political and literary spheres. Throughout the volume, Khatibi seeks to inflect the practice of writing by shaping a 'texte-limite' that rejects ideological conformism and methodological restrictions.

The originality of the subversive discourse developed in Khatibi's and Laâbi's volumes lies in their attempt to operate beyond the immediate space of Moroccan society and politics while enriching the concept of revolt with a transcolonial political and aesthetic dimension. In this respect, Palestine serves not only as a metaphor or a conduit for a transnational discourse of revolt but also as a continuation of the ongoing struggle against the Moroccan postcolonial malaise. In the 1960s and 1970s, the questions of oppression,

[284] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.80.
[285] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.95.
[286] Khatibi, *Vomito blanco*, p.80.

inequality, and injustice denounced in the Palestinian context resonate with particular force in Morocco. Khatibi's and Laâbi's engagement with the Palestinian cause is also an extension of revolt and contestation beyond local boundaries. Palestinian poets and resistants serve as inspiring models for the Moroccan writer who seeks to regenerate, reinforce, and expand the horizon of his ongoing revolt.

The Moroccan discourse of revolt, as developed in Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's early works, is primarily as an urgent response to the context of violence and repression in the 1960s and 1970s. In their attempt to resist Moroccan authoritarianism and respond to the challenges of post-independence social and political realities, the three writers develop a dynamic and multifaceted revolt, open to reinterpretation and transformation. In this context, personal disillusionment fuels political struggle which, in turn, benefits from the calls for poetic resistance, intellectual autonomy, and critical thought. The three writers' recourse to revolt is as much a multi-layered contribution to the debates surrounding the construction of a decolonized national culture as an urgent way of overcoming the collective disappointment in the years following independence. For the Moroccan writer as a rebel subject, the concept of revolt works as both a thoughtful conduit for political and sociocultural critique and an immediate exit from the feeling of powerlessness that haunts the popular masses and their intellectual elites.

Investigating the aesthetic and formal manifestations of this revolt allows for a better understanding of its role as a process not only tied up with politics but also concerned with the regeneration of the literary form. By focusing on aesthetics, the next chapter seeks to demonstrate that strategies of formal experimentation and innovation work alongside and beyond politics to articulate a creative discourse of protest and dissidence. As mentioned earlier, the articulation of revolt and aesthetic form requires a specific and

more detailed study as it serves to approach the performance of revolt from a literary, structural, and formal perspective to which the three writers have been particularly attentive in their respective works.

Chapter 3: Strategies of Revolt in Aesthetics

Introduction: Literary genres & subversive aesthetics

> Seul importe le livre, tel qu'il est, loin des genres, en dehors des rubriques, prose, poésie, roman, témoignage, sous lesquelles il refuse de se ranger et auxquelles il dénie le pouvoir de lui fixer sa place et de déterminer sa forme.[287]

This widely quoted reflection from Maurice Blanchot's *Le Livre à venir* often serves to describe the tendency of modern literature to evade conventional boundaries and escape the classificatory gesture of literary genres. While the previous chapter has discussed the relationship between revolt and aesthetics only incidentally and in relation to politics, the current chapter focuses on revolt as expressed in literary form through structural innovation and formal experimentation. In what follows, I use the term 'subversive aesthetics' to designate the various strategies that allow the writers, following Blanchot's reflection, to subvert the conventional categories of literary production and develop experimental and hybrid forms of creation. My points of focus are the different ways in which those strategies perform the idea of revolt in aesthetics by blurring the boundaries between literary genres and redefining literary forms and structures as spaces of textual transgression and deviation.

In contrast to Blanchot's dismissal of genre, Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, among others, have rightly pinpointed the relevance of literary genres to the discussion of aesthetics. Todorov, for instance, argues that 'que l'œuvre 'désobéisse' à son genre ne rend pas celui-ci inexistant; on est tenté de dire: au contraire', for

> non seulement que, pour être une exception, l'œuvre présuppose nécessairement une règle; mais aussi que, à peine reconnue dans son statut exceptionnel, cette

[287] Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p.272.

> œuvre devient à son tour, grâce au succès de librairie et à l'attention des critiques, une règle.[288]

In line with Todorov's reflection, my contention is that the subversive potential of literary works is better understood when approached in relation to literary genres as these help us to identify how formal transgression operates at once within and between categories of literary production. David Duff goes even further and suggests that

> the word genre now seems to have lost most of its negative charge, and to be operating instead as a valorising term, signalling not prescription and exclusion but opportunity and common purpose: genre as the enabling device, the vehicle for the acquisition of competence.[289]

It is this very conception of the literary genre as a 'valorising term' and an 'enabling device' that can help us to assess the representation of revolt in aesthetics. Literary genres are not only, in Todorov's words, 'ces relais par lesquels l'œuvre se met en rapport avec l'univers de la littérature',[290] but also the necessary tools that contribute to the understanding of how literary works comply with or challenge the distinctive features of recognizable categories of writing. At this point, it is worth recalling with Derrida that 'depuis toujours le genre en tous genres a pu jouer le rôle de principe d'ordre'[291] through various strategies of identification, organization, and taxonomy. Reading the representation of revolt in literary form consists less in calling into question this 'principe d'ordre' than in revealing how the writer works within this order by developing a wide set of devices that shift, interconnect, and reconfigure literary forms and structures.

These reflections might seem at odds with the respective positions of Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi who all unequivocally reject the notion of literary genre. Khaïr-Eddine,

[288] Tzvetan Todorov, *La Notion de littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p.30.
[289] David Duff, 'Introduction', in *Modern Genre Theory* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.1-24 (p.2)
[290] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p.12.
[291] Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p.287.

for instance, claims in a provocative statement: 'Pour moi, il n'y a pas de romans, pas de poèmes, maintenant. Il y a l'écriture. Mais plus du tout ce qu'on appelle des genres littéraires'.[292] Similarly, Khatibi clearly admits:

> Je ne m'inscris pas dans un genre littéraire en particulier. Peut-être que, par illusion, je sous-estime la différence entre les genres. Je ne vénère pas leur institution ni leur tradition. Je suis curieux autrement : transformer la langue, la renouveler si besoin et si j'en suis capable.[293]

Finally, Laâbi's vision is not much different as he refuses to dissociate novels and poetry in his oeuvre and adds: 'j'écarte sciemment le concept de genres'.[294] Despite these radical claims, however, the three writers consistently work with and within literary genres. More importantly, they deliberately transgress the boundaries between literary genres and adapt their choice of literary forms to both the content and the context of their writing. Thus, Khaïr-Eddine almost systematically includes poetic and dramatic fragments in his early novels, Laâbi uses the epistolary form in his prison writings and when addressing Moroccan politics, while Khatibi skilfully reworks philosophical concepts in his poetry and novels.

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated that the concept of revolt developed by the three writers in their early works, often in provocative and violent ways, is a dynamic and multi-layered process, connected to politics and based on various oppositional narrative and poetic strategies. My aim in this chapter is to shed light on the formal and structural aspect of this complexity, as expressed for instance in novel, poetry, and drama. Given the space constraints, I chose to focus on the latter two genres for they not only include, like the novel, an experimental dimension, but also extend the idea of revolt to oral and dramatic performance. By looking beyond the three authors' misleading rejection of

[292] Abboubi, p.21.
[293] Hassan Wahbi, *La Beauté de l'absent. Entretiens avec Abdelkebir Khatibi* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), p.43.
[294] Laâbi, *La Brûlure*, p.36.

literary genres, I would argue that they do develop a set of complex strategies of structural destruction and formal experimentation that work at once within and between literary genres to extend the performance of revolt by disrupting structures, forms, and categories of writing.

The dynamics of poetic transgression

The conception of poetic form as a space of formal transgression and experimentation has been central to Khaïr-Eddine's, Laâbi's and Khatibi's poetry. While the former two writers define themselves mainly as poets, the latter's incursions into poetry served to expand his intellectual production and revisit his ideas in poetic form. The originality of the three writers' poetic creations lies in the development of a poetic form that rebels against fixity and unity by using various techniques of formal variation, displacement, and reconfiguration. In the following section, I start by drawing a parallel between Khaïr-Eddine's poetic form and Artaud's attempt to reconstruct the human body in his last radiophonic plays. Laâbi's poetic form will then be described using respectively the metaphor of the outcry and the successive movements of destruction and reconstruction. Finally, I will approach Khatibi's poetry through the notion of a 'travelling form' that defines his subversive technique of borrowing and reworking poetic forms derived from transcultural sources.

Throughout his literary career, Khaïr-Eddine published four poetry collections[295] and numerous poems in literary reviews and journals, including notably *Les Temps Modernes*, *Esprit*, and *Alif*. Some of his poems were published posthumously and, given his intensive

[295] *Soleil arachnide* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969 ; repr. by Gallimard in 2009) ; *Ce Maroc!* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975) ; *Mémorial* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi Editeur, 1991) ; *Résurrection des fleurs sauvages* (Paris: Editions Nouvelles du Sud, 1994).

poetic activity and successive moves between France and Morocco, some others have not been collected nor edited yet. It is as though Khaïr-Eddine's poetry is constantly evading the logic of edited volumes, mirroring in its very disorganization the scattered structure of his poetic writing. While a huge effort is necessary in order to trace and collect Khaïr-Eddine's unpublished poems, it is in this scattering that one can read the relationship between his poetic form and his aesthetics of revolt. Khaïr-Eddine's specific language, based on the use of obscure and rare words, often referring to the fauna and flora of his southern homeland, reveals what Hédi Abdel-Jaouad aptly describes as Khaïr-Eddine's 'talent for audacious and unconventional imagery'.[296] Critics have often mentioned the influence of surrealism on Khaïr-Eddine's poetry and compared his style to those of Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Césaire, all poets whom he has read and admired. Beyond this linguistic specificity which has been widely commented on, I would like to focus on the formal structure of his poems and the way it embodies his aesthetics of revolt.

In Khaïr-Eddine's poetry, the structure of the poem often works as the conveyer of his personal revolt, seeking at once to describe and respond to the recurring themes of separation and splitting. His first poem, *Nausée noire*, for instance, is divided into sixteen sections with a succession of broken and disorganized lines, featuring frequent enjambments and *rejets*. The scattered structure of the poem echoes the metaphor of the prism mentioned earlier: 'Un prisme ouvert posé au hasard des chardons | et nulle | cause pour vivre'.[297] The inner malaise of the subject, already suggested by the title of the poem, is emphasized with the tension created by the enjambment and its dynamics of syntactic interruption and resumption of meaning. The poem, entirely composed of run-on lines and both typographically and syntactically disrupted verses, reads as a subversive response to both the challenge of poetic creation and the inner splitting of the self. A similar strategy is

[296] Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, 'Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine: The Poet as Iconoclast', in *Research in African Literatures* 23/2, *North African Literature* (Summer 1992), pp.145-150 (p.146).
[297] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.21.

performed in ‘Barrage’, a cataclysmic poem from the collection *Soleil arachnide* in which the formal destruction of the text revolves around the theme of neutralization and nullification: ‘alors que terre n’est | plus terre | pierre | plus pierre’.[298] The structure of the poem is undermined and turned into a chaotic compilation of scattered lines, shifting images, and disconnected words, all opposed to the ideas of uniformity and order.

Another strategy of formal revolt performed by Khaïr-Eddine consists in using and subverting the specific genre of the ‘prose poem’, initially defined by Baudelaire as ‘une prose poétique, musicale sans rythme et sans rime, assez souple et assez heurtée pour s’adapter aux mouvements lyriques de l’âme, aux ondulations de la rêverie, aux soubresauts de la conscience’.[299] A substantial revolt against traditional forms of poetry, notably the highly constraining Alexandrine, the ‘prose poem’ has been described as ‘a critical, self-critical, utopian genre, a genre that tests the limits of genre’.[300] Khaïr-Eddine’s innovative technique consists in maintaining the Baudelairian poetics of the genre while emphasizing its experimental dimension by combining prose fragments with poetic verses.[301] As a result, the poem becomes a hybrid piece of creation with fragmented prose, irregular verses, and unusual typography. A relevant example is the final and longest poem of *Soleil arachnide*, entitled ‘Manifeste’, in which Khaïr-Eddine combines poetry, prose, and drama in a dizzying mixture of capital letters, interrupted lines, disjointed fragments, and playful punctuation. The destruction of poetic structure turns the idea of revolt into a material element, a performative act operating within the literary form. While Khaïr-Eddine’s poem deals with a wide range of themes, including autobiographical sequences, Moroccan, Arab, and African politics, and various reflections on theatrical and literary

[298] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.76.
[299] Charles Baudelaire, ‘A Arsène Houssaye’, in *Le Spleen de Paris* (Paris: Emile Paul, 1917 [1869]), pp.iv-vi (p.v).
[300] Jonathan Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Poetics of Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p.16.
[301] See for instance ‘Le Roi’, ‘Gennevilliers’ and ‘Soleil arachnide’ (*Soleil arachnide*), ‘Sur une mort anonyme’ (*Ce Maroc!*), and ‘Job’ (*Résurrection des fleurs sauvages*).

creation, this thematic variation is overemphasized by the disorganization of textual elements. Jean-Paul Michel interestingly considers 'Manifeste' as the embodiment of Khaïr-Eddine's 'registre-limite',[302] a significant term that hints at Khaïr-Eddine's radical strategy of destroying the poetic form and pushing poetry to the limit of the genre as an organizing and a recognizable category of writing. Michel also draws a parallel between Khaïr-Eddine's poem and late radiophonic performances by French dramatist Antonin Artaud. This comparison is compelling not only because both Artaud and Khaïr-Eddine created provocative works informed by their own lives and subjected to censorship, but also because Artaud's subversive aesthetics can precisely serve to describe Khaïr-Eddine's poetic structures.

In 1947, Artaud recorded *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, a radiophonic play that was immediately prohibited by Radio France not only for its antireligious and controversial stances, but also for its extremely disorienting construction. Roz Murray notes that Artaud's text 'fluctuates between chaos and order, evident from its very structure, framed by an introduction and conclusion, but punctuated by throttled moans and glossolalic outbursts'.[303] The unsettling dynamics of sound effects and vocal performance created by Artaud was significantly described as a 'theatre of voices'[304] in reference to the way voices are staged, exaggerated, and opposed throughout the play. In the conclusion of his text, Artaud proclaims that 'l'homme est malade parce qu'il est mal construit […] Lorsque vous lui aurez fait un corps sans organes, alors vous l'aurez délivré de tous ses automatismes et rendu à sa véritable liberté'.[305] This famous image of a 'corps sans organes' can serve to describe Khaïr-Eddine's subversive aesthetics in poetry. According

[302] Jean-Paul Michel, '*J'arrache les clous de mon corps trop haut pour être cloué*', in Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, pp.7-17 (p.14).
[303] Roz Murray, *Antonin Artaud. The Scum of the Soul* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), p.157.
[304] Edward Scheer, *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p.48.
[305] Antonin Artaud, 'Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu', in *Oeuvres Complètes XIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 65-104 (p.104).

to Roz Murray, Artaud's 'breaking with all conventional-sounding vocal gestures is a way of reshaping the vocal cords and organs of speech in order to forcibly reconstruct this badly designed anatomy;'[306] Building on this reading, I would draw a parallel between Artaud's attempt to reconstruct the human body by reshaping its organs and Khaïr-Eddine's strategy of rebuilding the poem by using fragmented and scattered elements. What Artaud contests is actually not the organs themselves but, in Anne Sauvagnargues's words, 'l'assemblage réglé d'organes constituants, assujettis à un principe d'unité corporelle'.[307] Similarly, Khaïr-Eddine rebels against the corporeal unity of the poem, expressed by regular verses, coherent syntax, and homogeneous punctuation. In Artaud's play, the voice represents the attempt to create a 'corps sans organes', which is not 'un corps dépourvu d'organes, mais un corps en deçà de la détermination organique, un corps aux organes indéterminés, un corps en voie de différenciation'.[308] Similarly, Khaïr-Eddine's poetic form attempts to create 'a poem without organs', meaning a poem that is not deprived of its constituents but rather a poem whose constituents (verses, syntax, and punctuation) are disrupted and often indeterminate, a poem released from any form of corporeal unity. As a result, Khaïr-Eddine's 'Manifeste' becomes in its very structure a bodily representation of revolt that operates both within and outside the boundaries of poetry as a literary genre. On the model of Artaud's 'theatre of voices', Khaïr-Eddine shapes the poem as a 'theatre of forms', a complex corporeality composed of various elements, and based on a radical assemblage and unsettling staging in the textual space. The formal aspect of Khaïr-Eddine's poetry, which critics have described either as a 'souffle'[309] or a series of 'giclées',[310] always recalls the dynamics of Artaud's vocal outbursts and the necessity of reconstructing the poem as a new body. Although Khaïr-

[306] Murray, p.157.
[307] Anne Sauvagnargues, *Deleuze et l'art* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), p.87.
[308] Sauvagnargues, p.87-88.
[309] Jean Orizet, 'Songe et clameur du réel', in Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, pp.5-6 (p.5).
[310] Michel, '"J'arrache"', p.14.

Eddine's later poems reduce the impact of this formal technique, his work remains concerned with the necessity of reinventing poetry in its very structure.

Khaïr-Eddine's formal strategies bear great resemblance to those found in Laâbi's early poetry, at least until *L'Arbre de fer fleurit*, written in the early months of his imprisonment in 1972, published two years later, and often considered as the turning point in his aesthetics. As rightly noted by Alessandra, Laâbi's first poem, *Race : Itinéraire oral*, is 'en rupture avec tout conformisme, jouant avec le discontinu, la ponctuation et les majuscules […]'.[311] The poem, which starts 'je crie | ma race monte',[312] develops the symbolism of the outcry as a structuring element of the poetic form. The significance of the shout as a vocal manifestation of the poet's anger is emphasized in the tenth section of the poem which opens with a reference to Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum lamenting the 1967 Arab defeat discussed in the previous chapter. Oum Kalthoum's melancholic songs are reworked by Laâbi and turned into a succession of shouts accentuated in the text through the repetition of the word 'cri' twenty-six times. The final occurrence, 'cri baraka',[313] significantly combines the act of shouting with the idea of rejection and refusal conveyed by the word 'baraka', which means 'stop, enough' in Moroccan dialect. Moreover, the symbolism of the outcry is enabled, as with Khaïr-Eddine, through the disruption of typography. Letters, words, and lines can be considered, given their fragmented and shifting representation on the page, as a series of shouts thrown in the face of the reader in what Laâbi describes as 'l'anarchie de la création'[314] and 'une déroute exemplaire'.[315] As suggested by the somewhat oxymoronic combinations 'anarchie/création' and 'déroute/exemplaire', Laâbi's poetic form becomes the locus of two successive yet opposite movements of chaotic

[311] Alessandra, *Abdellatif Laâbi*, p.45.
[312] Laâbi, *Race*, p.5.
[313] Laâbi, *Race*, p.21.
[314] Laâbi, *Race*, p.19.
[315] Laâbi, *Race*, p.20.

destruction and systematic reconstruction. Typography often serves to describe and emphasize those movements. In 'Marasmes', for instance, a poem from the collection *Le Règne de Barbarie*, the words 'miné' and 'tombe'[316] are printed in a disjointed form with horizontally separated letters for the former and a stair-like vertical transcription for the latter as a reference to the respective movements of burst and fall. Thus, both words are broken down and reconstructed in their very structures to convey and extend the meanings sought by Laâbi.

Starting with *L'Arbre de fer fleurit* and the subsequent collections from his period in prison, Laâbi seems, however, to abandon this extreme demonstration of formal subversion for a more conventional poetic form, shifting the idea of revolt from a structural and typographical representation in the poem to a reconstruction in the content. As noted by his friend Serfaty, Laâbi's poetry becomes 'révolutionnaire par le contenu. Point n'est besoin pour elle d'être "terroriste" dans la forme. Par là même, cette forme prend-elle un souffle plus profond'.[317] Nonetheless, I would argue that this shift is not as radical as might be thought and, more importantly, does not reduce the subversive power of the poetic form. My contention is that Laâbi rather constantly renews his poetic structures to overcome the individual traumas of prison and torture, and face the collective tragedies in both Morocco and the Arab world. In *Histoire des sept crucifiés de l'espoir*, written in tribute to seven opponents of the Moroccan regime[318] executed in August 1974, he frames the poem as a narrative divided into twelve time sections introduced by a prologue. The choice of this structure allows Laâbi to reconstruct, hour by hour, the night preceding the execution. The twelve sections run from the 26th of August 1974 at 8pm until the 27th of August 1974 at

[316] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.31.
[317] Ahmed Tariq (pseudonym of Abraham Serfaty), 'Préface', in Laâbi, *L'Arbre de fer fleurit*, pp.i-xii (p.xi).
[318] Méliani Driss, Janah Boujemaaa, Lahjiouni Mohamed, Miri Boujemaa, Said Oukouya, Moha Ou Hammou and Mouhtadi Mohamed were all arrested in the aftermath of the events launched by the movement '3 mars' in March 1973. They were all condemned for being involved in a series of attacks against official governmental sites organized by the armed branch of the UNFP (Union Nationale des Forces Populaires), the party who opposed the Moroccan regime in the 1970s.

6am. As the reader moves forward in the poem, the tension rises and culminates with the final account of the execution. By reshaping his poem as a narrative composed of successive sections, Laâbi not only brings life back to the condemned but also seeks to contain the trauma in a closed structure. Laâbi's poem is at once a poetic response to the execution and a shout of anger and revolt emphasized throughout the text by the repetition of the lines 'gongs d'annonce | tambours témoins | battez | résonnez | battez'. Laâbi's symbolic call for the noisy sounds of gongs and drums is a way to break the silence that surrounded the waves of arrests and condemnations in Morocco in the 1970s. Each section of the poem becomes a gong stroke that faces the trauma and raises awareness of the abuses committed by the Moroccan regime.

Another interesting example of this fundamental connection between the structure of the poem and post-traumatic writing is provided by *Oraisons marquées au fer rouge*, four poems dedicated to four Moroccan figures of political activism.[319] On the one hand, the acts of torture inflicted upon Laâbi's comrades are materialized in the very structure of the poems. Verses that overtly describe torture are systematically fragmented and broken up as if the poem was incorporating and recreating the suffering of the tortured bodies: 'Fouet | perchoir | étouffement à l'eau | torture'.[320] The poetic structure becomes at once a revolt against the act of torture and an extension of the tortured body, a further organ that equally receives savage and horrible treatment, expressed by disjointed words and indented lines on the page. On the other hand, Laâbi's poetic form develops a discourse of resistance by celebrating life and its continuation. The first poem, for instance, reproduces the word 'VIVANT' five times while the third one opens with a moving question: 'est-ce possible Mahmud | tu es déjà parti | tu n'avais que vingt-cinq ans | tu en étais à ton premier

[319] Evelyne Serfaty (the sister of Moroccan opponent Abraham Serfaty, died from torture in October 1974), Omar Benjelloun (Moroccan activist assassinated in Casablanca in 1975), Abdellatif Zeroual (Moroccan activist who died from torture in 1974) and Saida Menebhi (Moroccan activist and sister of Aziz Menebhi the president of Moroccan Students Union in 1972; she died from torture and hunger strike in 1977).
[320] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.223.

poème'.[321] Here, the death of the political activist is called into question and symbolically contrasted with poetic creation as an act of permanent regeneration. This idea is developed in the last poem which opens with a call for poetry: 'Réveille-toi | Poème | fils de l'extrême douleur'.[322] Laâbi's aesthetic revolt turns the poetic form into a living organ born out of trauma and violence. The aesthetics of the poem, shaped by fragmentation, repetition, and questioning, serves to reinforce the poet's ability to resist and formally respond to state violence.

The mobility of Laâbi's subversive aesthetics finds a resonance in the poetic experience of Khatibi, largely informed by his transcultural readings and influences. Khatibi's incursion into the realm of poetry takes place in two fundamental phases: his first poetic collection *Le Lutteur de classe à la manière taoïste*, published in 1976, and what was termed 'la poésie de l'aimance',[323] launched ten years later with *Dédicace à l'année qui vient* and developed in his subsequent poems.[324] In both moments, I would argue that the subversive dimension of Khatibi's poetic form, influenced by his intellectual revolt discussed in the previous chapter, lies in its ability to rebel against cultural boundaries by drawing inspiration from and engaging in a productive dialogue with other poetic forms, derived from foreign cultural and literary environments. I would call Khatibi's poetic form a 'travelling form' as it overcomes geographical boundaries and travels across cultures to appropriate new features and structures, thus opening the poem to the enriching experience of otherness.

[321] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Histoire des sept crucifiés de l'espoir & Oraisons marquées au fer rouge*, (Cesson-la-Forêt: Editions de la Table Rase, 1980 [1977]), p.45.
[322] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique I*, p.224.
[323] This is the title of the second volume of Khatibi's complete works, published by Editions La Différence in 2008.
[324] *Le Livre de l'aimance* (Casablanca: Editions Marsam, 1995) and *Aimance* (Neuilly: Editions Al Manar, 2003).

In *Le Lutteur de classe*, largely inspired by the 'Tao Te Ching', Marc Gontard has extensively demonstrated how Khatibi operates a 'transfert formel'[325] of the Chinese text by reproducing its syntactic and rhetorical structural forms in his own poem. Further to Gontard's reading, it is noteworthy that Khatibi also frames *Le Lutteur de classe* in forty numbered sections which symbolically recalls the structure of the Chinese text, also composed of brief chapters. Khatibi not only overcomes the linguistic barrier by working on the French translated version of the Chinese text but he also defines his own poem as the result of a permanent dialogue between two distant cultural spaces. In the first section, Khatibi offers what can be read as a perfect definition of his poetic form: 'ne t'envole pas dans ta propre parole | ne t'évanouis pas dans celle des autres'.[326] This call, directed towards both the self and the reader, hints at the creation of a new transcultural poetic form in the contact zone between the respective 'paroles' of the Moroccan writer and the other. I would argue that Khatibi's poetic form, by appropriating and reworking the syntactic and rhetorical structures of the Chinese text, operates in what Bhabha defines as 'the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture'.[327] This 'inbetween space', central to Khatibi's subversive aesthetics, is not only manifest in his borrowing of the Chinese poetic form but also emphasized throughout the poem as he celebrates 'la différence sans retour',[328] a concept that refers to the rejection of fixity and to the permanent opening towards difference and otherness. At the end of his poem, Khatibi writes that 'plus on voyage plus le signe à l'horizon se scinde'[329] in reference to the way in which his travelling poetic form

[325] Marc Gontard, *La Violence du texte : études sur la littérature marocaine de langue française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981), p.82.
[326] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II. Poésie de l'Aimance* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2008), p.11.
[327] Bhabha, p.56.
[328] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.12.
[329] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.34.

repeatedly renews its rebellion against cultural isolation and its productive contact with the other.

Khatibi's aesthetic revolt takes a significant turn with the concept of 'aimance' which he regenerates from occidental and oriental sources and defines as 'cette autre langue d'amour qui […] affirme une affinité plus active entre les êtres, qui puisse donner forme à leur désir […], en son inachèvement même'.[330] At the core of Khatibi's definition, there is an attempt to create a poetic form that can embody love and desire, and foster an active relationship between people, without mastery or appropriation. Khatibi argues that the concept of 'aimance' is fascinating because it precisely conveys the uncertainty of happiness and sorrow in love, and embodies, in its infrequency, the idea of search and desire that drives writing: 'On écrit toujours par touches approximatives, par tâtonnements, par écarts plus ou moins grands entre le vouloir-écrire et sa mise en forme, toujours inachevée, friable et détachable en fragments'.[331] Implicit in Khatibi's reflection is a rejection of writing as a monolithic process, a revolt against immutable and rigid literary forms which leave little space for hesitation, rewriting, and reconstruction. In what follows, I demonstrate that Khatibi's 'poésie de l'aimance', by engaging with other cultural references, redefines the poetic form itself as a fragmented, multidimensional, and open-ended construct.

On the one hand, Khatibi's poetry, in 'Nouveau mode courtois' for instance, moves away from modern influences and draws on both the tradition of medieval courtly poetry and the 'Ghazal' or the seventh-century Arabic genre of love poetry. Khatibi frames his poem as a direct address to a beloved woman and presents himself as a 'courtisan de volupté'[332] seeking pleasure and instruction in the experience of 'aimance'. Moreover, he borrows some techniques which are recurrent in love poetry, like the profusion of

[330] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'L'Aimance et l'invention d'un idiome' in *Œuvres Complètes II*, pp. 123-145 (p.128).
[331] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.125.
[332] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.45.

questions, appeals, and interjections, as well as the construction of fictional dialogues with the beloved: 'C'est toi, dis-je, la donnante | […] Donne-moi le secret en lui-même | Redit-elle en souriant'.[333] The borrowing is also manifest in the way in which Khatibi reactivates the connection between love poetry, music, and oral performance. In medieval European tradition, courtly poems were often chanted by minstrels and troubadours. Similarly, in Arabic tradition, the art of singing 'Ghazal' is very old and often dated back to oral performance in 'Ukaz, a market near Mecca where poets used to read their texts in the pre-Islamic period. In 'Nouveau mode courtois', for instance, Khatibi significantly divides his poem into two 'partition[s]',[334] a term that refers at once to the act of division and to music sheets or scores. In doing so, Khatibi implicitly suggests that his poem can be read, sung, chanted, and otherwise performed.

On the other hand, unlike in *Le Lutteur de classe*, Khatibi's borrowing of medieval European and Arab forms of love poetry is neither structural nor prosodic as he prefers to evade the structural requirements of these forms. He even uses the poem to champion a poetic form freed from the constraints of rhyme and metre: 'Et jugez, je vous prie | De ces poèmes | Sans rime visible et de raison autre | Mais au rythme du moment'.[335] As suggested by these verses, Khatibi's poetic form is rooted in the very moment of writing, and consequently remains open to interpretation, rewriting, and variation. A good example of this variation is the different words used by Khatibi to describe his poetic works: 'processions',[336] 'proses artistiques',[337] 'offrande',[338] and 'notes de mémoire'.[339] These

[333] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.52.
[334] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.43 and 57.
[335] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.49.
[336] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Dédicace à l'année qui vient* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1986), p.75 ; In an interview, Khatibi notes that these 'processions' were initially a letter that became haiku and then poems (see *La Langue de l'autre* (New York: Editions Les Mains Secrètes, 1999), p.80).
[337] This is the subtitle of Khatibi's *Le Livre de l'aimance.* Khatibi writes in the 'Protocole' that opens the volume: 'Entre l'écrivain et le lecteur, *une prose artistique* (selon le dire des lettrés italiens) est ici exigée, invitant le lecteur à trouver les mots de ses émotions et leur sonorité, à reconnaître où parle le désir, où il s'affirme en son rythme et sa force plastique', in *Le Livre de l'aimance*, p.6.

varied designations exemplify Khatibi's conception of the poetic form as both the product of an aesthetic revolt against conventional and well-established forms of poetry, and the object of an open quest for innovative forms that echoes the search for the beloved and the realization of the fleeting concept of 'aimance'. In a final note from 'Les deux livres de chevet', Khatibi writes : 'Je vois la composition de ces notes, mais je ne vois pas assez leur effet sur le lecteur et la lectrice. Indétermination qui convient à mon regard sur le monde et sur moi-même'[340]. This indeterminacy, fuelled by the variation of poetic form and extended to the experience of reading, is another way to resist frozen forms of literary creation and to rebel against rigidity and strictness in the very construction of poetry. Khatibi's poetic form can be conceptualized as an object of desire for openness and encounter, echoing the position of the author whose 'désir ultime' is 'd'inventer le lecteur, c'est-à-dire l'inviter à trouver les mots de ses émotions et de leur sonorité'.[341] Although Khatibi's poetry of 'aimance' can be often seen as conveying an idealistic and utopian vision of social relationships, it still performs a revolt against all forms of possession and retreat into reductive and static conceptions of identity. This is clearly manifest in the way in which his aesthetics overcomes linguistic, geographical, and national barriers, connecting Moroccan poetry with both its Arabic heritage and Western influence, and inviting the reader to think across historical periods and cultures.

The theatre and its subversive double

Despite a relatively limited corpus, theatre also plays a fundamental role in the trajectory of the three writers, notably for the embodiment of revolt in literary and dramatic

[338] This is how Khatibi defines *Le Livre de l'aimance*: 'L'auteur considère ce livret en tant qu'offrande', in *Le Livre de l'aimance*, p.6.
[339] Khatibi, *Le Livre de l'aimance*, p.7 and 38.
[340] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.101.
[341] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.128-129.

form. The originality of Khatibi's, Khaïr-Eddine's, and Laâbi's theatrical creations lies in their combination of western theoretical influences, mainly from Artaud and Brecht, with reproductions of Moroccan, Arabic, and African materials. The representation of revolt in dramatic form attempts to revisit the concept in a literary genre that inherently connects with people through staging and performance. Theatre, as noted by Hannah Arendt, is 'the political art per excellence; only there is the political sphere transposed into art. By the same token, it is the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationships to others'.[342] If one considers the political in its broad meaning of the everyday practice of communication and intersubjectivity, then theatre – as a dialogic form of art based on interaction and exchange – can provide a useful lens through which to assess the aesthetic performance of revolt.

In what follows, I explore how theatrical forms developed by the three writers perform the idea of revolt through a wide set of structural, symbolic, and technical tools that recall Artaud's theory of theatre. At stake in this discussion is the way in which theatrical form internally evolves and subverts a certain idea of representation or *mimesis*. In his reading of Artaud, Derrida rightly observes that 'le théâtre de la cruauté n'est pas une *représentation*. C'est la vie elle-même en ce qu'elle a d'irreprésentable'.[343] Derrida's definition hints at Artaud's attempt to abolish the idea of representation and turn theatre into a space driven by physical and direct action, and concerned with real life rather than with imitation or reproduction. In the following section, I also address the performance of revolt in the three writers' theatrical works through the relationship between representation and accessibility by looking at stage directions and assessing the effectiveness of performance in the light of Brecht's theory.

[342] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.187-188.
[343] Jacques Derrida, 'Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation', in *L'Ecriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), pp.341-268 (p.343).

In his autobiography *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi reveals that his early contact with drama took the form of 'un théâtre de hasard'[344] improvised with his elder brother in the streets and then the theatre of Marrakech in the aftermath of Morocco's independence. Later on, Khatibi wrote an unpublished play, *La Mort des artistes*, staged in Paris in 1964 by Argentinean director Jorge Lavelli, and *Le Prophète voilé*, a play 'écrite directement pour la *scène théâtrale*'[345] and broadcast on France Culture in 1974. Abdellatif Laâbi, who was one of the historical founders of the Moroccan University Theatre in 1963, which staged plays by Brecht and Arrabal, published three dramatic pieces: *Le Baptême chacaliste* (1987), *Exercices de tolérance* (1993) and *Le Juge de l'ombre* (1994), all gathered in the volume *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade* (2000). Finally, Khaïr-Eddine systematically disseminated theatrical fragments throughout his works and wrote two major plays: *L'Etat d'exception*, included in his novel *Moi l'aigre* (1970), and *Les Cerbères* (1999), his unique piece of theatre published as such. To borrow one of the terms used by Laâbi, one can think of the theatrical production of the three writers as an 'incursion' into the realm of drama where the literary form works to extend, materialize, and revisit the concept of revolt. In a brief text significantly entitled 'Le théâtre n'est point mort',[346] Khatibi draws a link between theatre and poetry as he celebrates the subversive and sensual energy of both genres: 'le théâtre est un poème: il doit avoir la rigueur, la violence rusée et la joie dionysiaque nécessaires à sa construction'.[347] This fundamental proximity between poetry and theatre is acknowledged by Laâbi who sees in poetry 'une sœur siamoise du théâtre'.[348] Laâbi's metaphor emphasizes the connection between theatre and poetry, and brings about a corporeal dimension of unity and interaction through the

[344] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'La Mémoire tatouée', in *Œuvres Complètes I. Romans et récits* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2008) p.66.
[345] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Le Prophète voilé', in *Œuvres Complètes II,* p.222.
[346] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Le théâtre n'est point mort' in *Œuvres Complètes II,* pp.305-309.
[347] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II,* p.308.
[348] Abdellatif Laâbi, 'Appendice', in *Le Baptême chacaliste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), pp.59-62 (p.60).

suggestive image of two conjoined bodies. Laâbi explains that he came to theatre through poetry and notes that both genres 'procèdent d'une démarche commune' as they 'donnent à voir et à entendre le corps aux prises avec le travail d'enfantement de la parole'.[349] This focus on the oral dimension of theatre is shared by Khaïr-Eddine who advocates 'une idée nette de théâtre fondée principalement sur le mouvement et la fréquence de la parole'.[350] Both the association of theatre with poetry and the focus on orality attempt to redefine the theatrical form as a poetic construct that uses language, imagery, and performance to reach and speak to its audience.

The understanding of theatre as an inherently poetic and revolutionary genre echoes the theory developed by Artaud. In *Le Théâtre et son double*, which similarly includes frequent parallels between poetry and theatre, the French dramatist argues that

> une vraie pièce de théâtre bouscule le repos des sens, libère l'inconscient comprimé, pousse à une sorte de révolte virtuelle et qui d'ailleurs ne peut avoir tout son prix que si elle demeure virtuelle, impose aux collectivités rassemblées une attitude héroïque et difficile.[351]

Artaud conceives of theatre as an unsettling form of art that deeply moves the subject and urges the necessity of revolt upon audiences. His insistence on the virtual dimension of this revolt as a condition of effectiveness hints at the necessity of using the power of the imagination to upset and overwhelm the spectator. This virtual revolt performed through theatre finds a resonance in the different plays written by the three authors.

In a foreword to *Les Cerbères*, in which he locates the play somewhere in Africa, Khaïr-Eddine presents the dialogue between characters as stemming from the fragmented African body: 'Cette Afrique […] tend vers nous des moignons dont nous ne savons plus

[349] Abdellatif Laâbi, 'Préface', in *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2000), pp.7-9 (p.8).
[350] Khaïr-Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*, p.120-121.
[351] Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p.40-41.

qu'ils étaient des mains. Ce sont ces moignons qui parlent'.[352] The virtual and shocking image of speaking stumps, which resists at once coherence and unity, foregrounds orality and polyphony as two fundamental features of Khaïr-Eddine's theatrical form. These features are emphasized throughout the play through a series of symbolic characters that embody African postcolonial political, economic, and social ills (the despot 'Lehaï Mar', 'La Famine', 'Le Chef de la milice', 'Le trafiquant',…) and constitute a discordant chorus of voices, all conspiring to seize power, as summarized by the despot: 'Le pouvoir est un délire. Je vois partout des ennemis, des assassins en puissance et des comploteurs chevronnés'.[353] The whole play is organized around the struggle for power and the complex strategies of manipulation, conspiracy, and exploitation performed by the different characters. The African masses, in contrast, are depicted as a group of dispossessed and starving humans who suffer throughout the play and end up dying in the epilogue whilst sarcastically screaming: 'Vive la Mort!'[354] The rather conventional structure of the play, composed of three acts with a prologue and an epilogue, can be read as an attempt to resist the discursive chaos and respond to the disorder of polyphony through the order of theatrical form. Khaïr-Eddine's ironical representations of both the despot, 'le Chef Suprême du Parti et du peuple'[355] who struggles to maintain his rule, and his enemies, who plot against him without destabilizing his power, are emphasized by the title of the play, 'Les Cerbères'. In Greek mythology, Cerberus is a multi-headed dog who guards the doors of hell and prevents the dead from escaping. In Khaïr-Eddine's play, it metaphorically refers to the various strategies of exploitation and abuse that undermine the everyday life of the African population. In his prologue, Khaïr-Eddine admits that 'il

[352] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères* (Paris : Arcantères, 1999), p.8.
[353] Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères*, p.132.
[354] Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères*, p.141.
[355] Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères*, p.12.

faudrait sans doute inventer dix mille Hercules pour en venir à bout […]'.[356] The impossibility of this perspective opens the way for Artaud's 'révolte virtuelle', performed in the play through the shocking image and utterances of speaking stumps. Khaïr-Eddine as a dramatist is, to some extent, just another 'conspirator' who uses the theatrical form as a way to rebel against dispossession and tyranny in the African continent.

This relationship between aesthetics and politics in theatre is similarly explored by Laâbi throughout his plays. In *Exercices de tolérance*, for instance, he divides the play into eleven scenes that can be read separately, although all investigate the notions of tolerance and intolerance in social relationships. The titles chosen by Laâbi for the scenes draw on eminent literary and political references. The first scene, 'Rimbaud et Shéhérazade (ou le dialogue des cultures, il paraît)', refers, with a touch of irony, to an improbable encounter in a supermarket between the French poet and the legendary storyteller. The dialogue between the two characters revolves around life, exile, love, and poetry. Their encounter is described as 'la rencontre de la parole et du souffle, de la sagesse et de l'innocence, du rire et des larmes, de la danse de l'esprit et de la transe des mots'.[357] The dialogue develops a metaphorical reflection on how poetry and narration, both forms of literary creation exemplified by Rimbaud and Sheherazade, can overcome historical and cultural boundaries. The third scene, 'Le bruit et les odeurs', is a clear reference to a polemical speech in 1991 by Jacques Chirac, the mayor of Paris who later became French president. In his speech, Chirac claimed that problems of immigration in France are mainly caused by North African and Black immigrants, arguing that a French worker living in a popular neighbourhood cannot stand his jobless immigrant neighbour who lives off benefits, and adding: 'Si vous ajoutez à cela le bruit et l'odeur […], eh bien le travailleur français sur le

[356] Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères*, p.7.
[357] Laâbi, *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade*, p.90.

palier devient fou […] Et ce n'est pas raciste que de dire cela'.[358] Laâbi's play draws on Chirac's speech and denial of racism by featuring two comedians who suffer from intolerance and accept to be gagged to avoid pronouncing controversial and racist statements. Other comedians discuss the role of theatre and argue that art is about dealing with 'les zones d'ombre, les non-dits, les dérapages, les lames du fond de l'être' and about 'entrebâiller des portes qui sont fermées'.[359] As a result, the subtext and the unsaid in the play become as important as the dialogue, offering a genuine reflection on how theatre can explore hidden or denied aspects of intolerance and racism. The fourth scene, 'Homme au foyer', cannily plays on the inversion of the common expression 'Femme au foyer' to denounce sexism and promote gender equality. The play features a dialogue between a working woman and her jobless husband waiting for her back home. In a movement that recalls the technique discussed in the previous chapter, Laâbi reverses the conventional structure of Moroccan society by depicting the man as 'l'être faible'[360] who does the household chores and suffers verbal violence from his wife. The theatrical form becomes the locus of a creative reversal that sheds light on sexism and gender equality issues in Morocco and beyond. More broadly, Laâbi's *Exercices de tolérance* is constructed in a way that works simultaneously to promote theatre and to rebel against various forms of intolerance. A good example of this double aim is provided in the prologue that serves not only as a playful introduction in the form of a 'mise en abyme' with a deliberate misspelling of Laâbi's name, but also as a possible sequel to the last scene of which it features the same characters. As a result, the whole play resembles a closed loop surrounding the discourses of hatred and intolerance, symbolically confined in its structure.

[358] 'Allocution de Jacques Chirac du 19 Juin 1991', in Journal télévisé de TF1, 21st June 1991 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BxaVdu0hqU> [accessed 20 March 2018]
[359] Laâbi, *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade*, p.108.
[360] Laâbi, *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade*, p.119.

Laâbi's theatrical form seeks not only to resist but also to circumscribe intolerance and submit its manifestations to the transformative and subversive power of theatre.

With Khatibi's *Le Prophète voilé*, the theatrical form becomes the meeting ground where aesthetics, politics, and history intersect. Khatibi defines his play as 'une libre interprétation'[361] of the story of Hakim bnû Hicham, also known as al-Muqanna' (The Veiled), a masked man who claimed to be a prophet and rebelled against the reign of the third Abbasid Caliph Al-Mahdi in the eighth century. Khatibi's play draws on both contradictory historical sources and the fictionalized account of the character in a short story published by Borges in 1934,[362] with some material overtly borrowed from the Argentinean author. Khatibi's free interpretation of the veiled prophet, which hinges on 'une recréation du personnage',[363] extends the idea of revolt and opposition, already embodied in the figure of the veiled Prophet, to the construction of theatrical form.

At the beginning of both sections that constitute the play, characters, for instance, are presented in two groups, those 'du côté du Prophète voilé' and those 'du côté du Khalife', thus emphasizing the symbolism of opposition and confrontation. On a structural level, each section is divided into a series of 'tableaux', a term that departs from the European canonical 'scènes' and hints at the 'séances' of the *Maqamat,* a classical Arabic literary genre that combines rhymed prose and poetry. Interestingly, this genre first emerged in Khurasan, the region where the veiled Prophet appeared in the eighth century and where Al-Hamadani composed his famous *Maqamat* two centuries later. In the very structure of his play, Khatibi's 'tableaux' not only revive the theatrical dimension of the 'Maqamat' but also work to transgress the historical and cultural boundaries of theatrical form by

[361] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.223.
[362] See Jorge Luis Borges, 'El tintorero enmascarado Hakim de Merv', in *Historia universal de la infamia* (Buenos Aires: Tor, 1935).
[363] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.224.

combining materials from Western and Arabic sources, as evidenced by the recourse to both Borges' short story and the specific genre of *Maqamat*. This effort recalls the work of Moroccan playwright Tayeb Saddiki who staged an adaptation in Moroccan dialect of Al-Hamadani's *Maqamat* and sought to combine past and present influences in his plays. Here again, I would argue that Khatibi's aesthetic choices are driven not only by a desire to promote transcultural dialogue in theatre but also by an intellectual revolt against navel-gazing and one-dimensional conceptions of literary creation, as well as a formal protest against the neglect of the long-term history of Arab culture. In this respect, Khatibi's choice of characters, including not only harems but also the typical characters of 'Le Khalife', 'L'Eunuque', and 'Le Conteur' who closes the text, strengthens the connection of the play with the legacy of Classical Arabic tales. This significant choice reveals that Khatibi is concerned as much with reflecting on revolt as a performance embedded in theatrical form as with connecting his work to the oft-neglected structures and patterns of Arabic narrative tradition, which have a great influence on Moroccan popular culture. As a result, Khatibi's theatrical form becomes the meeting point of historical investigation, structural innovation, and promotion of cultural heritage, all expressions of formal revolt against reductive, simplistic, and superficial approaches to literary creation.

The influence of Artaud's theory on the three writers' aesthetic revolt in theatre is also evident in the way they make use of the various means of expression available on the stage to create 'une poésie dans l'espace'[364] that substitutes the power of material imagery for that of language. Artaud posits that this form of spatial poetry exploits 'tous les moyens d'expression utilisables sur une scène, comme musique, danse, plastique, pantomime,

[364] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.57.

mimique, gesticulation, intonations, architecture, éclairage et décor'.[365] The dramatic works by the three authors combine and emphasize those various elements.

In Khaïr-Eddine's *Les Cerbères* – the closest work to Artaud's revolutionary aesthetics – the preliminary description of the stage sets the tone: 'La scène est brillamment éclairée: spots rouges, couleur de terre africaine – latérite. Sol bosselé avec un arbuste desséché. On entend une rumeur étrange, un bruit de fond exprimé par des êtres suffocants'.[366] From the beginning, scenery and sounds establish the setting and throw the audience into fear and anxiety. The reference to the colour of the African soil and the emphasis placed on light serve to stage a scenic revolt against the silence and darkness that surrounds the image of the African continent. Throughout the play, this revolt is performed in a succession of decaying spaces, stealth spectres, violent lights, and brutal sounds of gongs and weapons, producing what Artaud defines as 'ce jeu perpétuel de miroir qui va d'une couleur à un geste et d'un cri à un mouvement, [...] nous plonge dans cet état d'incertitude et d'angoisse ineffable qui est le propre de la poésie'.[367] Khaïr-Eddine turns the stage into a poetic and chaotic scene driven by bodily language with characters turning, as in Artaud's account of the Balinese theatre, into 'des hiéroglyphes animés'.[368] A good example of this transformation is provided in the fifth scene of the first act, as Khaïr-Eddine insists on setting the lights in a way that creates the illusion of movement: 'Le contre-jour doit être reproduit tel que les personnages n'apparaissent que comme des figures d'ébène mouvantes, des marionnettes en quelque sorte',[369] a genuine reproduction of Artaud's vision of characters that rails against the exploitation of the African body. Similar strategies are used by Laâbi in *Le Baptême chacaliste,* published in 1985, and which opens with a powerful and frightening concert of sounds including '[des]

[365] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.57-58.
[366] Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères*, p.9.
[367] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.96.
[368] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.83.
[369] Khaïr-Eddine, *Les Cerbères*, p.57.

halètements divers', '[le] hurlement d'une sirène', '[des] rafales d'armes et de vents', '[des] tam-tams et crotales' and 'le jappement du chacal'.[370] The play includes a succession of songs, rhythmic music, and ritual dances, often performed by choruses and groups of actors, in line with Artaud's call to create a theatre based on 'des transes, comme les danses de Derviches et d'Aïssaouas produisent des transes'.[371] The idea of revolt becomes the object of a theatrical performance that resists the strategies of oppression and silencing exerted by the Moroccan regime, and promotes the liberating power of artistic creation. Comparably, in *Le Prophète voilé*, Khatibi plays with the voice of the main character to emphasize the pervasive power of the rebel. Thus, he provides the character of the false Prophet with three different voices: '– voix I: quand le Prophète parle normalement, comme tous les mortels. – Voix II: off. – Voix III: off-écho', with the last two 'se [faisant] entendre en présence du Prophète ou en son absence'.[372] Khatibi uses at once the multiplication of voices and their separation from the body to create a vocal theatricalization that recalls Artaud's experimentation in his late radiophonic plays, discussed earlier in this chapter. As a result, throughout the play, the spectator must continually identify the source of the voice and the situation in which the utterances of the rebel are performed. As a result, the very idea of revolt becomes the object of a quest for meaning that not only empowers the audience but also constitutes a central element in the process of staging, which Artaud significantly considers 'non comme le simple degré de réfraction d'un texte sur la scène, mais comme le point de départ de toute création théâtrale'.[373]

The stage directions in the different plays also reveal a common interest in this subversive aspect of theatrical aesthetics. In an appendix to *Le Baptême chacaliste*, Laâbi,

[370] Laâbi, *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade*, p.13.
[371] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.128.
[372] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.229.
[373] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.144.

for instance, includes a section on staging in which he notes that the performance of his text needs to 'donner corps, voix et mouvement à la folie qui le parcourt' and 's'éloigner à tout prix du premier degré des discours, des situations'.[374] Similarly, Khatibi insists that the director is responsible for merging the different forms of theatrical performance (music, gesture, dance...) so as to create what he calls 'l'exigence des mouvements prodigieux' and 'cet enchantement du corps et de la pensée'[375] sought through the experience of theatrical creation. In summary, the three writers, without fully conforming with the features of the 'theatre of cruelty', still appropriate Artaud's vision of staging and include in their respective plays substantial references inspired by his revolutionary aesthetics. The theatrical form is reworked in both the text and the staging so as to elaborate an aesthetic revolt defined by physical mobility, artistic performance, and sensorial excitement. This form of aesthetic revolt is in permanent dialogue with politics as it deals with a wide range of topics, from social and cultural intolerance in Morocco (Laâbi) to Africa's political and economic problems (Khaïr-Eddine) and the *topos* of rebellion in Arabic history (Khatibi). The three writers' formal strategies demonstrate that the idea of revolt can be at once performed on stage, revisited from social and political perspectives, and shared with the audience. In this respect, Artaud notes that theatre, like the plague, 'est fait pour vider collectivement des abcès'[376] and that its action 'est bienfaisante, car poussant les hommes à se voir tels qu'ils sont, elle fait tomber le masque, elle découvre le mensonge, la veulerie, la bassesse, la tartufferie'.[377] In the Moroccan context, revolt in theatrical form serves also as a cathartic process that expels political and social frustrations. Laâbi, for instance, considers his practice of theatre 'comme besoin d'une gargantuesque dérision, comme

[374] Laâbi, 'Appendice', in *Le Baptême chacaliste*, p.61.
[375] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.309.
[376] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.45.
[377] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.46.

volonté de faire enfin feu sur mes "sur-moi"'.[378] The achievement of this cathartic dimension leads unavoidably to the question of performance and its ability to reach the Moroccan audience.

In the realm of Francophone North-African theatre, the work of Kateb Yacine provides a clear lens through which to discuss the question of performance and accessibility in the three writers' works. After 1970, Kateb, already acknowledged as a national writer and novelist, decides to focus on theatre as a way to engage with the postcolonial challenges facing his fellow citizens. Neil Doshi rightly observes that 'through performance, Kateb sought to develop a cultural form that would address the Algerian people as it gave voice to their history and desires'.[379] After founding his own troupe in 1975, Kateb was to practise 'a theater that employed minimal props and spare settings for performances in public spaces, workplaces, and rural areas, in front of audiences with little or no access to modern drama'.[380] In comparison with Kateb's experience, the three Moroccan writers were clearly less involved in performance and relatively less concerned about the question of reaching wide and popular audiences. If one excludes Laâbi's early experience within the Moroccan University Theatre, which was rapidly interrupted by censorship in the Years of Lead, the three writers did not have their own troupes nor did they direct the performance of their own plays. While Kateb's troupe promoted 'a theater of dialogue and collective deliberation'[381] as a form of revolt against the canon of dramatic performance, the plays by the three Moroccan authors have been performed, in both Morocco and

[378] Laâbi, 'Appendice', in *Le Baptême chacaliste*, p.61.
[379] Neil Doshi, 'Brecht in Algeria: On the Question of Influence in Kateb Yacine's Late Theater', in *Research in African Literatures* 44/3 (Fall 2013), pp.72-86 (p.73).
[380] Doshi, p.73.
[381] Doshi, p.84.

France, in conventional configurations.[382] Unlike Kateb's theatre which combines a Brechtian influence with 'a particular engagement with local forms',[383] the three Moroccan authors delivered distinct visions of dramatic performance. While Khatibi acknowledges that he remains 'fidèle au principe brechtien de la distanciation',[384] Laâbi champions the necessity of 'soutenir suffisamment le rythme pour que le spectateur ne puisse à aucun moment faire la part de l'illusion et de la réalité',[385] which is contrary to Brecht's aesthetics. In contrast to Kateb who believes in 'a theater that evolved in function of its public, while at the same time preserving histories of populist revolt',[386] Khatibi and Laâbi opt for either abstract or symbolic representations of revolt while Khaïr-Eddine conceives of his dramatic creations as an extension of the ongoing political struggle in Morocco, Africa, and beyond.

The effectiveness of performance in Khatibi's, Laâbi's and Khaïr-Eddine's plays can be questioned in the light of Brecht's theory. First, it is noteworthy that most plays employ the Brechtian distancing effect to empower an intellectually alert audience through different techniques. One of these consists in using direct audience-address as a way to disrupt the illusion of staging and performance. In *Le Prophète voilé*, Khatibi uses the character of 'Le Conteur' at once to comment on the play and to interact with the audience. In a closing statement, 'le Conteur' celebrates 'la conscience faite spectacle',[387] a clear reference to the relationship between theatrical performance and the consciousness of spectatorship. In Laâbi's *Le Baptême chacaliste*, the audience is presented from the beginning as a hostage of the so-called 'Organisation du jihad poétique chacaliste',[388] a metaphorical and ironic designation referring to the rebellious generation of *Souffles*.

[382] Recently, for instance, Khaïr-Eddine's novel *Le Déterreur* was adapted by Cédric Gourmelon ('Le Tarmac' theatre, 2017).
[383] Doshi, p.80.
[384] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.81.
[385] Laâbi, 'Appendice', in *Le Baptême chacaliste*, p.62.
[386] Doshi, p.79.
[387] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes II*, p.304.
[388] Laâbi, *Rimbaud et Shéhérazade*, p.19.

Another technique is used in the prologue of *Exercices de tolérance* which stages the opening credits as an integral part of the play with a sense of self-mockery when the author's name is initially spelled 'Abdellatis Larbi'. Finally, in Khaïr-Eddine's *Les Cerbères*, the distancing effect is manifest in the way in which two characters ('Saba' and 'La Famine') constantly exchange their morphologies, forcing the spectator to reconsider their identities throughout the play.

While these strategies seem to reactivate Brechtian aesthetics with the aim of reinventing an alert and conscious audience, their effectiveness is however hindered by the complexity of the texts. The plays develop a rather sophisticated discourse that might be inaccessible to standard audiences. The allegorizing strategy adopted in most plays raises evident questions of comprehension for the standard spectator. Apart from Khaïr-Eddine's early theatrical fragments that mention political characters by their names or titles, thus helping the process of identification, most plays feature generic, symbolic, or allegorical characters. Furthermore, the stories performed are often obscure and difficult to understand. In his *Short organum for the theatre*, Brecht warns that 'everything hangs on the "story"; it is the heart of the theatrical performance. For it is what happens *between* people that provides them with all the material that they can discuss, criticize, alter'.[389] The problem with the plays discussed above lies in the fact that this material remains inherently intricate and not really favourable to debates and discussions. 'De l'actualité et des événements, oui! Des préoccupations, dans ce qu'elles ont de profond et qui est l'apanage de quelques-uns, non !',[390] warns Artaud. By addressing erudite themes in highly intellectualized discourses and formats, the three Moroccan authors take the risk of losing their potential audience and weakening the effective power of their subversive aesthetics. The performance of revolt remains not only circumscribed to a narrow audience but also

[389] *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen & Co, 1964), p.200.
[390] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p.151.

limited to a purely formal exercise that often fails to develop into a fully intelligible form of political or sociocultural critique.

One way of getting round this issue is through the fundamental work of translation and adaptation, as exemplified by the successful trajectory of Laâbi's play *Exercices de tolérance*. The play was translated into Moroccan dialect and performed not only in Morocco but also in several festivals across the Arab world where it received interpretation and direction awards. While the success of the play is partly due, I would argue, both to its composition in ten brief scenes and to the universal and topical theme of tolerance, the staging also plays a key role by combining dramatic sequences with musical and dancing performances in what was praised as a simultaneously dynamic, instructive, and entertaining work of art. In this specific case, the use of Moroccan dialect is also a decisive factor since it makes the content available to a broader audience and ensures a more productive interaction with the performance of revolt on stage.

At the crossroads of Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's, and Laâbi's aesthetics of revolt, there is a permanent movement towards the construction of literary forms that are substantially complex, heterogeneous, and multidimensional. The three Moroccan writers have repeatedly created hybrid and transgressive structures that operate at once within and between literary genres. As demonstrated by their creative experimentations in the realms of poetry and drama, they have developed a wide set of strategies not only to overcome the conventional boundaries of literary genres, but also to revisit the expression of their personal and political revolt through new mediums, including poetic innovation and theatrical performance. However, while this aesthetic revolt might be able to renew literary forms and emphasize the discourse of opposition, it often fails to create an accessible and direct response to individual and collective forms of discontent. The strategies of formal

transgression and experimentation as developed in poetry and drama remain often disconnected from the immediate social and political context in Morocco where both genres reach a very limited audience. As a result, the Moroccan writer is often left alone as his revolt progressively turns into a solipsistic form of protest and creativity. While this situation paradoxically allows the regeneration of revolt in writing, it also creates loss and frustration, and paves the way for the emergence of nostalgic recollections and evocations.

Chapter 4: Forms of Nostalgia in Autobiography

Introduction: Dynamic nostalgia & the self

'Chaque révolte est nostalgie d'innocence et appel vers l'être',[391] writes Camus in *L'Homme révolté*. In other terms, revolt entails a longing for a state of lost innocence and a desire to recover and reconnect with the sense of self. Camus's association of revolt and nostalgia becomes less surprising if one bears in mind that the etymology of the word 'revolt' already includes the idea of return. In *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, Kristeva indeed demonstrates that the word 'révolte' underwent two semantic shifts around the respective notions of movement, space, and time. The French word 'révolte' originates in the Latin verb 'volvere' which suggests an initial set of meanings connected with movement ('courbe', 'entourage', 'tour', 'retour'[392]), and later confirmed, under Italian influence, by the words 'volutus', 'volute', 'volta' and 'voltare', which all suggest 'l'idée d'un mouvement circulaire et, par extension, d'un retour temporel'.[393] This temporal return, of which nostalgia is one possible form, sheds further light on Camus's reflection. As well as a refusal and an opposition to a present situation, revolt could be a symbolic return to a lost state of being. Thus, reading and investigating the figure of nostalgia in literature is in many ways a continuation of the previous study of revolt.

While nostalgia is often used simplistically in its first meaning of 'a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past',[394] the concept works in a wider scope than just reflecting an emotion or an affection. If one now goes back to Camus and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, nostalgia proves to be a pivotal concept in the process of self-

[391] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.139.
[392] Kristeva, *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, p.8.
[393] Kristeva, *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, p.9.
[394] Definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

constitution. In his words, 'la pensée d'un homme est avant tout sa nostalgie'.[395] Nostalgia refers here to the insatiable desire for a sense of unity, which Camus designates as 'ma nostalgie d'unité'.[396] This idea – and ideal – of unity, central to Camus's thinking, describes the never-ending quest for a consistent union with the self, the world, and the other. From this perspective, the persistent and unsatisfied nostalgia for unity is what constitutes the subject as a being. In Camus's words, 'je peux tout nier de cette partie de moi qui vit de nostalgies incertaines, sauf ce désir d'unité, cet appétit de résoudre, cette exigence de clarté et de cohésion'.[397] This desire, however, is confronted in Camus's thought with the impossibility of unity and the irrationality of the world. This nostalgic and unresolved tension embodied in Camus's tormented subject is particularly relevant for the reading of autobiography and other modes of self-writing. What is most relevant here is Camus's reading of nostalgia as a fundamental concept not only grounded in selfhood but also involved in a broader quest for a sense of being and of being-in-the-world.

Although Philippe Lejeune's seminal works have been subject to debate, criticism and updates in recent years, they still offer a good starting point to further discuss the relationship between nostalgia and self-writing. In his oft-quoted definition of autobiography as 'récit rétrospectif qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité',[398] the word 'rétrospectif' foregrounds the idea of return, which is central to nostalgia, as a fundamental element in the process of writing the self. While not every retrospective narrative of the self is nostalgic, nostalgia in autobiography is often associated with retrospective evocations and considerations. Furthermore, if one notes with

[395] Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.71.
[396] Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.73.
[397] Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, p.75.
[398] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p.14.

Fred Davis that 'nostalgia thrives on the subjective apprehension of transition',[399] the concept becomes even more important in the reconstruction of 'l'histoire de [la] personnalité' as it works precisely to grasp and revive pivotal and transitional moments in one's lifetime. Lejeune's definition, however, fails to identify the various areas in which nostalgia influences and interacts with autobiography. One of these areas is the language of self-writing. In his reading of the blurb of Serge Doubrovsky's *Fils*, in which the French author coins the word 'autofiction' and indicates 'avoir confié le langage de l'aventure à l'aventure du langage', Philippe Gasparini rightly notes that 'le retour en arrière ne va pas sans quelque nostalgie d'un langage pur et univoque, qui, à la limite, transmettrait les émotions sans avoir besoin de mots'.[400] Writing the self, whatever form it might take, remains a nostalgic quest for this unique and mythical language that could circumvent the uncertainty of words and convey the deep and autonomous voice of the subject. In *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, Derrida points to the importance of this linguistic quest when he considers that any anamnesis or autobiographical project is conditioned by the invention of 'une langue assez autre pour ne plus se laisser *réapproprier* dans les normes, le corps, la loi de la langue donnée'.[401] A good example of how nostalgia can inform this 'other' language is Derrida's use of the neologism 'nostalgérie',[402] a combination of 'nostalgia' and 'Algeria' that describes not only his personal affection for his country of birth but also the experience of the Pied-Noir community or repatriated European settlers and their persistent longing for Algeria after its independence. A word that recreates and reappropriates the lost country in language, nostalgeria embodies what Mireille Rosello

[399] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, quoted in Donald J. Winslow, *Life-Writing: Glossary of terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), p.44.
[400] Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2008), p.21.
[401] Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p.124.
[402] Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, p.86.

describes as an 'identificatory power'[403] and points out how nostalgia could serve as a factor of linguistic creativity in self-writing.

Conversely, however, nostalgia and autobiography can also work against each other. Writing the self can be all about resisting nostalgia and embracing being as always in flux. A relevant example here is the fragmented *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, a text which, in Paul Jay's words, 'resists nostalgia for the past, nostalgia for a past "self", and nostalgia for a more authentic narrative mode to present both'.[404] While rejecting this three-fold nostalgia, Barthes still plays with the concept and frames his text as a 'patch-work' that elaborates, in his own words, 'une autre énonciation, sans que je sache jamais si c'est de mon passé ou de mon présent que je parle'[405]. This conflation of temporal references serves Barthes's construction of an anti-nostalgic and 'ghostly image of the subject as "dispersed" and "diffracted" *in the present*'[406]. Resistance to nostalgia in writing the self is also manifest in Said and Mohr's *After the Last Sky*. In one of his notes, Said writes in the name of Palestinians:

> The dynastic sense, the feeling for one's immediate past, the effort of placing ourselves in a living continuum: there is little help to be gotten for such things. The closeness and clutter of the present force us to attend to the details of everyday life.[407]

This quote is particularly interesting as it draws on Said's own experience and reveals how nostalgia, and more broadly any connection with both individual and collective pasts, is severely challenged by the pervasive and overwhelming burden of the present. Said's reflection, which echoes the fragmented perspective developed in his memoir *Out of Place*,

[403] Mireille Rosello, *The Reparative Narratives: Works of Mourning in Progress* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p.205.
[404] Paul Jay, *Being in the text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p.177.
[405] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2010 [1975]), p.171.
[406] Jay, p.177.
[407] Mohr & Said, p.67.

reveals, according to David Huddart, 'a constantly mutating and re-inventing impulse that does not delude itself with dreams of return and redemption, but an impulse that not so secretly posits a dream of a kind of wholeness'.[408] In this context, writing the self becomes a shifting and ambivalent project in which the autobiographer, confronted with the pressing sense of his fragmented identity in the present, becomes somehow nostalgic for the idea of nostalgia itself.

Said's reflection provides a relevant transition to the question of how nostalgia relates to autobiography in a postcolonial context. If, following Michael Sheringham, 'autobiography is an anxious genre' that often shows 'accents of disquiet and unease',[409] this anxiety becomes more intense as postcolonial writers strive to reconstruct a sense of their individual and collective selves in the aftermath of colonialism. This anxiety, I would argue, emphasizes their recourse to nostalgia not necessarily to mourn or to long for a precolonial prosperous past but rather to reappropriate and transcribe a subjectivity that has been long silenced, excluded or at least pervaded by the experience of Western domination and sometimes neo-colonial strategies developed by post-independent states. A fundamental element in postcolonial autobiographies, nostalgia also partakes in what Philippe Gasparini defines as 'une fonction maïeutique en libérant une parole contrainte et ainsi favoriser l'apparition d'une nouvelle littérature'.[410] The liberating power of nostalgia lies in its ability to disrupt the linearity of time, reconnect the subject with its own self, and enrich the process of writing back and resisting strategies of oppression and silencing.

In this respect, postcolonial theory makes a crucial contribution to the reading of nostalgia in postcolonial autobiographical writing. As summarized by Huddart, 'postcolonial theory, in displacing universalized subjectivities associated with Western

[408] David Huddart, *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), p.45-46.
[409] Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.ix.
[410] Philippe Gasparini, *Est-il je ?* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004), p.303.

thought, wants to emphasize how one universalization of subjectivity has always excluded other modes of subjectivity'.[411] This effort that works to recover excluded modes of subjectivity is augmented by a trans-historical approach, proper to the field and which fosters the interpenetration of past and present. In Young's words, 'postcolonial theory always intermingles the past with the present' and 'is directed towards the active transformations of the present out of the clutches of the past'.[412] While this historical interest could have encouraged the focus on nostalgia as a fundamental aspect in postcolonial modes of writing the self, the concept has often been surprisingly seen as a suspect notion usually associated, as detailed in the introduction, with discourses of idealization, nativism, or romanticism. My contention is that nostalgia can be read, conversely, as a productive concept that allows for a more complex and qualified understanding of postcolonial subjectivity.

In my approach to nostalgia in the autobiographical writings of Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi and Laâbi, my aim is not so much to restore or celebrate the concept in Moroccan postcolonial literature but rather to shed light on the various ways in which it guides, influences, and shapes the narrative and textual strategies of self-writing developed by the three authors. This chapter, based on a close reading of one autobiographical work by each writer, will consider nostalgia in its broader sense, not just as an ambiguous emotion or affection towards the past but rather as a structuring element of what Debra Kelly defines as 'autobiographical discourses'[413] that engage with past, present, and future. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym stresses that 'nostalgia is not just about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective; fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the

[411] Huddart, p.20.
[412] Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.4.
[413] Debra Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p.2.

present have a direct impact on realities of the future'.[414] Besides this 'prospective' form of nostalgia that works to reverse the dominant *topos* of return, Boym distinguishes in her typology, as mentioned in the introduction, two categories of nostalgia: a 'restorative nostalgia', which 'stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home', and a 'reflective nostalgia' which 'thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming wistfully, ironically, desperately'.[415] As the question of homecoming will be treated alongside the experience of exile in the next chapter, I would like to retain here from Boym's concepts the idea that nostalgia can work as a hermeneutic and dynamic tool to approach the representation and reconstruction of the Moroccan postcolonial self.

In what follows, my analysis is motivated by the idea that such a dynamic reading of nostalgia can help us to understand the multi-layered structure and the process of self-reinvention at play in Khatibi's, Khaïr-Eddine's, and Laâbi's autobiographies. As aptly noted by Kelly, 'autobiography is a mode of writing that constantly reinvents itself and whose basic premise is that of self-questioning, not only of the subjectivity under investigation, but of the very forms in which that investigation may take place'.[416] My aim is to show that nostalgia plays a fundamental yet subtle role in questioning the limitations of autobiography and reshaping autobiographical discourse.

Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgia: working against the 'negative' world

Khaïr-Eddine's autobiographical writing informs nearly every piece of narrative or poetic work he published since the 1960s. Abdel-Jaouad rightly observes that 'reciprocity between life and art marks every aspect'[417] of Khaïr-Eddine's oeuvre. As discussed in the

[414] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xvi.
[415] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xviii.
[416] Debra Kelly, p.32.
[417] Abdel-Jaouad, p.145.

previous chapter, this reciprocity can be seen in the very composite structure of Khaïr-Eddine's novels and in the connection between his personal, political, and aesthetic expressions of revolt. In what follows, I propose to investigate the relationship between nostalgia and autobiography by focusing on his last diary written during his hospitalization in Rabat in August 1995, and published posthumously in 2001 under the poetic title *'On ne met pas en cage un oiseau pareil' (Dernier journal, août 1995)*. The significance of this piece in regard to the representation of nostalgia in autobiography lies in two main factors. First, the diary symbolically marks the closing of Khaïr-Eddine's autobiographical writing and provides an illuminating lens through which to consider the evolution of his discourse in contrast with his early works. Second, it was written in a peculiar context as it reproduces the final moments of Khaïr-Eddine's life, a few months before his death after a long struggle with cancer. *Dernier journal* is centred on the author's personal experience and embodies a nostalgia that contrasts with his earlier explosive revolt and creates an intricate dialectic of hope and disillusionement.

Khaïr-Eddine's last diary offers a peculiar and acute combination of nostalgia and autobiography. Written between the 7th and 28th of August 1995, nearly three months before the author's death, this moving work is composed of a series of dated fragments organized in two sections. The diary combines three categories of writing: accounts of hospitalization and medical treatment, reproductions of personal and literary memories, and reflections on recovery and self-reconstruction. At play in this distribution is an acute tension between past, present, and future, as suggested by the opening words: 'Rien ici ne sera chronologique. Je ne suis pas très à l'aise dans la chronologie, et pourtant, il y aura souvent des indications permettant de situer l'événement'.[418] Khaïr-Eddine's hesitation

[418] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *"On ne met pas en cage un oiseau pareil": Dernier journal, août 1995* (Bordeaux: William Blake & Co Editions, 2001), p.9.

between a strictly chronological writing and a more flexible account occasionally augmented with dates and references points to the difficulty of both writing the self and defeating illness. Khaïr-Eddine, caught between the overwhelming present of physical suffering and the uncertain future of recovery, seems to seek refuge in the past. It is worth observing that throughout the diary, nearly every note on the present opens an opportunity to rewrite the past and exhume anecdotes, images, and memories likely to comfort the patient and facilitate his recovery. Nostalgia entails a quest for a 'positive world' where the subject can recover, reproduce, and reconstruct the sense of self. Khaïr-Eddine's illness started in 1993 following a medical error during a dental operation which resulted in a fissure of his jaw. In the diary, this 'fêlure de la mâchoire'[419] becomes a sign of a larger split that undermines both the physical and mental self. The body, overwhelmed by the burden of treatment but also the loss of voice, weight, and capacity to eat properly and to read, becomes a prison of pain and suffering. When referring to the hardest period of his illness, Khaïr-Eddine writes: 'Je réagissais contre la douleur en essayant d'échapper à ses pièges et de quitter ce corps qui m'emprisonnait'.[420] In this desperate attempt to evade the bodily prison and reconstruct the unity of self, nostalgia plays a key role as a combined activity of memory and imagination. In the following section, I focus on three aspects of this nostalgic presence in Khaïr-Eddine's diary.

In a volume looking at the presence of Berber cultural references in Maghrebian Francophone literature, Mohammed-Saâd Zemmouri identifies what he describes as 'l'expression d'une nostalgie païenne'[421] in the works of Chraïbi, Farès, Kateb, and Khaïr-Eddine. The term refers to the promotion of forms of Berber paganism and culture in their writing, notably through the reactivation of the symbolic figure of Kahina, a Berber

[419] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.9.
[420] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.11.
[421] Mohammed-Saâd Zemmouri, *Présence berbère et nostalgie païenne dans la littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Tétouan: Publications du Club du Livre de la Faculté des Lettres de Tétouan, 2000), p.171.

warrior queen who resisted the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb, used by Khaïr-Eddine as 'la figure de l'opposante qui apparaît pour inciter les descendants contemporains à la révolte contre les injustices et la tyrannie'.[422] While Khaïr-Eddine's early works, as developed in the first chapter, do indeed include a violent revolt against dogmatic religion and its representatives, his last diary is marked by a surprising resurgence of the figure of God in what can be conversely described as a pious nostalgia. Throughout the diary, Khaïr-Eddine persistently refers to and praises God as his first and ultimate resort: 'La nuit, le jour, à toute heure, je prie Dieu l'Unique de me délivrer de ces maux'.[423] Writing against the burden of pain and the spectre of death, Khaïr-Eddine reactivates the figure of God as a central source of help and support. The diary significantly includes a poem in the form of a prayer or a letter in praise of 'l'Eternel [qui] annihile | le Mal et démolit | les projets du Démon',[424] and a reference to the project of writing around a hundred psalms, 'un bouquet de joie'[425] in tribute to God the Creator. In addition to working as a sign of religious conversion, I would argue that Khaïr-Eddine's pious nostalgia also uses God as a spiritual domain opposed to the material world that he fiercely criticizes for its hypocrisy and falseness throughout the text. As rightly noted by Mustapha Bencheikh in his reading of the diary, 'le Tout-Puissant n'arrive pas à sortir cette œuvre de sa vie d'homme, de poète épris de justice et de vérité au milieu d'un monde imparfait'.[426] God is at once the counterpoint of the 'negative' world contained in the title of Khaïr-Eddine's early narrative *Corps négatif*, and the counterpart of the nostalgic poet who struggles to reconstruct himself, overcome illness and degeneration, and aim for some sort of elevation and renewal in the very act of writing. For Khaïr-Eddine, who significantly compares himself

[422] Zemmouri, p.173.
[423] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.11.
[424] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.69.
[425] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.73.
[426] Mustapha Bencheikh, 'Le journal contre la mort', in *Awal* 35-36. *Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine (1941-1995)* (Paris: Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2007), pp.179-183 (p.181).

to Job, God also serves as a metaphor for the unlimited yet inaccessible horizon towards which nostalgia, writing, and being are all directed.

Khaïr-Eddine's second form of nostalgia aims to reconstruct the previous moments of life, pleasure, travels, and encounters. These moments are often triggered by present observations either in hospital or in the house of his friend Paul Rousselon. Throughout the diary, Khaïr-Eddine recalls his night life in Paris and laments urban change in the French capital, mourning the loss of his friends, the disappearance of old vagrants, and the emergence of what he describes as 'la barbarie financière moderne'.[427] The nostalgic reconstruction of Khaïr-Eddine's Parisian life provides a rich and powerful counter-space to the hospital, namely a space of regeneration where nostalgia serves the self-healing process and the struggle against physical pain and deterioration. 'Si j'écris beaucoup sur le passé', admits Khaïr-Eddine in one of the fragments, 'c'est que je n'ai pas grand'chose à dire sur le quotidien. Le passé est plus riche que ces journées que je passe allongé sur mon lit, en attente d'une guérison prochaine'.[428] The return to the rich and lively past is also a way to escape the tedium of the present. Nostalgia provides, at least momentarily, a symbolic outlet for the desperate patient. A good example of this movement is when Khaïr-Eddine describes the ruins of Chellah, a medieval fortified necropolis near Rabat, as livelier than the Moroccan capital itself, adding that 'ses habitants [of Chellah] seront toujours les mêmes: des morts-vivants invisibles que la loi du temps ne concerne plus'.[429] For Khaïr-Eddine, this personal nostalgia provides the illusion of escaping time and space and rejoicing in the exhumation and celebration of peripheral and lost symbols, including in the collective space. When referring to Morocco, for instance, Khaïr-Eddine significantly laments the deterioration of natural resources, the noxious impact of industrial pollution, and the expansion of corruption. Conversely, he mournfully celebrates the life of

[427] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.54-55.
[428] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.58.
[429] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.58.

animals and birds which recall his childhood and reactivate the beauty of the sacred and the lost sense of hope and freedom. Although Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgia is deeply intimate and personal, it also points, I would argue, to a collective feeling of disillusionment among the generation of writers and poets who shaped the revolutionary period of the 1960s and 1970s. Their frustrated aspirations for political and social change trigger a hurtful nostalgia for lost and often idealistic spaces, as evidenced in Khaïr-Eddine's mournful evocations of natural beauty. Throughout the diary, the reader can draw a parallel between the patient held in hospital and the hoopoe, a bird caught and eventually released by the son of his friend Paul. 'On ne met pas en cage un oiseau pareil; il doit rester libre',[430] writes Khaïr-Eddine as if he was referring to both the bird and himself, thus clinging to 'the liberating power of nature'.[431] Until he achieves a potential recovery that would release him from the prison of hospital, Khaïr-Eddine's freedom is desperately pursued in the nostalgic rewriting of the past and the mournful reactivation of the power of its lost symbols.

The third form of nostalgia refers to literature and writing itself. Throughout the diary, Khaïr-Eddine evokes his previous works, from the completion of his posthumously published novels *Il était une fois un vieux couple heureux* and *Tobias* to the process, difficulties, and joys of writing as such. The diary opens therefore an individual space for self-assessment where Khaïr-Eddine nostalgically looks back to his works and develops what can be read as a literary legacy. This nostalgic dimension reinforces Khaïr-Eddine's conception of writing as a serious and demanding activity: 'Chaque livre, chaque rédaction a ses propres exigences. J'obéis à cet ordre pour éviter toute espèce de bâclage'.[432] To the devastating disorder of illness, Khaïr-Eddine presents in opposition the order of writing as a resolute commitment. Against the absence of a true family and the failure of his personal

[430] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.76.
[431] Lynne Rogers, 'Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's *Le Déterreur*: An Invitation to the Primal Past' in *Dalhousie French Studies* 30 (Spring 1995), pp.159-170 (p.163).
[432] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.20.

experience of social life, he invokes his nostalgia for a prospective life of freedom and enjoyment in which literature – as, he argues, in Artaud's case – always defeats self-degeneration. In the last fragment of the diary, Khaïr-Eddine mourns his years in high-school, a period he describes as an 'époque formidable'[433] when he used to read French prose and poetry, and when he wrote his first poems. The fragment significantly ends with Khaïr-Eddine's declaration: 'Je voulais avant tout être poète',[434] a statement that retrospectively marks a typical act of nostalgic reconstruction of personal identity. In the diary, Khaïr-Eddine includes numerous references to a series of writers, poets and intellectuals whom he knew and met throughout his life in France, Morocco, and the Maghreb such as Mohamed Choukri, Kateb Yacine, Tahar Djaout, and Malek Haddad. Some fragments from the diary, entitled 'Souvenir', refer to friends of whose death he learned recently or while in hospital. This community of literary friends, I would argue, not only reinforces 'the importance of individuality and fraternity'[435] in the isolated space of hospital, but also provides a series of nostalgic mirrors where Khaïr-Eddine sees himself and celebrates those shared values that echo, complement, and reinforce his own conception of writing and creation: 'la paix intérieure et l'intelligence de la Beauté'[436] of Michel Leiris, the sensibility and misery of André Laude, the pleasure of scholarship and the research of Jacques Berque, the commitment to poetry of Léon-Gontran Damas, the pro-Arab activities of Lucien Bitterlin, and the poetic energy of Marcel Béalu. Moreover, the nostalgic evocation of these figures functions as a symbolic way to resist illness and keep away the spectre of death. 'Non! Ton nom est lié à mon univers. Pour moi, tu n'es pas mort',[437] calls out Khaïr-Eddine to French literary critic Claude Bonnefoy. These obstinate

[433] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.78.
[434] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.78.
[435] Lynne Rogers, 'Resurrection and Redefinition: Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's *Légende et vie d'Agoun'chich*' in *Dalhousie French Studies* 39/40 (Summer/Fall 1997), pp.223-237 (p.137).
[436] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.20.
[437] Khaïr-Eddine, *Dernier journal*, p.74.

yet unrealistic evocations, like the diary's last references to a very close and total recovery, mark, retrospectively, the disillusionment of Khaïr-Eddine's paradoxical nostalgia. The journey to the past is both necessary and ineffective; the nostalgic self-writing momentarily heals the subject but always ends up crashing against the ineluctable present and the resurgence of the patient's consciousness of time and space. Faced with a persistent and undefeated 'negative' world which carries the traumas of both childhood (oppressive tradition and painful separation from the homeland) and adulthood (illness, solitude, and isolation in hospital), autobiography and individual nostalgia come together to create an unavoidable disillusionment, but one that remains paradoxically necessary and central to the act of writing the self.

Khatibi's nostalgia: writing and reincarnating the self

In contrast with Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgic and disillusioned struggle against the persistent shadows of his 'negative' world, Khatibi seems to offer a more elaborate account of how nostalgia can potentially enrich the process of writing the self. Khatibi's engagement with autobiography dates back to 1971 and the publication of his acclaimed and perhaps most famous work *La Mémoire tatouée*, significantly subtitled 'Autobiographie d'un décolonisé'. Although, as Debra Kelly notes, 'Khatibi's whole writing project is one that is concerned with identity',[438] a concern that takes on a fictional form in his late narratives,[439] it is only one year before his death, in 2008, that he decides to publish his second autobiographical work under the suggestive title *Le Scribe et son ombre*. To a certain extent, one could consider that autobiography has constituted a

[438] Kelly, p.208.
[439] In an interview with Hassan Wahbi, Khatibi admits that '[ses] grandes lignes autobiographiques' can be found 'ça et là mais surtout dans *La Mémoire tatouée*, *Pèlerinage d'un artiste amoureux* et *Féerie d'un mutant*' (Wahbi, *La Beauté de l'absent*, p.41).

fundamental starting and closing point in Khatibi's literary creation although he admits that 'une certaine prudence [le] retient quant à la narration de sa vie privée'.[440] For Khatibi, autobiography remains a suspect genre that needs the writer to develop specific textual and discursive strategies to evade the trap of self-exposure. As a result, both Khatibi's autobiographical works cited above are organized in complex and multi-layered structures. While *La Mémoire tatouée* is composed of two sections significantly named 'Série(s) hasardeuse(s)', which 'have connotations of chance and lack of coherence'[441] but also suggest the notions of selective memory and arbitrary rearrangement of life sequences, *Le Scribe et son ombre* is described by the author as 'cet essai qui s'est aventuré entre l'autobiographie, le témoignage et le récit intellectuel',[442] foregrounding the image of a hybrid text that moves between literary genres and resists taxonomy and categorization.

If most critics have paid sufficient attention to the complexity of Khatibi's well-studied *Mémoire tatouée*, their readings remain caught in recurrent debates – often justified by Khatibi's own comments – about the generic definition of the text, the reconciliation of Moroccan and Western cultures, the symbolic power of names, myths, and initiating experiences, and the reconstruction of identity through language. What is most striking, perhaps, is to see that the importance of Khatibi's individual experience and the role of nostalgia within his autobiographical writing have been clearly dismissed. In what follows, my aim is to revive and follow Khatibi's nostalgic voice in his far less studied autobiography *Le Scribe et son ombre* by offering a new reading perspective that articulates the concept of nostalgia, in Michael Sheringham's words, as both a 'desire' and a 'device' of the autobiographical text. 'Desire' refers to 'the wish to fathom the self – to trace its trajectory, to elucidate its idiosyncrasies, to pin down its elusiveness',[443] and opens

[440] Wahbi, *La Beauté de l'absent*, p.41.
[441] Kelly, p.227-228.
[442] Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2008), p.7.
[443] Sheringham, p.vii.

the subject to the experience of alterity, while a 'device' designates 'both a stratagem, a plan devised to fulfil a certain aim, and an emblematic figure'.[444] Both notions resonate with Khatibi's interest in psychoanalysis, for which he overtly blames Marc Gontard in the 'Lettre-Préface' to his volume *La Violence du texte*, arguing that Moroccan literature develops a mode of writing that is 'une traduction du corps, de l'inconscient et du désir',[445] three 'devices' at the core of his autobiographical discourse. It is my contention that the combination of both functions (desire and device) describes how nostalgia inflects Khatibi's self-representation and structures his autobiographical discourse.

The dialogue between the writer and his dual image as initiated in the closing pages of *La Mémoire tatouée* is further developed in *Le Scribe et son ombre*. As the title suggests, Khatibi's autobiographical project is driven by the need to explore the hidden subjectivity of the writer. In the opening lines, Khatibi significantly writes that 'le moi n'est ni haïssable, ni adorable. C'est un masque singulier d'altérité'.[446] This definition excludes from the outset any emotional or nostalgic understanding of identity and opens self-writing to the constitutive experience of alterity. *Le Scribe et son ombre*, composed of eleven short chapters, reads as the self-portrait of an intellectual who looks back at his personal experience from the outside. I would argue that this volume develops a form of nostalgia that recasts memories from the past to produce a prospective image of the self, informed by alterity and otherness. This is precisely what Khatibi refers to when he describes his project as 'le masque d'une initiation à une quête dont il faudrait composer l'arrangement des signes, pour se révéler à soi comme un étranger'[447]. The outsider is the other image of the self, the open horizon of autobiographical writing. One year before his

[444] Sheringham, p.ix.
[445] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Lettre-Préface', in Gontard, pp.7-9 (p.8).
[446] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.7.
[447] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.14.

death, Khatibi sees himself as 'un être mélancolique qui rêve de réincarnation'.[448] More than a mere autobiographical work, it is my contention that Khatibi's text is at once his intellectual legacy in the form of an ultimate journey to the past and his nostalgic reincarnation in the exercise of self-portraiture.

In *Le Scribe et son ombre,* Khatibi's conception of nostalgia is developed within the framework of a new relationship with the past, based on reconciliation and intellectual activity. Khatibi recalls that he was born at the crossroads of three signs of human violence: sacrifice – in reference to his birth on the day of 'Aïd el Kébir', the Muslim celebration of the sacrifice by Abraham of his son Isaac –, colonialism, and the Second-World War. For Khatibi, this wounded past, however, 'n'est pas l'effet d'une fatalité […] mais, après tout, une alliance bénéfique entre les adversités de l'époque'.[449] As revealed throughout the text, it is precisely the violence of Khatibi's past that has shaped his culture and informed his sharp attention not only to individual and collective history but also to social, political, and symbolic signs. If *La Mémoire tatouée* performs a poetic yet problematic return to the past aimed at unveiling and reflecting on the early signs of violence and their consequences, *Le Scribe et son ombre* develops 'un autre retour vers le passé lorsqu'il accompagne le développement de la pensée'.[450] Intellectual production becomes the common thread of a new – and final – journey to the past where the subject still uses nostalgia in the process of redefining his identity in terms of self-duplication and mobility.

This notion of intellectual mobility is central to Khatibi's conception of autobiography and its ability to promote a new understanding of nostalgia. The structure of the work itself reconstructs Khatibi's intellectual trajectory as a series of successive disciplines and areas of interest, from sociology to epistolary correspondence, via

[448] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.15.
[449] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.16.
[450] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.17.

ethnology, semiology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. The notion of mobility is also manifest in the varied composition of the text itself, which reproduces sections from other works including Khatibi's diary during his period of psycho-analysis[451] and his letter to a young political activist.[452] As a result of this textual circulation, *Le Scribe et son ombre* becomes 'cette autobiographie migratoire qui chemine à la trace des autres et des personnages en moi'.[453] Moving out from the external environment, individual nostalgia is redirected towards the problematic self and its process of self-fictionalization. Khatibi's text suggests that one can also be nostalgic for a fictional self, reconstructed in the simultaneous process of longing and writing. The nostalgic journey to the past and the recollection of its signs have no other goal than to explore his dimension of otherness and embed this dimension in the autobiographical text itself. For, in Khatibi's words, 'on fabrique de l'étranger rien que par un déplacement associatif des signes'.[454] It is the dynamics of circulation and combination of memories, sequences, and signs that reveals the alterity within the subject. In *La Mémoire tatouée*, writing the self hinges on the two contradictory movements of acceptance and resistance to nostalgia, as perfectly illustrated in Khatibi's account of his arrival to the French capital: 'Additionné à la ville comme tant de nostalgies exilées, je glissais dans Paris, acharné et invaincu'.[455] The contrast between Khatibi's recognition of his overwhelming 'nostalgie exilée' and his opposing references to smooth movement ('je glissais') and strong determination ('acharné et invaincu') pinpoint this ambivalence towards nostalgia, which paradoxically opens identity not only to otherness ('additionné à la ville') but also to mobility and self-empowerment. This

[451] See Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Par-dessus l'épaule* (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1988), pp.55-71; reproduced in *Le Scribe et son ombre*, pp.75-89.
[452] See Abdelkébir Khatibi, *L'Alternance et les partis politiques* (Casablanca: Eddif, 1998) pp.103-106; reproduced in *Le Scribe et son ombre*, pp.111-115.
[453] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.52.
[454] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.45.
[455] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.85.

process is taken a step further in *Le Scribe et sombre* where nostalgia, overtly accepted and embraced, opens the way for the disclosure of Khatibi's other self.

This association of nostalgia and self-duplication is visible in Khatibi's nostalgic evocations of his intellectual friends and his own conception of autobiography. First, most intellectual figures cited by Khatibi carry in their personalities and experiences specific forms of duality and alterity; Paul Pascon, the pioneer of Moroccan sociology, is celebrated for his dual independence, 'vis-à-vis des siens – les Français du Maroc – et vis-à-vis de la société marocaine en soi',[456] which informed his reading of Moroccan society as inherently plural and diverse. Victor Segalen is the champion of 'un apprentissage de l'altérité excentrique',[457] contained in his concept of the 'exote' and in the particular experiences of Arab travellers Ibn Battuta and Ibn Fadlan, both moved by the desire for encounter. Finally, Roland Barthes is depicted as 'un homme discret, respectueux en société et irrespectueux ailleurs. Une personnalité dédoublée, sinon pluralisée',[458] in reference to the contrast between his even temperament and his fierce rejection of dogmatic and rigid thinking. As noted earlier with Khaïr-Eddine's diary, those various portraits, I would argue, work as many reflected images of Khatibi's own self. In doing so, they nostalgically reproduce his conception of identity as a dual process, constantly open to otherness, exchange, and reconstruction. More than a dialogue, Khatibi conceives of autobiography as a tridimensional conversation that involves the self, a fictional witness located in the distance, and a third unknown character who continually relaunches the discussion. This dynamics is emphasized in the text by Khatibi's use of external sources, as well as past readings and encounters, to inform the reconstruction of his own self. These include reflections by Marc Augé, Pierre Klossowski, Claude Lévi-Strauss or more directly the Moroccan philosopher Abdesslam Benabdelali. In summary, the autobiographical text

[456] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.36-37.
[457] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.42.
[458] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.57.

is shifted from the evocation of a lost and problematic past, as in *La Mémoire tatouée*, to the longing for an alternative future yet to come. I would argue that this 'prospective' dynamics still qualifies as nostalgia since it mourns and builds on the potentialities of the past to inflect the future. 'Consideration of the future', writes Boym, 'makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales'.[459] While revisiting and reworking the past, Khatibi's prospective nostalgia longs for a future still to be created, not only for the individual subject, enriched by the encounter with his alter ego, but also for the collective community. Thus, Khatibi's text seems to support Boym's argument that nostalgia 'is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory'.[460] Pluralism, diversity, and openness to alterity, all results of Khatibi's prospective nostalgia, are indeed promoted throughout the text as a way out of Maghrebian contradictions and separations, a potential conveyor for a sustainable peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – which marks a significant turn in Khatibi's subversive discourse developed in his earlier pamphlet *Vomito blanco* –, and an ethical principle in the exercise of politics in Morocco and beyond. Khatibi's 'prospective' nostalgia is located in what he names 'l'inter', namely the 'in-between' space of virtual encounter with the other which operates through language, semiotics, and photography, and prefigures Bhabha's further developments of the concept.

In Khatibi's text, this prospective nostalgia is also associated with the utopian dream of reincarnation. When reflecting on his experience of being virtually reincarnated in the new countries he visits, Khatibi describes this feeling as 'trouble d'identité' and adds that 'ce trouble doit être l'effet d'un souvenir, le degré idéal de la rencontre avec le passé'.[461] Here, nostalgia serves a virtual reconstruction of the self in the space of alterity. In other words, it is the process of longing, remembering, and recollecting memories that

[459] Boym, *The Future of nostalgia*, p.xvi.
[460] Boym, *The Future of nostalgia*, p.xvii.
[461] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.119.

materializes the construction of the other self. I would argue, however, that since this process of reincarnation remains virtual, the only material space where prospective nostalgia and self-reconstruction can take place is writing. Khatibi himself admits that 'quoi qu'on dise du nihilisme scriptural, l'écriture participe à l'édification de soi'[462] and notes that 'une autobiographie intellectuelle n'est pas un constat, mais un signe de vie et d'un monde à venir'.[463] This world still to come is that of writing, defined as an open-ended process that not only describes the disillusionments of the subject when he returns to material life, but also constantly pushes nostalgia towards the future. It is not surprising, therefore, to see Khatibi cunningly hinting at a prospective and imaginary project of self-writing as he suggests: 'Il serait comique d'écrire une autobiographie du futur et de ma réincarnation virtuelle dans tel lieu de mon horizon caché à mort'.[464] The contrast between this 'autobiographie du futur', potentially materialized in a literary text, and Khatibi's 'réincarnation virtuelle', firmly grounded in the space of fiction, suggests that the only possible reincarnation is that of writing. Ultimately, Khatibi's late autobiography is the performance of prospective nostalgia in the sense that it constantly reinvents the writer's identity and reshapes his project of writing the self.

Laâbi's nostalgia: retrospective, prospective, and counter-factual constructions

Like Khaïr-Eddine, Laâbi's life and personal experiences, whether as a political activist and prisoner or an exiled poet, have continually informed his writing, more notably his narratives *L'Œil et la nuit* (1969), *Les Rides du lion* (1989) and *Le Chemin des ordalies* (1982). Two fundamental works, however, offer a more overtly autobiographical content: *Le Fond de la jarre*, published in 2002, which reconstitutes his years of childhood in the

[462] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.27.
[463] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.63.
[464] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.54.

Moroccan city of Fez under French colonialism, and *Le Livre imprévu*, a multilayered narrative published eight years later, which combines diary fragments, travel accounts, and personal notes and reflections. Unlike Khaïr-Eddine and Khatibi, however, Laâbi came later to autobiography and, according to Alessandra, could not take the decision to start working on *Le Fond de la jarre* until a few months after the death of King Hassan II in 1999, as he finally benefited from 'une période d'apaisement et de soulagement intégral'.[465] It is as though Laâbi's traumatic experience, marked by prison, torture, separation, and exile, had always prevented him from establishing the distance that is necessary for autobiographical writing. In this respect, the choice of his early years in Fez as a setting for his first autobiographical work is compelling, since, in my view, it contrasts the violence of adult life with the innocence of early years. In *Le Fond de la jarre*, the reconstruction of the sense of self is launched from the territories of childhood and defined as a literary recovery of urban space, language, and family. This process of reconstruction, where nostalgia remains implicit, is taken a step further in *Le Livre imprévu*, a work that combines the necessity of self-writing with the unpredictability of writing itself, and more importantly, its ability to blend retrospective and prospective forms of nostalgia. For Laâbi's self-writing is concerned at once with recovering, and at moments longing for the past, as in Khaïr-Eddine's diary, and with giving a sense of self in the present and the future, as in Khatibi's late autobiography. One significant marker of this dual dynamics is Laâbi's dedications in both books. While the first work opens with this reference: 'Pour Ghita et Driss [his parents], ce fond de la jarre qu'ils m'ont légué',[466] the second is dedicated 'aux petits-enfants Nassim, Nina, et la toute dernière May'.[467] As suggested by those opening dedications, Laâbi's autobiographies develop a transgenerational form of recovering the self as both a social and an historical subject. The following section focuses

[465] Alessandra, *Abdellatif Laâbi*, p.73.
[466] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Le Fond de la jarre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p.9.
[467] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2010), p.7.

on *Le Livre imprévu* and demonstrates how autobiographical writing mobilizes nostalgic discourse in the process of reconstructing an individual and collective self, grounded as much in direct references to the present as in mournful evocations of the past and the future. The choice of *Le Livre imprévu* is motivated by the fact that it has drawn little attention despite offering a more complex and overt expression of nostalgia. Furthermore, its nostalgic discourse shares with Khaïr-Eddine's and Khatibi's autobiographies, respectively, a deep-seated sense of disillusionment and a strong desire for self-reconstruction through writing.

In *Le Livre imprévu*, Laâbi's elaborate discourse of nostalgia is partly justified by the very composite nature of the work itself. As suggested by the title, *Le Livre imprévu* is composed of successive notes and reflections driven only by what Laâbi describes as 'l'inattendu',[468] namely the arbitrary directions taken by inspiration and writing. As a result, what starts as a diary goes on to propose a wide range of unexpected pieces including a letter to Morocco, accounts of travels and visits to Southern Spain and Palestine, tributes to friends and intellectuals, and a series of reflections on and memories from childhood, adolescence, prison, friendships, encounters, and death. This heterogeneous structure, wittily called by Laâbi an 'OLNI (objet littéraire non identifié)'[469] and emphasized by a substantial number of digressions, flashbacks, and projections, positions Laâbi's text in an intermediate and shifting space where past, present, and future are constantly intermingled. This phenomenon ends up producing, as in Khatibi's *Le Scribe et son ombre*, an original combination of retrospective and prospective forms of nostalgia. Furthermore, Laâbi's nostalgia stretches to include a longing for experiences he has not lived, opening an additional space for fictional rewriting. I would argue that this

[468] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.25.
[469] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.161.

nostalgic, intricate, and multi-layered construction reveals the status of the writer himself, caught in a paradoxical dilemma, between the necessity of revisiting his past and tracing the origins of his personal convictions and decisions, and the desire to think through his future and resist death by assessing the options he has missed and the possibilities he still has.

Laâbi's retrospective nostalgia, which echoes that of his first autobiography *Le Fond de la jarre*, resonates in the resurgence of a series of previous nostalgic evocations, this time with a deeper sense of loss and mourning. This is particularly visible in his evocations of his mother and his intellectual colleagues, and a series of geographical and symbolic spaces. When describing his everyday life in Créteil, a small town in the suburbs of Paris, Laâbi mournfully evokes his mother: 'Parfois, quand je suis dehors, j'ai l'impression de regarder avec ses yeux ce que je vois, de capter avec ses narines l'arôme douceâtre que dégagent les haies de troènes balisant mon parcours'.[470] This nostalgic process of sensorial appropriation brings the mother back to the present and renews Laâbi's connection with his past and current environments. In Laâbi's evocation of house chores, the mother reappears as a central figure whose words continue to guide and inspire the author, as evidenced by his re-appropriation of her French translated proverb 'Ton œil est ta balance'[471] as his first rule for cooking.

Laâbi's nostalgia, as in Khaïr-Eddine's and Khatibi's late autobiographies, is also manifest in his moving evocations of his friends and fellow writers and intellectuals. These include not only his old comrades from the journal *Souffles*, but also literary and artistic figures who had died recently such as Syrian painter Sakher Farzat, Moroccan writers Driss Chraïbi and Mohamed Leftah, and Egyptian writer Albert Cossery. Laâbi

[470] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.164.
[471] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.166.

significantly refers to the successive losses of these figures as 'gifles',[472] a violent metaphor that reflects the extent of his shock. Laâbi's nostalgia is focused, however, on two central figures who, I would argue, mirror his own dual identity defined by politics and poetry: Moroccan activist Abraham Serfaty and Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Serfaty is mourned as an intellectual, humanist, and political figure who served the Palestinian cause from his peculiar position as a Moroccan Jew. Laâbi's nostalgia can be read in the evocation of his complicity with Serfaty, which reaches its climax in the description of their simultaneous torture at a police station in 1972: 'les vases communicants de la douleur produisent un phénomène de fusion des consciences et des corps meurtris [...] On intègre un corps commun qui fait face aux inquisiteurs avec une puissance décuplée'.[473] This powerful image of a unified body as a metaphor of complicity in torture, recalled during Laâbi's last visit to his friend and emphasized by the painful evocation of loss and separation, turns nostalgia into a vibrant celebration of shared values of resistance, brotherhood, and friendship. In the case of Darwish, Laâbi's nostalgia is evident in his mourning for the linguistic creativity and national commitment of the Palestinian poet, whom he significantly compares to Victor Hugo and Homer, and more notably in his evocation of their rare moments of intimacy. This is when both men, released from public pressure and commitments, recover their identities as exiled poets 'vivant aux quatre coins du monde, portant chacun la marque d'origine de sa blessure mais travaillant tous à la régénération de la poésie, à la poursuite de son aventure'.[474] Laâbi's intimate and nostalgic celebration of Darwish aims to recreate a powerful sense of transnational community in the practice of poetry as a space of endless renewal, creativity, and commitment. His most suggestive nostalgic evocation is when he mentions the key of his mother's ancestors' house in Andalusia, a symbolic object that echoes the

[472] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.150.
[473] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.125-126.
[474] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.157.

transgenerational nostalgia for 'l'Andalousie perdue' and is perpetuated in Laâbi's longing for Spanish language, poetry, streets, and smells: 'Mille détails qui font qu'ici je ne peux pas être un simple passant mais un interlocuteur averti',[475] as he sums up. Here, individual nostalgia works as a triggering factor that reshapes Laâbi's experience of travel and strengthens his sense of collective belonging. In Southern Spain, Laâbi's privileged position as an 'interlocuteur averti' draws on his nostalgic reconstruction of the visited space and its symbols.

In *Le Livre imprévu*, another form of nostalgia, which I will describe in Boym's terms as 'prospective', is visible in Laâbi's longing for a future yet to be created from and in dialogue with the projects, the lessons, and the disillusionments of the past. This form of prospective nostalgia is tied up with Laâbi's conception of writing as a process driven by 'l'imprévu'[476] and the promise, for the writer, to open 'le chemin d'une liberté qu'il n'a pas encore goûtée'.[477] This prospective nostalgia remains, however, inherently ambivalent as it sketches out possibilities for the future and simultaneously presents them as utopias that remain out of reach. Starting from the early pages, Laâbi nostalgically evokes the list of his literary projects put on hold as he continues to write his diary. These include a sequel to *Le Fond de la jarre* for which he laments a desperate 'angle d'attaque',[478] another sequel to his series of theatrical works 'restée orpheline depuis un bail',[479] and a new autobiographical project described as 'des mémoires en bonne et due forme'.[480] Although Laâbi presents these projects as 'sérieux' in opposition to '[l']idée saugrenue'[481] of the diary, they remain hindered by the difficulties of writing and confined in the space of

[475] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.73.
[476] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.11.
[477] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.11.
[478] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.10.
[479] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.11.
[480] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.11.
[481] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.10.

nostalgia and desire. Besides writing, Laâbi's prospective nostalgia extends to other areas such as ecology and politics. In his diary, he mournfully evokes the warning signs of a global environmental disaster and nostalgically asks: 'y a-t-il encore un avenir pour l'espèce humaine sur terre?'[482] In another passage, he mourns the dream of the Maghreb Union, 'cette belle utopie qui ne cessera jamais d'éclairer mon chemin d'homme. Cette réalité éclatante, confisquée. Ce gâchis dû à la bêtise et l'aveuglement. Ce crève-cœur!'[483] In both cases, prospective nostalgia not only extends the space of autobiographical writing to broader concerns but also works to expel Laâbi's anxieties and reaffirm his convictions. As a result, it opens a fragile yet necessary space to strengthen the sense of self and use autobiography as an open memory for both the subject and the community.

Despite this positive role, however, Laâbi's prospective nostalgia remains ensnared in a deep and acute tension that is proper to writing about the future. Towards the end of his letter to Morocco, Laâbi observes: 'Ma confession s'achève dans un climat apaisé et déjà une angoisse se lève puisqu'il faut parler d'avenir'.[484] As the writer finds reconciliation with his past, the future breaks out as a space of deep uncertainty and questioning, emphasized by the spectre of nearby death. While retrospective nostalgia struggles with the recovery of the past, prospective nostalgia is caught in what Laâbi identifies as 'un coup de dés'[485] in the future. This reference to Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* hints, I would argue, at both the creative potential of writing and the prevailing role of randomness in the nostalgic construction of the future. Both dimensions resonate in the final chapter of the work, as Laâbi looks at his new-born granddaughter and imagines her with 'la silhouette d'une femme à la maturité avancée,

[482] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.15.
[483] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.32.
[484] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.56.
[485] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.57.

penchée sur le berceau d'un bébé'.[486] This oneiric image reveals Laâbi's painful nostalgia for a forthcoming world he knows he will not see but which he can still dream of and visit through writing and fictional construction.

Between retrospective and prospective forms of nostalgia, *Le Livre imprévu* features a third type of nostalgic discourse concerned with what could have occurred in the past and reshaped Laâbi's present and future. This form of nostalgia, which Boym still describes as 'prospective', is, in her words, 'not a nostalgia for the ideal past, but only for its many potentialities that have not been realized'.[487] This third space of longing, which can be described as a 'what-if' or 'counter-factual' nostalgia that operates on both an individual and a collective level, captures Laâbi's mournful evocation of a further space for rewriting the self and the home country.

On an individual level, it is manifest in Laâbi's evocation of his missed career in cinema when, after the baccalaureate, his application for a scholarship in film studies in Paris was rejected. This failed project opens the space for desire and longing:

> [je] me voyais déjà quelques années plus tard derrière la caméra, foulant une terre vierge en matière d'images, captant des paysages humains que seul l'œil étranger avait effleuré […] bref, faisant œuvre inaugurale et restituant enfin la parole aux miens, cette parole confisquée tout au long de la période coloniale.[488]

Interestingly, Laâbi's nostalgia for this missed career hinges on a strong yearning for artistic exploration ('terre vierge') and anticolonial engagement ('la parole aux miens'), two aspects he has later developed in his œuvre, turning his initial frustration into a source of creation and commitment. Another example of this connection between failed past and possible future is his long nostalgic evocations of Lebanon and Spain as two potential homes in exile where he could have settled following his decision to leave Morocco in

[486] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.215.
[487] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.168.
[488] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.13.

1985. Laâbi's longing for both countries is driven by their respective symbolic power: Beirut is a centre for cultural and intellectual activities that could have served as a continuation of Laâbi's re-appropriation of Arabic language and culture during his years in prison, while Spain would have provided an ideal environment to develop his passion for Spanish, this 'langue désirée'[489] which he also started learning in jail. In both cases, I would still qualify Laâbi's longing as nostalgia in the sense that it describes his mourning for two potential homes he never had. With both Lebanon and Spain, this counter-factual nostalgia is intermingled with a strong desire for knowledge, cultural and linguistic enrichment, and self-reconstruction in exile, all missed to various extents in France.

On a collective level, Laâbi's counter-factual nostalgia can be read in his mourning for an alternative Morocco that could have been developed if *Souffles* had pursued its effort of cultural renewal or if Moroccan Jews had stayed in the country. This alternative Morocco could have been not only a country in process, 'une chrysalide prête à prendre son essor et à tracer son chemin à travers le monde',[490] but also a modern project of a unified, diverse, and powerful nation. In Laâbi's mournful words, 'que de savoir-faire, que de talents auraient été investis dans un projet audacieux de modernité et de construction démocratique, alors que celui qui est âprement débattu de nos jours s'éternise dans la transition!'[491] This suggestive and painful parallel between Morocco as it is and as it could have been, which also echoes Khaïr-Eddine's discourse in his diary, reveals Laâbi's and his generation's overwhelming nostalgia for all those missed opportunities to reconstruct the country and move away from discourses of democratic transition towards a true and all-encompassing modernity.

In conclusion of this journey through Laâbi's various forms of nostalgia, one could think of *Le Livre imprévu* as an extremely complex result of his intersecting nostalgic

[489] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.193.
[490] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.119.
[491] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.120.

discourses. In this original autobiographical work which focuses on personal experiences and voices a permanent uncertainty towards autobiography as a literary genre, nostalgia provides an interesting device to approach the complex reconstruction of identity and reflect the inner dilemma of the poet.

As discussed throughout the chapter, the three writers' late autobiographies feature individual forms of nostalgia that contrast with the dismissive or reductive way in which collective nostalgia has been treated by postcolonial critics. Interestingly, however, Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi share with Said's more personal nostalgia, as represented in his book about and in the name of the Palestinians, a deep sense of disquiet and anxiety. This suggests, I would argue, that the complexity of nostalgia is most powerfully expressed in personal narratives. In autobiography, nostalgia works as a productive device that shapes the strategies of self-writing and facilitates the writer's connection with the past and the future. At times, it is acknowledged and overtly performed in its retrospective, prospective, and even counter-factual forms, and at other times it is developed to the point of revealing and often emphasizing not only the writer's individual disillusionment about his own trajectory, but also the collective frustration of his generation about the country's precarious present and uncertain future.

In a striking reflection from *Le Livre imprévu*, Laâbi admits being 'travaillé par la matière de l'utopie'[492] and considers that 'le poète n'est pas de ce monde tel qu'il existe et il n'en est pas absent, prisonnier d'une chimère extra-monde'.[493] Since this could easily apply to Khaïr-Eddine and Khatibi, nostalgia as explored in this chapter is nothing but the reflection of this 'extra-monde' where the Moroccan writer remains haunted by the past, concerned about the future, and constantly questioning his present in the light of what he

[492] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.140.
[493] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.140.

has missed or failed to achieve or understand. It is in this in-between and fragile space of remembering, longing, and writing, that he can perform his role as 'passeur',[494] and transmit, as Laâbi symbolically does to his granddaughter at the end of *Le Livre imprévu*, what can be described as the dual Moroccan legacy of freedom and fear, testimony and uncertainty, self-regeneration and anxiety.

[494] Laâbi, *Le Livre imprévu*, p.140.

Chapter 5: Nostalgia and Writing Exile

Introduction: Writing exile, exile in writing

In his introduction to the volume *Reflections on exile*, Edward W. Said uses the phrase 'historical experience' to define 'an opening away from the formal and the technical toward the lived, the contested, and the immediate'[495] in the study of literature. As he evokes the two opposite trends in literary scholarship which lack, respectively, engagement with the world or reflective analysis, he argues that 'historical experience, and in particular the experience of dislocation, exile, migration, and empire, therefore opens both of these approaches to the invigorating presence of a banished or forgotten reality'.[496] Writing about exile always entails a quest for an absent reality which often draws on references to the self as an individual and collective presence in the world. While the previous chapter has demonstrated that nostalgia can work as a pivotal device in the autobiographical reconstruction of identity, my aim in what follows is to investigate the role of nostalgia in shaping the experience of exile as it is figured in literature in relation to Said's reflection, and extending what I have previously called the in-between and fragile space of remembering, longing, and writing.

In the definition he gives of exile, Said insists on the impossibility of overcoming the experience of loss and separation. Not only is exile 'the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between a self and its true home' but 'its essential sadness can never be surmounted' and its achievements 'are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever'.[497] At the same time, if exile is about terminal

[495] Edward W. Said, 'Introduction', in *Reflections on Exile* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.xi-xxxv (p.xxxi).
[496] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p.xxxii.
[497] Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on exile', in *Reflections on Exile*, pp.173-186 (p.173).

discontinuities and ruptures, writing the exilic experience always hinges on a sense of reconnection and reconstitution. In Michael Seidel's words, exile can be viewed as 'an enabling fiction'[498] that allows the exiled writer 'to transform the figure of rupture back into a figure of connection'.[499] Being out of place incites the exile to create a new world that somehow compensates for, or at least parallels, the old one left behind. This dual process of creation and compensation includes, however, an often insurmountable tension between past, present, and future.

In the articulation of exile and literary creation, Said's idea that 'the only home truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing'[500] throws into question not only the condition of the exile as an isolated creator, but more importantly the ability of his writing to capture, transcribe, and overcome the pain of separation. Writing exile amounts to writing about a personal experience whose 'emotional expression is loss, usually manifested as sorrow, though sometimes as nostalgia'.[501] In the process of putting exile in writing, nostalgia proves useful as a notion that could at once bridge the gap between memorial past and lived present (retrospective nostalgia), and open the writer's imagination to the perspectives of the future (prospective nostalgia). Besides staging both forms of nostalgia, the exilic experience often puts the writer in a fragile and unstable situation that oscillates between two attempts: recovering or reconstructing the lost homeland in the experience of literary return, and using the experience of longing itself to rebuild a sense of self in the world. As mentioned previously, Boym characterizes these movements as 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia, while stressing they 'are not absolute types, but rather tendencies, ways of giving shape and meaning to longing'.[502] The sense of

[498] Michael Seidl, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.xii.
[499] Seidl, p.x.
[500] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p.184.
[501] Robert Edwards, 'Exile, Self, and Society', in *Exile in Literature*, ed. by Maria-Inés Lagos-Pope (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988), pp.15-31 (p.15).
[502] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.41.

separation and uncertainty, already present in exile, is somehow embedded in the definition of nostalgia itself. Nostalgic discourses dealing with exile and exilic experiences are indeed the locus of doubts, contradictions, and uncertainties. In Said's words, 'exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure'.[503] The nostalgic exile is a tormented subject who constantly questions not only his own identity but also his writing practice and his ability to negotiate issues of longing and belonging.

In a postcolonial context, the questions raised by the experience of exile in relation to nostalgia and nostalgic subjects and discourses become even more complicated. The phenomena of migration, massive displacement, political exile or banishment, as well as the reconfiguration of borders and identities all influence the articulation of exile and nostalgia. Here again, Said opens an interesting perspective on this increasing complexity. Forsdick argues that Said's notions of 'travel' and 'exile', as explored in his works from *Orientalism* to *Out of place*, 'have undergone a long gestation' to the extent that 'they are no longer contradictory but rather intertwined and even complementary'.[504] Indeed, in Said's works, an exile often has a strong yearning for travel while a traveller finds sometimes himself in the position of an exile. This 'unstable inter-relationship of travel and exile' challenges the conventional hierarchies and categories of postcolonial studies and, according to Forsdick, 'ultimately reflects Said's recognition that postcolonial approaches to displacement are themselves inevitably composite and fractured'.[505] In a postcolonial context, the understanding of notions such as 'mobility', 'belonging', and 'homeland', is an object of debates and variations that depend on the subject's position. According to the Routledge *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, a good example of how the idea of 'exile' can be problematized consists in 'the tension involved in constructing a distant

[503] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p.186.
[504] Charles Forsdick, 'Travelling theories, Exiled Theorists' in Charles Forsdick (ed.), *Travel and Exile. Postcolonial Perspectives* (Liverpool: Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French, 2001), pp.1-14 (p.11).
[505] Forsdick, 'Travelling theories', p.11.

place as "home" by native-born descendants of the colonizers'.[506] Although this specific case does not apply to the Moroccan context, it still highlights the tension triggered by strategies of destabilization and opposition at play in postcolonial settings. Furthermore, colonial practice has constantly worked to extend the idea of 'exile' from its initial geographical meaning, to more elaborate forms of cultural, linguistic, and social alienation. As a result, by complicating the experience of exile and blurring its distinction with travel and displacement, postcolonial contexts invite us to reconsider nostalgia and nostalgic discourses in the light of the new cultural and social practices generated by postcolonial exilic experiences. In post-independence Morocco, where the Moroccan subject faces the overwhelming challenge of reconstructing his identity within a society affected by various forms of political and sociocultural alienation, nostalgia becomes a key concept in the negotiation of exilic experiences and their consequences. Nostalgia is not only what connects the Moroccan subject to his roots but also what potentially provides a discursive framework for his post-independence disillusionments.

In the works of Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi, various tendencies are often brought together to shape a complex definition of nostalgia in relation to exile and exilic experiences. The trajectories of the three writers and their distinct experiences of separation from and travel out of the homeland shed light on how nostalgia becomes involved in the negotiation of the malaise generated by exile. In line with my reading of nostalgia in the previous chapter as a hermeneutic and dynamic tool to approach strategies of representation and reconstruction, my aim in the following sections is to show that nostalgic discourses problematize the relationship with the homeland and enrich the notion of exile by extending its meaning to various experiences of wandering, travel, and confinement.

[506] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, p.92-93.

Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine: Wandering and obsessive nostalgia

Of the three writers, Khaïr-Eddine is the one who faced the most extreme and tragic experience of exile. Besides his eighteen years spent in France (1965-1979 and 1989-1993), Khaïr-Eddine suffered a life of wandering, misery, and lack of stability. His voluntary move to France in 1965, most likely influenced by the political turmoil in Morocco and the yearning for literary opportunities in the French capital, marks the starting point of both his exilic experience and writing career. Two years later, he would indeed publish his first novel, *Agadir*, steadily followed by his subsequent works, until *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple, toujours errants*, published in 1978, one year before his return to Morocco. This 'novel' offers an interesting perspective from which to read nostalgia and exile in Khaïr-Eddine as it coincides with the end of his first exilic experience in France, and represents his last publication before the 'novel of return' that is *Légende et vie d'Agoun'chich*, published in 1984, five years after his homecoming.

Interestingly, the association between life, identity, and displacement echoes in the striking title of Khaïr-Eddine's work which superimposes the words 'une vie', 'un rêve' and 'un peuple' onto the powerful sense of a never-ending wandering ('errants'), overemphasized by the adverb 'toujours'. Moreover, the use, with each word, of the indefinite pronoun 'un(e)' questions from the outset the individual ('une vie') and collective ('un peuple') identity, caught between the creative space of dreams ('un rêve'), potentially geared towards the future, and the persistent sense of loss and separation, which seems to span the past and the present ('toujours errants'). One year prior to his homecoming, it is as if Khaïr-Eddine is already aware that his return is doomed to end in a new separation, and that only the act of writing – embodied in the suggestive title of his

work – can resist the dialectics of exile and return through the powerful representation of a continuing mobility. I here use the word 'mobility' to refer to the displacement and wandering of the exiled writer, as well as the internal dynamics of his literary texts, based – as seen in previous chapters – on a combination of personal, political, and aesthetic forms of revolt, but also open to nostalgic recollections and reconstructions. As I have argued elsewhere in my reading of his subsequent novel *Légende et vie d'Agoun'chich*, Khaïr-Eddine's writing can be understood as an open-ended process that uses the idea of mobility to negotiate not only the tension between exile and return but also the act of remembering.[507] It is this fundamental obsession with mobility, I would argue, that shapes Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgia in relation to the experience of exile and separation.

In *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple, toujours errants*, Khaïr-Eddine's text is driven by a permanent oscillation between homeland and exile, real world and oneiric spaces, individual and collective identities, experiences of separation and reconnection. As aptly noted by Moroccan scholar Ahmed Raqbi, the novel can be read as 'une traversée du grand vide', driven by 'la logique de l'errance'.[508] In a significant gesture, the novel opens with the depiction of a cataclysmic space that refers to death and decay: 'Encore cet abominable lieu! Monde où les gens s'étripent entre les murs tombés, le grouillement des rats, des chats sauvages et le bourdonnement strident des insectes'.[509] The opening word 'encore' not only marks a constant feeling of frustration, but also reconnects the novel with Khaïr-Eddine's previous texts, starting with *Agadir*, set in a city levelled by an earthquake and reproduced through the returning image of 'les murs tombés' and the conflation of human violence and wild animals. This intertextuality informed by destruction and degeneration

[507] Khalid Lyamlahy, 'Moving Beyond Mobility: The Aesthetics of Exile and Becoming in Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's *Légende et vie d'Agoun'chich'*, *The Journal of North African Studies* 22/2(2017), pp.259-282.
[508] Ahmed Raqbi, 'Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine: l'écrivain du lieu et des lieux', in *Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, texte et prétexte. Actes du Colloque international 20-22 Novembre 1996, Université Cadi Ayyad, Marrakech* (Rabat: Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, 1999), pp.127-133 (p.130).
[509] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple, toujours errants* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978), p.9.

provides the initial backdrop from which the narrative can emerge as an attempt to rebuild the sense of individual and collective selfhood. In this uncertain process of reconstruction, nostalgia plays a fundamental role as a vehicle that at once revives the lost territories of childhood and opens memory to the regenerative possibilities of dreams and oneiric evocations.

Writing from exile, Khaïr-Eddine longs for his Moroccan southern homeland in a convoluted narrative that combines personal memories and collective histories, and whereby nostalgia becomes progressively an obsessive and structuring element. Indeed, Khaïr-Eddine's text juxtaposes his French exile and his first separation within Morocco, when he left his southern village and joined his father in the northern cosmopolitan city of Casablanca. Read from the perspective of his subsequent exile in France, the narrative describes a two-fold separation and develops a nostalgic discourse in which another nostalgia is embedded:

> Je ne retournais plus au bled qu'une fois l'an, en été. J'y redécouvrais alors la volupté des paysages nus et des montagnes pelées, l'eau glacée des torrents, la chasse, les mariages la nuit avec des battements de tambours et des chants dont certains se détachaient sur le ciel à l'instar d'un aigle solitaire. De retour en classe, c'était la même quiétude au bout de quelques jours, mais j'avais peine à quitter le lieu de mon enfance.[510]

In this excerpt, the lyric description of the southern homeland emphasizes the pure and primitive beauty of its nature ('paysages nus', 'montagnes pelées', 'eau glacée des torrents'), bringing people, fauna, and flora together in the same space, as evidenced by the association of weddings, musical rhythms, and popular songs, with the ambivalent image of a solitary eagle in the sky. The return to school in Casablanca is depicted as a fragile moment of peacefulness, rapidly overtaken by the resurgence of nostalgia and the longing for the space of childhood left behind. In contrast with the natural symbiosis of the

[510] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.141.

southern homeland, Casablanca is, in the early fifties and before independence, a city 'en proie à la terreur', and the lost image of mountains, landscapes, and iced water back home is replaced in Morocco's largest urban centre with 'des goumiers, des légionnaires et des flics partout'.[511] This spatial shift from quietness to terror and from natural beauty to military presence is taken a step further when Khaïr-Eddine depicts the factories in Parisian suburbs, where he used to work alongside African migrants: 'Mais ici, c'est le règne de l'acier et du courant électrique! Machine par-ci, machine par-là!'[512] The word 'règne', which could also refer to the Moroccan royal regime, is used here to characterize the industrial and oppressive work environment in exile. The industrial machines in France, like the French colonial soldiers and later the Moroccan repressive forces in the streets of Casablanca, are all the signs of a wounded individual memory that seeks refuge in the nostalgic evocation of childhood. In the space of slow death that is exile, either in cosmopolitan Casablanca or in poor Parisian suburbs, Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgia is, in Boym's words, 'restorative' in the sense that it focuses on the desire to reconstruct the world of childhood he once enjoyed as 'vivant, musical et solaire'.[513] The superimposition of exilic experiences, both in and out of Morocco, compounds the pain of separation and shapes a nostalgic discourse based on parallels and accumulation. Thus, when Khaïr-Eddine remembers his beloved grandfather, whom he compares to Hemingway, he writes:

> On buvait du vrai café, pas ce jus âcre qu'on vous sert au rade, à Paris. Un café pur qui sentait les racines de l'œil où s'amoncellent ces terres fortes qui te portent et qui se désintègrent dans ta cornée, effaçant le temps, amochant la phylogenèse…[514]

The remembering of the mere experience of drinking coffee becomes an occasion to celebrate the authenticity ('vrai café') and pureness ('café pur') of homeland, as opposed to

[511] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.142.
[512] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.51.
[513] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.163.
[514] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.52.

the bitterness of Parisian exile ('jus âcre'). More than a drink, coffee is a symbol of the lost sense of belonging and the missing power of the native land that define the identity of the individual, and influence his understanding of time and genealogy. As suggested by the reference to the eye and its cornea, Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgic discourse is aimed at reconstructing a visual image of the empowering homeland, while mourning its tragic disintegration that disrupts the sense of belonging. This disintegration is forcefully described by the scientific word 'phylogenèse', which refers to the evolutionary development of organisms and their features, here distorted by the author's sudden awareness of the distance that separates him from his homeland.

Nonetheless, Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgia remains ensnared in a dual discourse of reconstruction and mourning. This problematic duality can be read in the dreamlike evocations of the past, constantly emphasized throughout the narrative. As noted by Baïda, 'le récit est quasiment fondé sur le rêve'[515] which functions as a 'source de narration quelle que soit sa situation temporelle'.[516] Karima Yatribi goes in the same direction and argues that 'le personnage s'évade dans le rêve, qui représente le haut lieu de l'exil intérieur'.[517] The oneiric becomes an ambivalent space that embodies at once the continuation of exile and the possibility of return. This ambivalence is evident in the conflation of dreams and fictional images. While the lost childhood often refers to beauty and pureness, it is also depicted sometimes as the territory of illusions and chimeras where nostalgia has little place. When remembering, for instance, his early speeches and successful experiences with girls, Khaïr-Eddine's narrator claims: 'j'étais alors une sorte de dieu dont seule l'image était enfoncée dans la réalité'.[518] The powerful comparison with God is immediately offset by its fictional image, paradoxically the only one that gains access to reality. With the

[515] Baïda, p.23.
[516] Baïda, p.25.
[517] Karima Yatribi, 'La parabole du voyage', in *Awal, n°35-36. Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine*, pp.47-56 (p.52).
[518] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.145.

success stories of the lost past reduced to mere products of imagination, nostalgia is challenged by the fictional reconstruction of memories and events. Another difficulty stems from the fact that the celebrated childhood also marks the birth of the tormented subject. As the nostalgic narrator revives the episodes of his previous life, he comes to locate the origins of his suffering: 'C'était l'époque où dans mes tripes se réveillait l'homme qui depuis m'oxyde et me démembre'.[519] Nostalgia is also what rekindles and sustains the feeling of inner split and personal malaise. In Boym's lexicon, it significantly shifts from a restorative nostalgia, focused on the reconstruction of home, to a 'reflective' nostalgia, which thrives on the pain of loss and emphasizes the subject's fragmented sense of self. As the narrator dreams of alternative worlds, his reflective nostalgia always brings him back to the present and to his condition of a tormented exile, separated in his own being.

A careful reading of Khaïr-Eddine's novel reveals that, from the beginning, nostalgia is accompanied by dream and frustration: 'Quand un gars revoit le lieu de son enfance, c'est qu'il rêve. Quand sa mère lui apparaît, ce n'est plus comme avant'.[520] The striking parallel between, on the one hand, the space of childhood and the mother, and on the other, the act of dreaming and the evidence that 'ce n'est plus comme avant', pinpoints the problematic situation of the exile, torn between an irrecoverable past, an unrecognizable present, and an uncertain future. In this context, nostalgia needs to resist the loss of both spatial and linguistic references:

> C'est le rêve! Puis je remonte dans le temps…La vallée n'est plus qu'un roc! Une montagne de granite rose, granite disent ceux qui ne savent même pas ce qu'est une roche! Un entassement! Plus chez moi, ici![521]

[519] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.146.
[520] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.25.
[521] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.25.

Khaïr-Eddine's hesitation between the word 'granite' and the supposedly more authentic equivalent 'roche', and his use of successive nouns to describe the valley ('roc', 'montagne', 'entassement') betray a lack of confidence in the ability of language to recover the lost spaces of childhood. In the fictional space of the novel, words struggle as much to capture the returning images of the past as to evoke the oneiric constructions of the future. A relevant example of this struggle is the sequence when Khaïr-Eddine's narrator describes a dreamland that breaks with the image of the colourful, lively, and fascinating souk he used to visit in his childhood:

> Ce n'était donc ni une ville, ni un souk ni une quelconque ruine entretenue…ni même un mirage…Voici ce que c'était : des constructions qu'édifiaient dans leur tête des gens qui ne pensaient qu'à s'entre-tuer pour le pouvoir…Oui, il s'agissait bel et bien d'une lutte pour le pouvoir…[522]

In this excerpt, the elimination of the successive designations ('ni une ville', 'ni un souk', 'ni une quelconque ruine') is significantly extended to fictional representations ('ni même un mirage'). More importantly, the oneiric space is undermined by the struggle for power. Nostalgia, which used to reconnect the exile with his land and memory, gives way to a political awareness that denounces strategies of manipulation and trickery, embodied in the symbolic image of a 'pseudo-souk, érigé en fausse-ville',[523] as opposed to the 'souk extraordinaire'[524] of childhood. In Khaïr-Eddine's work, beyond the dialectics of the real and the oneiric, nostalgia allows for a critical reading of the present by introducing striking parallels between the lost past and the dreamlike future. Khaïr-Eddine's individual and obsessive nostalgia also works on a collective level by documenting the extent of geographical and cultural loss. In the theatrical section of the novel, for instance, the

[522] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.84.
[523] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.86.
[524] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.84.

character of ‘le vieillard’ mourns the time when the Berber land was beloved and protected:

> De mon temps, les ancêtres scrupuleux, les hommes valides et ceux bénis par Dieu, femmes, hommes, bêtes, épis d’orge, refoulaient quiconque entrait subrepticement dans ce pays plus haut dans ma mémoire que ne le fut jamais le ciel saint des prophètes.[525]

In this nostalgic evocation, Khaïr-Eddine revives the sacred union of people, ancestors, and nature in one movement that celebrates the attachment to the land, in contrast with a modern age when Berbers choose to leave their southern villages and live as anonymous exiles in the North. The nostalgic voice of the old man significantly magnifies ‘ce pays’ to the detriment of ‘le ciel saint des prophètes’, turning the homeland into the most sacred space. Furthermore, the act of mourning develops an underlying call for a cultural and political revival to save the sense of memory and heritage.

In Khaïr-Eddine’s work, this underlying call for revival, which draws simultaneously on nostalgic evocations and dreamlike constructions, is precisely what reunites the voices of the individual and the people. For Khaïr-Eddine and his narrator, exile constitutes a fundamental condition for cultural and political struggle. When evoking his stay in Casablanca, the narrator notes: ‘[…] mon père m’exila trois mois dans le bled. J’étais déjà un homme mais il me manquait l’expérience pratique qu’on n’acquiert qu’en pleine liberté, hors de sa famille’.[526] Although it may seem surprising, the association of the words ‘exil’ and ‘bled’ reveals the estrangement that defines the narrator’s new relationship with his unrecognizable homeland. More surprisingly, the following sentence stresses the necessity of a further exile, to gain this ‘pleine liberté, hors de [la] famille’. Khaïr-Eddine’s conception of writing and self-(re)construction hinges on

[525] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.99.
[526] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.154.

the necessity of a separation from the land, the family, and the tribe. In a subsequent reflection, he writes:

> En fait, je voulais donner à mon engagement d'écrivain une force franchement sociale et historique. Pour y parvenir, il urgeait que j'appartienne non plus à un seul clan, une seule famille ou un seul groupe, mais à tout un peuple.[527]

It is exile and separation from the native soil and its people that allow Khaïr-Eddine to read Morocco from a new perspective, and critically engage with the dreams and frustrations of his fellow citizens back home. As rightly noted by Robert Edwards, 'exile does not simply magnify personal separation to a collective displacement; rather, it intensifies the dialectical relation of the individual within the social'.[528] In Khaïr-Eddine's exilic experience, obsessive nostalgia takes part in the process of magnifying and intensifying the individual separation by working in the narrative to pinpoint spatial and social changes, and uncover the all-pervasive discrepancies between past, present, and future. In doing so, nostalgia becomes a fundamental device in the construction of this 'force franchement sociale et historique' claimed by the author. If Khaïr-Eddine is 'engagé', he is so in the sense that he uses both his position as an exile and his obsessive nostalgia for the homeland to rework the ideas of being and belonging in the Moroccan postcolonial context. Yatribi aptly observes that Khaïr-Eddine's southern homeland, 'site d'identité pour lui, est précisément le lieu qui favorise les unités fondamentales, les nostalgies obsédantes – en un mot, qui offre la possibilité d'une réhabilitation essentielle pour l'existence'.[529] Obsessive nostalgia, at once restorative and reflective, is what problematizes and constantly reactivates the subject's relation to his homeland, thus allowing for his self-regeneration in the dynamics of separation and reunion.

[527] Khaïr-Eddine, *Une Vie, un rêve, un peuple*, p.154.
[528] Edwards, p.17.
[529] Yatribi, p.55.

Abdelkebir Khatibi: Travel and subtle nostalgia

In contrast with Khaïr-Eddine's tragic exile and obsessive nostalgia, Khatibi's works offer an explicitly theoretical approach to nostalgic discourse in its relationship not only to exile, but also to travel and mobility. To borrow the opening line of his study *Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française*, in which he investigates the representation of alterity in French writers including Roland Barthes and Victor Segalen, one could think of Khatibi's oeuvre as 'le voyage d'un voyage'.[530] While the first 'voyage' refers to Khatibi's openness to transcultural references and foreign geographical and literary spaces, the second one hints at the inner dynamics of his writing, marked by the combination of literary genres and influences. In this respect, Khatibi's oeuvre echoes the genre of travel literature which, in Forsdick's terms, 'depends not so much on the indistinctness of intergenericity as on the constant voguing of transgenericity, on the discursive glide between different modes of writing the journey'.[531] Throughout his literary and intellectual journey, Khatibi consistently writes about the experience of travel and encounter with other cultures and literatures. French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet once wrote about Barthes that he was 'un penseur glissant'.[532] Khatibi, who knew and extensively read Barthes, is similarly a travelling intellectual relentlessly moving from one discipline to another, and making from the idea of travel the very definition of his writing.

That said, and although he lived six years in France during the preparation of his degree in sociology at the Sorbonne, and travelled extensively throughout his career, Khatibi never defined himself as an exile. In *Le Scribe et son ombre*, he writes: 'J'ai beaucoup voyagé, plus ou moins séjourné dans de nombreux pays. Mais je n'ai jamais été

[530] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1987), p.9.
[531] Forsdick, 'Travelling theories', p.3.
[532] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pourquoi j'aime Roland Barthes* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 2009), p.53.

poussé à l'exil, ni par force, ni par un désir d'errance et de transplantation'.[533] Unlike Khaïr-Eddine and his 'peuple errant', Khatibi excludes wandering from the experience of travelling around the world. His categorical statement raises then the following question: how does a travelling writer and a non-exile conceive of and represent nostalgia? In Khatibi's work, which is substantially open towards alterity and encounter with otherness, nostalgia is often what the writer works to resist and challenge. In his introduction to *Figures de l'étranger*, Khatibi writes: 'je viens de loin et l'étranger vient de plus loin dans ma mémoire et de sa dispersion soit dans la nostalgie, soit dans la méconnaissance et la dénégation'.[534] It is striking here that Khatibi draws a link between nostalgia and both lack of knowledge and denial, two notions that misrepresent the stranger by confining his identity either in the lost past or in the logic of reductive clichés and misconceptions. It is also worth noting that he sees a parallel between the 'je' and 'l'étranger', both located in a distant memory. In its attempt to resist the isolation of the stranger and bridge the gap between the self and the other, Khatibi's oeuvre – to borrow his own words about that of Segalen – 'est regard vers le Dehors, exil de soi'.[535] The experience of exile is not only grounded in the foreign space, but also redirected within the self and reshaped by 'cette œuvre qui se construit en se déplaçant, se développe en un art ex-centrique, soutenu continuellement par le terrain lui-même'.[536]

One example is Khatibi's Sweden which, like Segalen's Tahiti and China, provides a relevant ground on which exile is redefined as an inner experience and a literary space of investigation and self-definition that resists nostalgia. Interestingly, Khatibi's travel from France to Scandinavia and Sweden is associated with him getting closer to literature as he writes: 'Attiré par la Suède, transportant avec moi un bagage littéraire et artistique, plus

[533] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.15.
[534] Khatibi, *Figures de l'étranger*, p.11.
[535] Khatibi, *Figures de l'étranger*, p.22.
[536] Khatibi, *Figures de l'étranger*, p.22.

que sociologique. Plus je montais vers ce nord et ses extases froides qui faisaient ma joie, plus j'allais être rejeté dans la littérature'.[537] As suggested by the words 'attiré', 'extase', and 'joie', Khatibi's experience in Sweden hinges on a sensual dimension that shapes the act of writing. The ascent to the north – as opposed to the south where the native land is located – is a metaphor for the rising pleasure of travelling far from home and resisting nostalgia in the experience of writing mobility and estrangement.

Khatibi's *Un été à Stockholm*, a novel published in 1990, provides an interesting example of the representation of nostalgia as a counterpoint for the experience of travel and the pleasure of geographical and cultural mobility as experienced by a privileged intellectual. The novel, inspired by Khatibi's visit to Stockholm following a colloquium he attended in Paris in 1988 about Swedish poet Ekelöf, recounts the story of Gérard Namir, a French professional translator specialized in simultaneous translation and who defines himself as 'un voyageur professionnel'.[538] Gérard, who is on bad terms with his wife Denise, left in Paris, travels to Stockholm to cover a colloquium about 'strategy and neutrality', gets seduced by Lena, an air hostess, and decides to extend his stay and enjoy the city. At first, the narrative seems totally geared towards the celebration of the pleasure of travel and cultural immersion in the Swedish city, leaving little room for nostalgic discourse and mourning. This is not only visible in the title which overtly combines Stockholm and the summer, but also in the structure of the narrative. In one of his interviews, Khatibi observes that the number of chapters, nine, 'n'est point un hasard, le chiffre 9 étant important dans la mythologie scandinave'.[539] Furthermore, while the first and last chapters take place in the plane, with Gérard respectively flying to and leaving Stockholm, the seven other chapters are all set in the Swedish capital. It is as though the novel, in its very structure and organization, aims to disconnect the narrator – and the

[537] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.22.
[538] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Un Eté à Stockholm', in *Œuvres Complètes I. Romans et récits*, p.287.
[539] Khatibi, *La Langue de l'autre*, p.84.

reader – from his homeland by taking him on a literary journey to the Swedish city and getting him immersed in its cultural and symbolic environment. This is suggested by the narrator himself at the threshold of the text:

> Je conçois ma naissance au monde en une vitesse qui me sépare de plus en plus de mon passé en le voilant, me détachant de ma ville natale et de ses racines grégaires, presque immobiles au bord d'une plage océanique.[540]

The experience of travel is defined as a separation from the place of birth that allows for a rapid rebirth in the world. In contrast with the image of those 'racines grégaires, presque immobiles', which designate territorial anchoring and belonging, Khatibi promotes the dynamics of travel and 'une vitesse' that constantly propels and moves the self forward. This prospective dimension that seems to deny retrospective nostalgia is emphasized by Khatibi's depiction of Sweden as a transcultural country, a neutral hub for different nationalities and identities. The representation of Sweden as a country of transit and encounter is most openly manifest in the space and the topic of the colloquium, as well as in the narrator's activity of simultaneous translation and his recourse to 'une interlangue',[541] a notion that describes the circulation and transformation of language in a multilingual context. In Khatibi's fictional account of the colloquium, it is noteworthy that nostalgia is also openly rejected in the discourse of a Swedish professor from the University of Lund who claims: 'Nos ancêtres étaient de grands guerriers, nos dieux aussi. La guerre des uns et des autres est terminée. La paix perpétuelle, c'est à nous de la construire'.[542] At this stage, Sweden symbolizes the denial of nostalgic discourse, the separation from the past and the projection into the future, in the promise of a socio-political project defined by the utopian idea of a permanent peace. The neutral space that is

[540] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.287-288.
[541] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.310.
[542] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.313.

Sweden, defined by its seductive nature and 'calme pensif',[543] works to resist the temptation of nostalgic retrospective discourse. Furthermore, nostalgia is somehow overtaken by the increasing pleasure of travel and the excitement of inner exile, as the narrator observes: 'Voyager, changer de pays et de langue, excite ma pensée et mon surplus de plaisir'.[544] The word 'surplus' suggests an incremental process that locates the reconstruction of the self in the always renascent encounter with the other.

Throughout the narrative, however, the protagonist's relation to nostalgia proves to be more complex. The act of remembering, for instance, embodies a constant tension. In one of the first scenes during his flight from New York to Stockholm, Gérard Namir observes two children playing a game that brings him back to his childhood: 'Je me rappelle ainsi mon enfance et ses labyrinthes. Mais le couloir de l'avion, qui est une simple ligne droite, limite ma remontée dans le temps'.[545] The striking difference between the labyrinthine structure of memory and the form of the aircraft's corridor in a straight line captures the difficulty of remembering and mourning. The memory of Khatibi's narrator seems completely shaped by the appropriation of the new signs associated with the experience of travel, and later delivered by the city of Stockholm and its imaginary. As the narrative unfolds, travel itself becomes a mnemonic experience with 'le souvenir de chaque voyage en avion répétant dans la mémoire une série indéterminée de départs et d'arrivées, comme devant un échiquier où le voyageur immobile serait rêvé par le jeu'.[546] This repetition entails a back-and-forth movement which triggers a nostalgia for other experiences of travel, and whereby, as in Khaïr-Eddine's text, the line between reality and dream is constantly blurred, or at least displaced.

[543] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.297.
[544] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.297.
[545] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.290.
[546] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.288.

Once in Stockholm, the narrator finds himself torn between past and present, nostalgia and pleasure, mourning and enjoying, remembering and forgetting. This tension is manifest, for instance, in the opposition between his painful epistolary correspondence with his French wife Denise, left in Paris, and his seduction game with the air hostess Lena in Stockholm. In his attempt to appropriate the city and the new lover – both figures of 'the other' –, Gérard Namir wanders the streets of Stockholm and repeatedly returns to the same places, reading his experience as the quest for a 'secret' which he 'pressen[t] depuis [sa] prime enfance' while it 'n'appartient qu'à l'art des illusions'.[547] Embedded in this quest is a restorative yet problematic nostalgia for the fragmented and elusive space of childhood which echoes the fleeting and dreamlike experiences with Lena. In contrast, Namir's nostalgia for his wife Denise, triggered by her desperate letters, emerges in his depiction of Stockholm as 'un paysage empreint de nostalgie'[548] that revives old memories and reveals the burden of the past in long-term relationships. 'Suspendre mon passé, notre passé', concedes Gérard Namir, 'cela est impossible. Irréel'.[549] The experience of travel may well be enjoyable and exciting, but it never gets rid of the past. A subtle nostalgia always returns in both the space and the text. The city, like the self, remains bound to the returning power of the past, since 'la séduction perpétuelle ne liquide pas le passé, mettant en scène, en avant-scène ce qui n'est pas aimé en nous, ni assouvi en notre force cannibale'.[550] Beyond Stockholm and its seductive neutrality, it is the wounded past that is paradoxically revealed through the narrative. In a striking opposition, Gérard Namir asks himself whether he might be 'noué à un passé archaïque' while Lena conversely lives in 'la

[547] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.318.
[548] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.349.
[549] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.347.
[550] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.351.

simplicité assez déréglée du présent éternel'.[551] How to handle then the paradox of this returning nostalgia?

In one of his reflections, Alberto Albertini, an Italian film producer whom Namir meets in Stockholm, suggests that the neutrality of Sweden might refer to a special mode of living: '*la passion d'effacer les traces*', embodied in the snow that provides people with 'un extraordinaire désir de transparence'.[552] Alberto goes on exclaiming: 'Quelle incroyable nostalgie de se sentir transfiguré par la nature et ses anciens esprits, telle une sculpture runique, polie par les vents enneigés!'[553] Far from denying the returning nostalgia, Khatibi's novel develops it in an underlying discourse aimed at recovering a primitive nature and reconstructing the original traces of the space, the self, and the other in the experience of travel. An eloquent example of this process is provided by the passages that celebrate 'le repos écologique, entre terre et mer',[554] 'l'instinct sensuel de *conservation*',[555] 'le bonheur coopératif. Entre la terre et l'eau, l'eau et la neige, la neige et la glace',[556] and 'le langage de l'amour dans le cri mi-animalier, mi-végétal, entre les forêts, les grottes, les lagunes et les étoiles'.[557] This ecological relationality, which implicitly mourns the lost fusion of natural elements, builds upon the nostalgic evocation of a primitive age when nature was the sign of peace, protection, and symbiosis. Another example of this process of nostalgic appropriation and recovery is the narrator's reading of the old town in Stockholm: 'J'essaie de restituer à cette vieille ville sa splendeur fanée et qu'on dirait *kitsch*, habitée par le culte profane des Morts et des Revenants'.[558] Travel becomes an attempt to recover, mourn, and revive the lost image of the visited space. The reconstructed identity of the old town is made of nostalgic references, memorial signs lost

[551] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.354.
[552] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.315.
[553] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.315.
[554] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.314.
[555] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.333.
[556] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.341.
[557] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.373.
[558] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.330.

in the past and sought through the dual activity of strolling and writing. In a startling parallel, Khatibi compares the visitor to 'un archéologue des villes endormies sous la neige'.[559] Here, the reference to archaeology not only suggests a retrospective movement of research and investigation, but also draws on the activity of digging the hidden signs out of the past. Like an archaeologist, the visitor to the old town, writes Khatibi, 'risque d'être envahi un moment par une nostalgie sournoise ; je dirais une nostalgie de ce qu'on n'a pas réellement vécu, éprouvé'.[560] It is this subtle nostalgia, based on the experience of estrangement in the foreign space, which shapes Khatibi's conception of travel as an encounter with and an immersion in the unknown.

Faced with the outmoded beauty of the 'other' space, Khatibi's narrator becomes nostalgic for the unsatisfied desire for the past. Unsurprisingly, he starts considering himself as a returning subject, defined by and brought back to his previous travels: 'Suis-je moi-même un revenant? Un revenant de ma vie antérieure, accumulée par mon expérience de voyageur ?'.[561] Although this may seem paradoxical, the incremental experience of travel is also an invitation to move backwards and appropriate the past with its intricate network of constructions and evocations. It is then a subtle nostalgia, based more on imagination than on memory, which informs Khatibi's conception of travel writing. In Alberto's words from the novel, 'un écrivain doit écrire comme le premier homme l'a fait, viser l'essentiel, la mise en forme de l'essentiel'.[562] Writing this way requires the writer to develop a particular sensitivity to the lost past that amounts to his openness to the new spaces yet to be visited and transcribed in the text. In Khatibi's novel, the act of writing, like the activity of travel as a form of exile and that of translation as an engagement with otherness, locates the quest for self-definition in the combination of nostalgia and pleasure,

[559] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.329.
[560] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.329.
[561] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.330.
[562] Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes I*, p.340.

return and progress, memories and projections. In this dual process, nostalgia works as a contrapuntal device, a hidden mirror that reflects the encounter with both the self and the other, the familiar and the unknown, always reminding the travelling writer of his dual identity.

Abdellatif Laâbi: Prison and dualistic nostalgia

This subtle nostalgia, based in Khatibi's work on a peculiar tension between the seductive present of travel and the unavoidable return of the past, is somehow displaced in Laâbi's letters from prison. Laâbi's *Chroniques de la citadelle d'exil*, written in the painful present of incarceration, embeds nostalgia in another tension, that between the enjoyable past of freedom and the uncertain future of liberation. Prior to his exile in France following his release in 1985, Laâbi spent eight years in what he calls 'la citadelle d'exil', a metaphorical designation of jail. Laâbi's association of prison with exile is not surprising. In his study *Writers in Prison*, in which he investigates the works of intellectual and political prisoners, Ioan Davies notes that 'in virtually all cases, prison or exile has provided the opportunity for the reformulation of ideas in such a way that they had profound implications for the direction of the political movement'.[563] Both experiences of incarceration and exile are based on similar forms of separation and isolation, and both serve as laboratories for new ideas, informed by resistance and self-regeneration. In Laâbi's designation of prison, it is worth observing that the word 'citadelle', whose first meaning designates a bastioned fortification used formerly to defend an important place, also refers to a 'centre principal où l'on défend des idées, une doctrine, etc'.[564] Based on this dual definition, Laâbi's prison, I would argue, is an ambivalent space where the lost

[563] Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), p.54.
[564] Definition from *Larousse Dictionary*.

freedom is reconstructed in the resurgent nostalgia for both the past and the future. In his attempt to define a 'prison poetics', Doran Larson argues that 'prison writing is a genre bound not only by its subject and authors but in its expressive tropes, and those tropes at once determined by, actively resistant to, and thus indicative of both global and local conditions of composition'.[565] It is my contention that Laâbi's nostalgia, as expressed in the exile of incarceration, works as an 'expressive trope' that at once interacts with the personal history of the writer, and actively resists the experience of isolation by connecting him to both the past and the future. As a result, Laâbi's writing is driven, in Alessandra's words, by 'un vent de nomadisme qui pousse l'écrivain à parler de tout, à passer d'un jour à l'autre, d'un destinataire à l'autre, d'un thème à un autre'[566] in a fascinating movement that challenges the closed and immutable time-space of prison. Besides their message of hope and resistance, Laâbi's letters to his wife Jocelyne, his children Qods, Hind, and Yacine, and his friends, oscillate between two forms of nostalgia: the first is retrospective and mourns the missing past left behind, while the second is prospective and longs for an uncertain future yet to come. Both forms of nostalgia are shaped by the specific temporal and spatial environment of prison, which develops a peculiar tension between past and future.

In Laâbi's letters, this tension is manifest, to start with, in the representation of time. In prison, writes Laâbi, 'le temps se vide. On vit dans une sorte d'apesanteur'.[567] As an exile, the inmate lives out of place and out of time, but is still connected with the isolated communities of political and intellectual prisoners with whom he identifies himself. In Larson's terms, 'the prison universe is a true archipelago […] eradicated from time and place'.[568] In the confined space that is prison, Laâbi looses the sense of time

[565] Doran Larson, 'Towards a Prison Poetics', in *College Literature* 37/3 (Summer 2010), pp.143-166 (p.143)
[566] Alessandra, *Abdellatif Laâbi*, p.61.
[567] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle d'exil* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2005), p.48.
[568] Larson, p.144.

which becomes ‘un temps indivisible qui évolue par tranches d’émotions, de rêveries, de dialogue humain et fraternel’.[569] In other terms, he lives on a different time scale, made not of temporal references but rather of emotions, doubts, and hopes. As an exile, the prisoner is torn between two opposite necessities: shaping his future and rethinking his past. Laâbi describes this dilemma when he writes: ‘Le jour, je déroule le futur. J’apprends à l’ordonner lucidement. Ou bien j’éclaire le passé, je déblaye, je choisis, je froisse et jette les feuilles mortes, j’arrache les herbes inutiles’.[570] Unsurprisingly, this simultaneous engagement with past and future creates an ambivalent backdrop for his nostalgic discourse.

The same tension between past and future finds a resonance in the representation of space. For a political prisoner like Laâbi, being jailed in his own country entails a devastating and unequalled experience of social, cultural, and sensorial separation. As rightly noted by David Bevan, ‘exile within a place is often still more poignant than exile from a place or exile to a place’.[571] A space of internal exile, the Moroccan prison compounds the feeling of dissociation and separation from the homeland. To use one of Said’s terms, one could think of Laâbi’s jail as ‘the perilous territory of not belonging’,[572] in the sense that it at once jeopardizes his physical and mental integrity, and violently cuts him off from the outer world of belonging, which includes not only the native land, but also family, friends, and relatives. As a result, Laâbi’s letters develop in subsequent pages an ambivalent discourse in which the prisoner tries at once to appropriate and escape from the space of exile in the evocation of alternative spaces, selected from both the past and the future. Addressing his children Yacine and Hind, for instance, Laâbi compares the prison to ‘une grande maison avec beaucoup de pièces’, similar to their home with the only

[569] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle*, p.41.
[570] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle*, p.45.
[571] David Bevan, ‘Introduction’, in *Literature and Exile* (Amsterdam-Atalanta: Rodopi, 1990), pp.3-4 (p.3).
[572] Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p.177.

difference that 'on ne peut pas en sortir'.[573] This striking parallel redefines the relationship to prison as simultaneously familiarized and estranged. As a result, the poet is condemned to navigate in a paradoxical space that is both 'une cité interdite'[574] and 'cité de l'attente et de l'espoir irrépressible'.[575] The former description triggers Laâbi's longing for the missing past while the latter redirects his nostalgic feeling towards an uncertain future shaped by hope and expectation. As a result, Laâbi's retrospective and prospective forms of nostalgia work in parallel to recreate alternative spaces that could resist and challenge that of prison.

Laâbi's dialectics of retrospective and prospective nostalgia is carried on throughout his letters. Each form of nostalgic discourse hinges on a specific set of images and references. His retrospective nostalgia, to start with, is based on a systematic sensorial reconstruction of the past. Territories of childhood are depicted in a succession of 'souvenirs, impressions, odeurs, visions'[576] that recreate the hometown of Fez as a fascinating and dynamic space, in total rupture with the space of exile and silence that is prison:

> Il manque ici les miroitements de l'arc-en-ciel sur les coupoles, les verrières des vérandas juchées, les fragrances du jasmin, de la bergamote ou simplement du café turc. Ici, c'est le silence qui domine, l'air n'a pas d'odeur, on se croirait sur une montagne sans végétation, comme le fond d'un cratère volcanique.[577]

Laâbi's nostalgic evocation of the landscapes, the colours, and the smells of Fez is immediately contrasted with the meaningless and silent space of prison from which life and sensorial experiences are totally excluded. What the prisoner misses 'ici' is somehow recovered in the nostalgic and meticulous reconstruction of a poetic elsewhere. The process of sensorial and sensual reconstruction of moments from the past becomes a

[573] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.19.
[574] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.110.
[575] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.77.
[576] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.63.
[577] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.99.

fundamental feature of Laâbi's nostalgic discourse. As memories resurface in the letters, the writer accepts nostalgia as a vital element of his everyday life, a bridge between the oppressive present and the obsessive past. It is Laâbi's retrospective nostalgia, I would argue, that allows him to investigate the past and recover intense moments of intimacy and happiness. In the solitude of prison, nostalgic discourse is often framed as a monologue: 'C'était quoi, ce temps de l'innocence et de la ferveur, fête de l'instant accordant regards et gestes? C'est beau et légitime, un peu de nostalgie, face à cette nuit pétrifiée'.[578] Laâbi's question, which reveals his attempt to recover emotional and sensorial experiences from the past, is significantly followed by an overt acceptance of nostalgia as a means of resisting the oppressive space of prison. As suggested by the phrase 'un peu de nostalgie', however, Laâbi remains cautious towards this nostalgic impulse which could propel him into despondency and despair. Therefore, it is not coincidental that Laâbi's retrospective nostalgia is often presented in brief and fleeting evocations, 'de petites nostalgies passagères de prisonnier'[579] as he calls them when he remembers the coffee made by his wife, or when he mourns their walks and their moments of intimacy. These scattered nostalgic evocations function, in Laâbi's terms, as 'des fragments de cette ancienne liberté évanouie',[580] revived only in the act of writing. The resistance of the prisoner, I would argue, is conditioned by his ability to accept retrospective nostalgia as a means of recovering a sense of memory that can challenge the present through the power of nostalgic reconstruction: 'Je recouvre toute ma mémoire', writes Laâbi, 'et je ne peux pas me défendre d'un souffle d'heureuse nostalgie'.[581] In the prison of exile and separation, retrospective nostalgia not only bridges the gap between past and present, but also recreates moments of peace and happiness. Nonetheless, those vital moments remain

[578] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.53.
[579] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.129.
[580] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.76.
[581] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.154.

extremely brief and fragmented, forming what Laâbi terms a 'nostalgie sans boussole',[582] a phrase that describes at once the random organization of memories and the extremely difficult and lengthy process of nostalgic recovery. In this context, Laâbi often ends up admitting the failure of his retrospective nostalgia: 'C'est loin tout cela, il faut en convenir. On fera plus vite d'imaginer de tels moments au futur'.[583] This is precisely where prospective nostalgia intervenes by redirecting the nostalgic impulse towards a future that remains itself subject to doubt and uncertainty.

In the ambivalent exile of prison, Laâbi's prospective nostalgia stems from a persistent need to connect with and project into the future. The present is embedded in isolation and separation, while the future is geared towards healing and self-reconstruction. In contrast with the past and its uncertain and fleeting images, the future initially embodies the values of creation and rebirth. Laâbi's *Chroniques* are driven by what he calls 'la tension vers tout *ce qui sera*',[584] namely the tension that relentlessly seeks to imagine, describe, and eventually mourn an elusive future. I would still describe this tension as nostalgic, for it mournfully anticipates the loss of this evasive and fragile future. Laâbi's prospective nostalgia remains permanently threatened by violence and oppression and, as a result, endlessly moves between the lost past of freedom and the uncertain future of liberation. In one of his letters, the poet writes: 'Nous avons gagné de pouvoir imaginer le futur, pas un futur de fantaisie et de fantasmes mais l'avenir rationnel, inéluctable qui germe dans les entrailles du présent'.[585] Rather than this rationality, however, Laâbi's *Chroniques* offer a nostalgic evocation of a future that always escapes the grasp of the writer. For Laâbi's future is first and foremost the locus of dream, doubt, and questioning. 'Le futur', writes Laâbi to his wife, 'c'est nous émerveillés par la fête printanière, notre

[582] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.293.
[583] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.293.
[584] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.29.
[585] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.123-124.

sourire embrassant le passé, notre rire feu d'artifice de la présence. Le futur, c'est un beau conte, mais comme les contes authentiques, ce sera la quintessence de la réalité, de l'acquis'.[586] This ambivalent definition, which desperately tries to blend past and present, fiction and reality, is a significant representation of Laâbi's prospective nostalgia for a utopian future that remains out of reach. As a result, nostalgic discourse is in a deadlock, reduced to self-questioning:

> Suis-je triste ce soir, ce qu'on appelle triste ? Ou bien est-ce ainsi que je traduis cette nostalgie de la grande fête, de la fin de tous les exils ? Ce futur-là m'affole, qui ne peut être mesuré, lui ou le parcours de son approche. Le vivrai-je ? Serai-je l'homme de cette fête, épanouissant enfin tous mes dons ?[587]

Mourning an uncertain and elusive future, Laâbi's prospective nostalgia becomes a form of anxiety and panic. His successive questions describe a disconcerting exile of which he strives to imagine the end. As the perspective of liberation gets closer, however, nostalgia gives way to an ambivalent feeling, which Laâbi defines as 'la tristesse heureuse', arguing that 'c'est comme ça que s'exprime parfois la passion du futur. On décroche du quotidien, de son espace confiné, son cérémonial de conventions pour participer de ce qui viendra, imprévisible, indescriptible, mais pourtant familier'.[588] Laâbi's paradoxical familiarity with and longing for an indefinable future is precisely what helps him resist and fight back in the space of prison. Shaped by prospective nostalgia, the future is a mobile horizon that renews the act of resistance and writing. More important than the materialization of this future is the regenerative dynamics of prospective nostalgia which continually longs for the yet-to-come. By creating regeneration out of loss, this repetitive process works as an antidote to the prisoner's anxiety, although his nostalgic discourse remains ensnared in a

[586] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.122-123.
[587] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.199-200.
[588] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.248.

utopian loop from which he has no other way out than writing letters and exchanging with the outer world.

Caught between the opposite yet indivisible discourses of retrospective and prospective nostalgia, Laâbi's *Chroniques* offer a unique perspective from which to consider the relationship between the act of writing from exile and the possibility of self-reconstruction in nostalgia. The resulting image remains extremely ambivalent as Laâbi at once writes from prison and craves for an alternative space where he could recover his freedom and reinvent his writing. If prison is the space of violence and domination where writing paradoxically bridges the gap between the land of exile and the homeland, it still does not provide him with an adequate environment for a transformation of writing itself. As he concedes, 'la prison n'est décidément pas favorable au travail suivi, organisé, dont je rêve'.[589] Prison remains an oppressive space that hinders any possibility of reinventing writing and the self. A startling illustration of what can be defined as a nostalgic deadlock is Laâbi's highly evocative nostalgia for the space of prison itself, as when he mourns his first jail: 'Pendant toutes ces années, j'ai gardé une étrange nostalgie pour la prison de Rabat, sentiment comparable à celui que l'on a lorsqu'on revoit, après une longue absence, la maison où l'on a vu le jour'.[590] The adjective 'étrange' and Laâbi's unexpected comparison of prison with his birthplace offer an extreme representation of the power of nostalgia in reshaping the understanding of exile. Initially a place of confinement and separation, prison eventually becomes a paradoxical yet productive space for reflection, a fundamental milestone in the exile's personal history, as suggested in another letter: 'C'est paradoxal, mais parfois la prison me paraît être le seul endroit où je suis vraiment à ma place. Mes ruptures n'ont ainsi guère besoin de démonstration'.[591] Being nostalgic for prison itself reveals an insurmountable feeling of solitude and separation from the world.

[589] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.211.
[590] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.303.
[591] Laâbi, *Chroniques de la citadelle,* p.313.

Nostalgia for prison is nothing but the climax of Laâbi's problematic nostalgia, not only torn between past and future but also confined in a persistent and possessive present. By the time of his release, things become more complicated as the prisoner is invited to face the resurgence of nostalgic discourse in two opposite experiences: his separation from the new 'home' that is prison, and his new 'exile' in the outer world of political censorship and limited freedom. For Laâbi, nostalgia becomes this never-ending process that throws the writer in and out of the alternating spaces of longing and belonging. It is this dualistic nostalgia that figures the complex situation of the writer as an exile who simultaneously longs for and mourns an unreachable homeland.

Khaïr-Eddine's, Khatibi's and Laâbi's nostalgic discourses all reveal, although to different degrees, a persistent sense of uneasiness in writing exile. Although the three writers succeed in turning the experiences of wandering, travel, and prison into extremely diverse literary texts which extend the understanding of exile, and figure the quest for a lost reality of both the individual and the collective, their representation of nostalgia remains rather unstable and ambivalent. Initially an expressive device in the process of recovery and reconstruction, nostalgia proves to be respectively obsessive, subtle, and dualistic. It is also worth noting the fact that nostalgia never constitutes a dominant topic in their works and is often described through a fragmented succession of brief and fleeting evocations. While nostalgia works as a dynamic concept that investigates spaces and negotiates time, nostalgic discourse is systematically ensnared in a persistent tension between the lost past, the lived present, and the uncertain future.

As I have argued elsewhere about Khaïr-Eddine,[592] it is my contention that the ambivalence of the three writers' nostalgia stems from the fact that their works remain in

[592] Lyamlahy.

the in-between space of the two categories that Claudio Guillén defines respectively as 'the literature of exile', in which 'exile becomes its own subject matter', and 'the literature of counter-exile', in which 'exile is the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterized by a tendency toward integration, increasingly broad vistas and universalism'.[593] If Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi all write about different forms of exile, they never succeed in overcoming the constantly returning trauma of loss and dissociation. Although their responses 'incorporate the separation from place' and rework it in oneiric (Khaïr-Eddine), transcultural (Khatibi), or oppositional (Laâbi) patterns, they never really 'triumph over the separation' nor 'offer wide dimensions of meaning that transcend the earlier attachment to place or native origin'.[594] For all three writers, writing exile is a confrontation with a returning nostalgia in this in-between and fragile space of struggle that draws on remembering, mourning, and longing for an elusive reality. Nostalgia, whatever form it might take, not only emerges in this in-between space, but also thrives on the dialectics of exile and return that endlessly attracts and repels the Moroccan writer. In this sense, nostalgia describes the situation of the Moroccan postcolonial writer who stands between rootedness and nomadism, and faces the never-ending challenge of rewriting his exile and overcoming his returning malaise. Ultimately, then, nostalgia and revolt often reappear in new and blended forms, inviting the reader to consider the interconnection of the two concepts as a potential response to persistent individual and collective forms of discontent.

[593] Claudio Guillén, 'On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile', in *Books Abroad* 50/2 (1976), pp.271-280 (p.272).
[594] Guillén, p.272.

Chapter 6: Nostalgic Rebels and Revolted Nostalgics

Introduction: Towards a 'double critique' of revolt and nostalgia

In *L'Homme révolté*, Camus notes that poets at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century conceived their subversive aesthetics in opposition to the irrationality and absurdity of the world, thus attempting to restore a sense of order and control in life. Interestingly, Camus argues that these rebel poets, notably the Surrealists, 'voulant tout renverser, […] ont affirmé en même temps leur nostalgie désespérée d'un ordre'.[595] As a result, their revolt can be described as nostalgic in the sense that it simultaneously generates a desperate longing for a lost image of the world. In this oxymoronic notion of 'nostalgic revolt', which combines rejection and longing, refusal and mourning, nostalgia works as an open horizon for the act of revolt: the poet as a rebel longs for an alternative world, built not only with the subversive dynamics of his creation but also on the ruins of his loss, despair, and yearning. Nostalgic revolt thus marks the encounter of nostalgia and revolt in the realm of subversive poetics. And although it might seem equally incongruous or paradoxical, the other side to this nostalgic revolt would be a 'revolted nostalgia'. I would use this second term to designate a nostalgia that includes a rebellious tendency directed against the conventional categories of time and feelings of regret and wistfulness, or more widely a nostalgia that rebels against the very world it longs for and which it strives not only mournfully to evoke but also to recover and transform through the act of writing.

If nostalgia and revolt are thus intertwined, 'nostalgic revolt' and 'revolted nostalgia' are only two possible faces of this connection. Two other specific forms of relation between the two concepts would be a 'nostalgia *for* revolt', and a 'revolt *against*

[595] Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p.106.

nostalgia'. The former can refer to a nostalgia that either glorifies past successful revolts or longs for new forms of rebellion yet to be launched in the future. The latter can designate a more or less fierce rejection of nostalgia on the grounds that it embodies, as seen in previous chapters, a pejorative meaning or serves unrealistic or unproductive purposes.

In postcolonial contexts, both nostalgia for revolt and revolt against nostalgia can be used to promote a certain type of discourse aiming to restore, celebrate, or highlight specific elements of the national narrative. Postcolonial histories are made as much of failed or hoped-for revolts as of disillusioned or revived nostalgias: the two concepts, operating in a dynamic configuration, work with and against each other to assess the past, probe the present, and sketch out new possibilities for the future. This simultaneous work can be fruitful in postcolonial literature, whose texts often develop some of the most creative strategies of recovery, appropriation, and reconstruction. Edouard Glissant's concept of 'vision prophétique du passé', which designates the process of exploring the traumatic colonial past in light of the present and with the aim of sketching a new future, is a relevant example of this cross-temporal and original effort. Glissant observes, however, that 'cette exploration ne revient donc ni à une mise en schémas ni à un pleur nostalgique. C'est à démêler un sens douloureux du temps, à le projeter à tout coup dans notre futur'.[596] This rejection of nostalgic lamenting in favour of a more active and complex engagement with history should not prevent us, I would argue, from reading nostalgia alongside revolt in postcolonial texts. Nostalgic revolt and revolted nostalgia provide two productive ways of exploring the interaction and distribution of the two concepts in postcolonial literature, at once across historical periods and beyond lament and regret.

While the previous four chapters have studied revolt and nostalgia from distinct perspectives in the works of Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi, this chapter aims to analyse

[596] Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1981]), p.132.

how the two concepts work also together, either in opposed or simultaneous ways, to offer a further – and more complex – response to what I have defined in the introduction as the Moroccan postcolonial malaise. This combined reading does not contradict but rather extends and completes the previous analyses. My contention here is that the works of the three authors not only develop two distinct discourses of revolt and nostalgia but also feature elements that draw from the encounter and confrontation of the two concepts. Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi write not only *about* revolt and nostalgia but also *between* nostalgic revolt and revolted nostalgia. They describe not only revolt *and* nostalgia but also forms of revolt *against* nostalgia and expressions of nostalgia *for* revolt. Their texts circulate in an intermediary and unstable space where nostalgia and revolt are often brought together, put in dialogue, and represented with both their possibilities and limitations.

The model of analysis I will be following in this chapter is indebted to and inspired by Khatibi's most acclaimed essay *Maghreb pluriel*, which provides a relevant example of how a critical postcolonial discourse can gain from an understanding of the combination of revolt and nostalgia. Studying this seminal work in this section allows us to grasp its intricate and multi-layered thought in a comparative approach that can fruitfully serve as a theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis. *Maghreb pluriel* includes six articles that move from defining Khatibi's pivotal concepts of 'pensée-autre' and 'double critique' to discussing more specific questions related to sociology, orientalism, bilingualism, sexuality, and art. In a note following the opening article, Khatibi states that the aim of the volume is to 'ouvrir la recherche au Maghreb à des questions silencieuses refoulées par l'ordre théologique et celui du scientisme'[597]. At the core of Khatibi's project is an attempt

[597] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), p.41.

to resist and counter dogmatic approaches to knowledge about the Maghreb by exploring areas of thought and lines of research that have been long silenced in the region. Khatibi's significant opposition of the words 'ouvrir' and 'refoulées' at once denounces the strategies of restriction and repression mounted on theological or scientific grounds, and posits his own work as a counter-discourse to these strategies, thus serving an overtly rebellious thought.

Simultaneously, Khatibi justifies in the same note the choice of selecting his examples mainly from Morocco by a reference to 'la précision d'un lieu inscrit dans un Maghreb pluriel et d'où des paroles à advenir prendraient en charge ce texte en le livrant à son effacement'.[598] This idea that his text needs to be rooted in a plural Maghreb yet to be created, in order for it to be taken into consideration and put into practice, opens the way for a poetics of expectancy at the core of *Maghreb pluriel*. The idea that these 'paroles à advenir' can potentially appropriate Khatibi's discourse and transpose it in concrete politics pinpoints the author's expectations and uncertainties. The whole project of *Maghreb pluriel* incorporates a prospective nostalgia for a plural Maghreb yet to be constructed from the fruitful dialogue between Khatibi's text, its Moroccan examples, and its reception in the broader Maghrebi context. Interestingly, Khatibi's prospective nostalgia is still relevant today given the ongoing fragmented and moribund state of the Maghreb Union, which constantly postpones the political project of a plural and cohesive Maghreb.

This is to say that revolt and nostalgia underlie Khatibi's project of rethinking the Maghreb: the first concept openly serves to resist and loosen the grip of dogmatic thinking, while the second, more implicit, calls into question the reception and application of his thought. This duality is apparent in Khatibi's combination of the lexical fields of revolt and nostalgia throughout the book. In his first article, for instance, he contends that Arab

[598] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.41.

civilization ‘est incapable de se renouveler en tant que pensée, sinon par l’insurrection d’une pensée-autre, laquelle est en dialogue avec les transformations planétaires’[599] and in opposition to what he denounces as a ‘nostalgie du retour’[600] or ‘la nostalgie d’une identité totalisante et d’une différence encore informe, non élaborée, en un mot : impensée’.[601] In Khatibi’s discourse, revolt is what allows for critical thinking, radical difference, and universal opening, while nostalgia is conversely what freezes thinking in the unproductive quest for roots. Interestingly, this already creates a discrepancy with the prospective nostalgia for a plural Maghreb underlying his text, as discussed above.

Revolt and nostalgia become even more prominent as Khatibi tries to define his concepts of ‘double critique’ and ‘pensée-autre’. Khatibi’s ‘double critique’, directed against both Western heritage and local archaic patrimony, is associated with ‘la révélation du visible, fin de toute théologie céleste et de toute nostalgie mortifiante’,[602] while his ‘pensée-autre’, an alternative mode of thinking based on plurality and difference, and influenced by Derridean deconstruction, requires ‘un complot, une conjuration, une révolte soutenue et un risque implacable’.[603] Located between the contrasting acts of calling for revolt and rejecting nostalgia, Khatibi’s critical discourse promotes an alternative thought open to difference and disorder, and sensitive to dialogue and variation.

What is most instructive here is how Khatibi at once fruitfully draws on revolt and nostalgia and keeps them at a critical distance. On the one hand, he champions revolt as a necessary but not sufficient condition to fulfil his ‘pensée-autre’. His revolt includes indeed a self-critical dimension that insists on exploring the contradictions and shortcomings of rebellious thought through the action that consists in ‘mettre en crise, nous

[599] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.13.
[600] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.30.
[601] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.14.
[602] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.12.
[603] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.34.

mettre en crise dans l'impensé qui est notre lot',[604] while aptly warning that 'la différence n'est pas accordée au premier révolté'.[605] For Khatibi, a productive revolt needs to be as consistent and open to the world as it is critical and self-oriented. On the other hand, Khatibi's rejection of nostalgia is inconsistent throughout. The most relevant example is the section on art in which he praises the work of Moroccan painter Ahmed Cherkaoui as 'calligraphie des racines',[606] a concept that sets the act of artistic creation in dialogue with the search for origins. Khatibi contends that 'le voyage mène Cherkaoui à une nostalgie mystique […] Et ce n'est pas une nostalgie hasardeuse: la calligraphie des racines se règle sur sa réception du sacré, elle s'élance vers la beauté du soleil'.[607] This reveals that Khatibi is not opposed to nostalgia *per se*, but rather attentive to the way in which a well-founded nostalgia can enrich artistic creation by extending inspiration and meaning, while other forms of speculative and baseless nostalgia can be totally unproductive. As a reader, Khatibi is also aware that nostalgia is a key concept for understanding Islamic art. In his analysis of a miniature figuring the mythological creature Al-Buraq carrying the prophet Muhammad, it is again a positive nostalgic feeling that helps Khatibi to grasp the complexity of the scene and its resistance to reductive and hasty interpretation:

> Et en parlant, en laissant ma fantaisie aller et venir au gré d'une nostalgie paradisiaque, je me sens comme remontant le temps, dans des proportions oisives, dans un ordre, quoique enchanté, se présentant sous l'apparat d'une pensée enthousiaste. Car à scruter toute la miniature […] je ne sais pas où commencer, par où commencer : tant de splendeur, tant de féérie qui rivalise avec les plus grandes trouvailles de la peinture arabe et islamique.[608]

In Khatibi's complex thought, a certain form of nostalgia can be read as the counterpoint of revolt: it opens up critical discourse to sensual and spiritual experiences, triggers an

[604] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.38.
[605] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.38.
[606] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.218.
[607] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.225.
[608] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.249-250.

intellectual and emotional back-and-forth that originates in the author's longing for a lost paradise, and extends to the fascinating beauty and suspended meaning of the artwork itself.

The case of Khatibi's *Maghreb pluriel* is revealing, for it engages with revolt and nostalgia in a combined, dynamic, and critical way. The two notions are not only used to structure thinking and define pivotal concepts such as 'pensée-autre' and 'double critique', but are also criticized for their limitations. Revolt and nostalgia become the two-sided object of Khatibi's double thought. In *Maghreb pluriel*, he rightly notes that 'l'art exige une double pensée, celle qui l'accompagne dans son travail d'élaboration et celle qui l'aborde dans ses limites démesurées, là où, devenant déraison et désordre implacable, l'art est absence d'œuvre'.[609] I would argue that revolt and nostalgia need to be read according to this double thought as, on the one hand, conveyors and landmarks of postcolonial literary texts and critical discourse, and on the other, as contrasting notions used to nuance readings or reveal blind spots.

Following Khatibi's thinking, this chapter will focus on the three writers' late poetry published from the early 1990s onwards, which offers not only a breeding ground for a double critique of revolt and nostalgia, but also an opportunity to assess the evolution of their respective use of both concepts. In line with Camus's opening observation, I conceive of poetry as a dynamic site where the two concepts are constantly in dialogue: subversive poetics reveals the presence of an underlying nostalgic memory, while poetic nostalgia builds on the resurgence of rebellious desires and inclinations. My choice to focus on poetry is motivated as much by the particularly intense way in which poetic form brings together revolt and nostalgia as by the critical neglect of poetry in comparison with

[609] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.234.

fiction, including in postcolonial studies. Jahan Ramazani attributes this neglect to the fact that 'poetry mediates experience through a language of exceptional figural and formal density', which makes it 'a less transparent medium by which to recuperate the history, politics, and sociology of postcolonial societies'.[610] My contention, as will be developed in the following sections, is that poetry offers in its figurative form and descriptive language an exceptionally rich space where nostalgia and revolt work together to describe the significant gap between rekindled desires for change, whether individual or collective, and the persistent feeling of disillusionment and bitterness in the Moroccan postcolonial context.

Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine: a nostalgic rebel and a revolted nostalgic

At first sight, Khaïr-Eddine's late poetry seems less concerned with expressing revolt and nostalgia than with developing a new poetics based on cosmic representations and descriptions of global space and time. As suggested by their titles, the three poetry collections *Mémorial* (1991), *Résurrection des Fleurs Sauvages* (first published in Morocco in 1981 and republished in France in 1994), and the posthumous *Quasars* (2006) weave together the themes of memory, nature, and cosmos. My contention is that Khaïr-Eddine's revolt and nostalgia, exhausted with both the years of exile and the series of personal, social, and political disillusionments, seek in his late poetry new sources of inspiration and regeneration. Although he published several poems in Moroccan magazines following his homecoming in 1979 after fourteen years of exile in France, these three collections mark his official return to poetry. This return is deeply marked by revived nostalgia and obstinate revolt. At times, Khaïr-Eddine writes as a nostalgic rebel,

[610] Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.4.

struggling with the returning shadows of his broken life and seeking to regenerate his discourse of opposition and resistance. At other times, he is a revolted nostalgic, mourning his irrecoverable past and craving for his always-delayed aspirations.

One of the most striking features of the three collections is Khaïr-Eddine's attention to the cosmic dynamics of destruction and reconstruction. In an introduction to *Mémorial*, his friend French poet Jean Orizet suggests that 'le rôle des grands poètes comme Khaïr-Eddine consiste justement à tenter de donner un sens au monde, ou à tout le moins de susciter en nous de fécondes interrogations'.[611] This quest for meaning is conducted by Khaïr-Eddine in a permanent dialogue with the universe. The blurb of *Mémorial* introduces the work as 'une chronique chatoyante et passionnée sur l'état de la planète'.[612] In 'Mémorial', the opening poem that gives its title to the collection, Khaïr-Eddine writes about the energy of Earth, the birth of lands, and the mobility of human beings: 'Des êtres infimes s'agitèrent | au fond du puits naissant des univers… | Des terres nouvelles s'érigèrent | et des Déluges mémorables hurlèrent | dans l'infini des miroitements obliques…'.[613] The lexical field of the cosmos ('univers', 'Déluges', 'infini') and the use of action verbs ('s'agitèrent', 's'érigèrent', 'hurlèrent') serve at once the celebration of life and the idea of regeneration. Khaïr-Eddine's explosive poems convey a forceful energy fuelled by a series of references to animals, insects, lands, skies, galaxies, as well as mythological figures and legendary characters. Natural, bestial, and planetary voices are all set in dialogue with a series of assonances and alliterations: 'Frénétiques, effrénés',[614] 'au museau des musaraignes',[615] 'drossées engrossées',[616] 'le *laisse* de liesses',[617] 'sabrée,

[611] Jean Orizet, p.6.
[612] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, blurb.
[613] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.10.
[614] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.16.
[615] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.22.
[616] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.27.

sablée'…[618] Thus, the poem serves as a sounding box that records and reproduces the all-encompassing energy of the planet in what can also be read as a spatial extension of Khaïr-Eddine's previous nostalgic evocations of the homeland.

In *Résurrection*, the Moroccan poet addresses Venus in 'Titrit N'td Ggat', a poem named in Berber after the second planet of the Solar System: 'Et toi venue lavée de vents solaires | venue du fond du cœur tracé de dolomites […] Nous sommes huit autour de toi, Soleil, | debout sur tes flammèches'.[619] The emphasized proximity with the sun reinforces the quest for power and energy while the word 'debout' conveys a sense of Khaïr-Eddine's ongoing resistance and determination. This poetic representation, which at times intersects with Glissant's view of the cosmos as a space of endless regeneration and relation, is what constitutes the new driving force for Khaïr-Eddine's poetry and its subversive power. As he clearly puts it in 'Big-Bang', a poem from *Quasars*: 'Je n'écris rien, ne grave rien | qu'avec la griffe des équinoxes'.[620] Not only is writing compared to the act of engraving, which suggests a desire for a durable and long-lasting creation, but its very material is henceforth embedded in stellar mobility. Khaïr-Eddine's evocative image of 'griffe des équinoxes' rekindles a subversive definition of writing as an act of scratching and tearing lined up with a celestial temporality. Khaïr-Eddine's poetics of subversive cosmology works to regenerate and extend the space of his revolt. By the same token, it suggests a continuity with the dynamics of destruction and reconstruction launched with his first narrative *Agadir*, written in the aftermath of the Agadir earthquake. Khaïr-Eddine's cosmic revolt is an element of cohesion and rupture, a poetic experience located at once in and beyond the chaos that marks his œuvre.

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[617] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.30.
[618] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.41.
[619] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.76.
[620] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Quasars* (Rabat: Racines, 2006), p.31.

Interestingly, the poet himself becomes an element in this innovatively subversive aesthetics: 'Puisatier, tu vas, tu viens | en ce désert mouvant | ainsi qu'un sable dru jusqu'aux lunes | compliquées par l'Eclipse'.[621] This comparison between the poet and the well-digger wandering in the desert suggests that writing entails here a quest for meaning in a vast, irreducible, and unstable universe. The Moroccan poet identifies with this extended space and finds in its evocative power a new source for individual and collective regeneration. As he writes in *Quasars*, 'Nous sommes la masse solaire et la biomasse, | gélatineux et galactiques | quand l'éther s'arrime au déclenchement ionique'.[622] Khaïr-Eddine is careful to combine the cosmic ('solaire'; 'galactiques') with the material ('biomasse'; 'gélatineux'), and the atmospheric ('éther') with the atomic ('ionique'). By bringing together these multiple living worlds, he opens his poetry to a new spatiality that stretches beyond the natural or bestial references of his early nostalgic works. In a poem from *Résurrection*, the poet defies death and appeals to the reader to share his experience:

> Ouvrez donc mon cénotaphe!
> Je suis la morsure du trigonocéphale,
> le vent glacé du Pôle Céleste.
> Vadrouillez dans ma peau froufroutant de roussettes;
> je suis ce fleuve suspendu
> aux galaxies lointaines,
> le neveu de Charon
> nautonier dont la rame brise le cuir du lac
> quand les sorciers affichent le masque
> éclairant des ténèbres[623]

In these startling verses uncovering a colourful and unexpected underworld, the 'je' of the poet is not only grounded in the animal realm ('trigonocéphale', 'roussettes') but also connected to nature ('fleuve') and to the cosmos ('Pôle Céleste', 'galaxies lointaines'). Furthermore, the use of the words 'morsure', 'glacé', 'brise', and the reference to the

[621] Khaïr-Eddine, *Quasars*, p.17.
[622] Khaïr-Eddine, *Quasars*, p.38.
[623] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.129.

ferryman Charon who carries souls across the river Styx emphasize Khaïr-Eddine's desire to resist, counter-attack, and bridge the gap between the world of the living and that of the dead. This is further developed in a number of poems from the same collection, written as poetic *tombeaux* to major friends and leading literary or political African figures including Césaire, Senghor, Damas, and Alioune Diop, which prefigure the previously discussed nostalgic tributes in his last diary. A revolt against the logic of death and loss, Khaïr-Eddine's late poetry works at once to acknowledge and revive friendships, while sharing intellectual and literary legacies with the reader.

This first level of analysis might suggest, however, that Khaïr-Eddine's revolt is no longer grounded in concrete politics but rather opened to the symbolism of natural, cosmic, or transnational spaces. As often with the Moroccan poet, the poems prove to be more complicated. All published after his homecoming, which was made conditional upon his agreement not to criticize King Hassan II, the three poetic collections confirm Khaïr-Eddine's focus on global politics. His revolt is no longer directed at the Moroccan ruler but rather concerned with what happens across the world. In *Résurrection*, for instance, he rails against Ronald Reagan's anti-Arab policy and mocks him as a 'cow-boy élu par les étoiles' and a 'tueur fébrile'[624] in a likely reference to the American bombing of Libya in 1986. In an overtly transcultural reference, Khaïr-Eddine also evokes the deprived population of Harlem, and revives the memory of slavery as he writes: 'Au fond des cales je vois le nègre | gratter ses rides, crier… | Je le sens qui me gratte'.[625] The poem becomes a subversive response to various forms of injustice and violence inflicted across the globe with a focus on minorities and silenced masses. Throughout the collection, Khaïr-Eddine's rebellious voice draws on symbols of African identity including the baobab, the tam-tam,

[624] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.109.
[625] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.72.

and more significantly, the evocative figure of the Maasai warrior, famous for courage and bravery. Similarly, in two poems from *Quasars* ironically entitled 'Vertu du silence' and 'Traitement sous vide', Khaïr-Eddine denounces respectively 'la misère banlieusarde'[626] of immigrants in France and the tragedies of hunger and poverty in Rwanda and Somalia where 'des os se fondent, se mêlent aux os trafiqués'.[627] Khaïr-Eddine's revolt travels between countries and continents, moving from one political issue to another. In doing so, the late poems of the homecomer symbolically perpetuate his wandering and turn his revolt into a travelling discourse, unstable and fragmented but always attentive to the way in which local stories produce global impacts. In *Mémorial,* for instance, Khaïr-Eddine enthusiastically celebrates the release of Nelson Mandela which he contrasts with the fall of Romanian dictator Ceaușescu and describes as 'une aurore universellement perçue | et jusqu'au fond des cavernes | jusqu'au fond des cécités tueuses'.[628] As suggested by the striking opposition between the phrase 'cécités tueuses', which refers to blind and criminal violence, and the word 'aurore', which suggests a daybreak of light and hope, Khaïr-Eddine's subversive poetics is also concerned with promoting ideals of peace and freedom and sketching new horizons for transcultural and political expression of revolt.

Notwithstanding this renewed revolt fuelled by cosmic energy and transnational politics, a subtle form of nostalgia interferes in Khaïr-Eddine's late poems. Paradoxically, the three collections include very few references to Morocco and are more concerned with connecting the poem to global spaces. *Mémorial* travels between the Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa, the mountains of Kilimanjaro, Toubkal, Everest, and the Andes, the French town of Pont-Aven, residence of famous painters including Gauguin, the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific, the region of Big Sur in Central California, as well as Hiroshima and

[626] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.75.
[627] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.80.
[628] Khaïr-Eddine, *Mémorial*, p.25.

Nagasaki. In the same vein, *Résurrection* opens with a poem significantly entitled 'De Casa à Bogota' and features poems dedicated to spaces as diverse as the island of Gorée in Senegal and the streets of war-torn Lebanon. Similarly, *Quasars* takes the reader on a journey from the Fagne region in Belgium to Palestine, and from the Hoggar Mountains in southern Algeria to Lake Kivu in Rwanda and the Nile in Egypt. While this scattered geography might suggest, in the aftermath of Khaïr-Eddine's homecoming, that the poet has no more reason to be nostalgic for his homeland, new forms of nostalgia unexpectedly spark throughout the three collections.

To start with, these late works reveal a deep concern with the question of time and temporality. In a poem from *Quasars* entitled 'Délimitation', Khaïr-Eddine writes that 'le temps de l'homme est limité, délimité | par le chaos déterministe; | il n'y a pas de temps, | il y a la Flèche du temps;'[629] In physics, the theory of 'deterministic chaos' refers to the irregular and unpredictable forms of motion in systems that are sensitive to changes in their initial conditions. Khaïr-Eddine uses the same concept in an afterward to his friend French poet Jean Orizet's *Hommes continuels* when he describes poetry as the always-varying result of interaction with the universe: 'L'univers agit sur lui [Orizet] comme un stimulateur qui n'est pas un questionnement mais une mémoire en devenir capable de duplication et de diversification'.[630] In this context, nostalgia becomes a form of chaotic remembering, always in motion, driven by a revolt against the conventional categories of time and crafted in response to the changes in both the world and the poet's condition. Following a permanent, non-random, and traceable movement, nostalgic evocations unpredictably foreground a new form of revolt within the poem.

In *Résurrection*, a recurring nostalgic pattern is that of childhood, an ambivalent period of freedom and disillusionment: 'Toujours l'enfance amère retournée dépecée | sur

[629] Khaïr-Eddine, *Quasars*, p.72.
[630] Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, 'Les galeries lumineuses de Jean Orizet', in Jean Orizet, *Hommes continuels* (Paris: Belfond, 1994), pp.91-97 (p.96).

les soieries du labour et du chant | hésitante mais sautillant entre mes doigts | sur les cupules où le rêve me foudroie'.[631] While the opening adverb 'toujours' suggests repetition and obsession, the successive attempts to designate childhood significantly oscillate between bitterness ('amère'), doubt ('hésitante'), energy ('sautillant entre mes doigts'), and dreamlike evocation ('le rêve me foudroie'). Nostalgia for childhood gets lost in this chaos of feelings and designations, largely dominated by bitterness and resentment but still connected with the poet's traumatic experience of early separation from his mother(-land). In another poem, the figure of the mother concentrates Khaïr-Eddine's bitter nostalgia as he writes:

> Assise au bord des lèvres ouvertes au songe
> sur un sofa d'abeilles précaires
> et doucement bercée, encombrée par les vents,
> répudiée, morte, grimée sur ce ciel térébrant,
> Mère, je t'écoute et suspends à tes yeux
> ces breloques qui heurtent mon sang![632]

At once nostalgic and resentful, Khaïr-Eddine mourns once more his repudiated mother, painfully longing for her lost presence. While the reference to the bees and the sky pinpoints the poet's deep attachment to the natural setting of his southern homeland, notions of precariousness ('abeilles précaires') and deep pain ('ciel térébrant') disrupt the nostalgic evocation of the maternal figure and suggest an implicit revolt against her fate. Longing for the mother becomes a desperate attempt to resist the chaos of the world, to alleviate the burden of life and its failures, and, more importantly, to voice a deep-seated and unsatisfied revolt.

In the cosmic and expandable geography described earlier, Khaïr-Eddine's nostalgia is confronted not only with the dilution of the past but also with the extension and blurring of temporal and spatial references. As a result, Khaïr-Eddine is also nostalgic for

[631] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.30.
[632] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.41.

his years of exile and wandering. In a poem entitled 'Essaouira', he recognizes in the Moroccan city 'l'ombre et le périple d'Hannon | éclaboussant les quasars!',[633] a reference to Hanno the Carthaginian navigator and traveller who explored the western coast of Africa, and whose evocation emphasizes the African rootedness of the text. In another poem, Khaïr-Eddine nostalgically evokes his exile as an ambivalent period of pain and fulfilment:

> Exil, très simple exil exhaussé par mes crampes
> scintillant d'éclairs mûrs, excitant toute lune
> en ces relents de tabac noir et m'éloignant
> de l'arc-en-ciel précaire ! Exil !
> mes pas seront les deltas, le pas des mers[634]

These premonitory verses not only foreshadow Khaïr-Eddine's return to exile in 1989 but also reveal how his nostalgia becomes caught in a closed loop: longing for the painful and craving for the unreachable produce nothing but new revolts and aspirations, new desires for return and reconstruction, and eventually new disillusionments and failures, and so on. As a result, Khaïr-Eddine's late poems are torn between a reinvigorated revolt and a bitter nostalgia, forming what he describes in *Quasars* as 'l'écrit violet | de l'amertume grinçante | et Celle qui s'étonne et défonce des | ombres | en le miroir délié;'[635] This ambivalent bitterness, grounded in the fragmented subjectivity of the poet as suggested by the reference to 'le miroir délié' and informed by his personal experience of exile and wandering, constitutes the ground on which revolt and nostalgia are constantly combined and revisited.

[633] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.118.
[634] Khaïr-Eddine, *Résurrection*, p.56.
[635] Khaïr-Eddine, *Quasars*, p.65.

Abdellatif Laâbi: reinvigorating revolt and controlling nostalgia

After the years of political activism, prison, and exile, the question of homecoming and the relationship with the homeland are, as for Khaïr-Eddine, at the core of Laâbi's late poetry published from the 1990s onwards. In 1994, however, Laâbi's first return to Morocco after nine years of exile in France is marked by a painful disillusionment. His ambitious project of founding a publishing house in Morocco under the significant title of 'Kitabat' (meaning 'Writings' in classical Arabic) as well as a bilingual monthly magazine intended for young readers faces a series of problems, notably the withdrawal of his financial support and the persistent conservatism of local institutions. As a result, the project is cancelled and Laâbi is forced to a new exile. Published in 1996, his poetry collection *Le Spleen de Casablanca* captures this feeling of disillusionment as Laâbi sorrowfully admits: 'La séparation a, cette fois-ci, le goût amer de la perte. J'ai cessé de chercher une place, ma place quelque part. Voilà une quête de moins. L'errance reprend, délestée de ce fardeau de nostalgie'.[636] In a striking parallel with Khaïr-Eddine's experience, the failed reunion with the homeland throws the poet back to loss and separation. Paradoxically, Laâbi suggests that this failure has relieved him from nostalgia, significantly described here as a burden ('fardeau'). This highly evocative designation not only describes Laâbi's struggle with nostalgia during his years of exile in Moroccan cells and later in Parisian suburbs, but it also suggests that the concept has embodied the intricate sum of his frustrations, ruptures, and disillusionments.

My contention is that Laâbi's failed reunion with Morocco in 1994 reconfigures and complicates the presence of revolt and nostalgia in his works published since then. Laâbi himself admits that *Le Spleen de Casablanca* marks 'un tournant' and 'une

[636] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Le Spleen de Casablanca* (Paris: Editions de La Différence, 1996), blurb.

résurrection':[637] the rupture with the homeland triggers a desire for a new birth, a new relationship embodied in and reworked through the act of poetic creation. By re-enacting exile and separation, this painful episode serves the resurgence of nostalgia and revolt in his texts, and questions their relevance at the time of bitterness and disenchantment. In Laâbi's late poetry, nostalgia and revolt become, I would argue, the dual site of a never-ending struggle haunting a poet caught between aspiration and disappointment, refusal and frustration, opposition and isolation. Renewing the discourse of revolt and controlling the return of nostalgia are the two sides of this ongoing struggle.

Laâbi's desire to rekindle his revolt first appears in *Le Spleen de Casablanca* as he fiercely rejects the situation found in the country upon his homecoming. In a significant repetition of the phrase 'Ce ne pourra pas être un pays', he systematically denounces the persistence of Moroccan sins, including nepotism, exploitation, injustice, and lack of openness and transparency. In a striking inner call, he addresses the rebel in himself: 'Réveille-toi | rebelle | Le monde croule | sous les apparences | Il va crever | de résignation'.[638] Whereas Khaïr-Eddine's renewed revolt is fuelled by the energetic chaos of the cosmos, Laâbi's thrives on the disturbing chaos of the country. Revolt is at once the inexhaustible driving force for poetry and the ultimate connecting thread between the poet and his lost homeland. In *L'Automne promet* (2003), he writes:

> La terre
> ce sont les hommes
> qui l'embrassent
> et la maudissent
> Qui les reconnaîtra pour siens
> sinon celui qui ne leur laissera rien passer
> le vigilant
> l'éveillé à leurs tares
> et leur douleur

[637] Laâbi, *Le Spleen*, blurb.
[638] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique II* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2006), p.161.

le rebelle qui rompt
mais ne plie pas[639]

As suggested by these verses, belonging to the homeland and to the community requires a good deal of attention, alertness, sincerity, and determination in revolt. Laâbi cunningly reverses the French common phrase 'plie mais ne rompt pas' to 'rompt mais ne plie pas', thus suggesting that despite breaking up with the country, he would stand firm and never bend, always clinging to his spirit of revolt and resilience. 'Homme de l'entre-deux',[640] as he calls himself, Laâbi painfully accepts the reality of living between two exiles but radically refuses to make any concession that would compromise his spirit of rebellion. In Laâbi's new poetic world, the one following the years of activism and prison, revolt consists in staying on course and resisting the calls for political submission, intellectual obedience, and moral surrender.

At the same time, Laâbi is aware that his decision to leave the country once again can be interpreted as a form of retreat and resignation. Consequently, he makes a considerable effort to show that his revolt is still operating and equally vigorous, efficient, and lucid. In *Mon cher double* (2007), a work that bears in its title the mark of Laâbi's geographical and inner split, the poet writes back to his counterpart who criticizes him for 'guerroyer contre les moulins à vent',[641] and thus anticipates external critiques:

Ne croyez pas
que je me laisse faire
sans réagir
Je peux aussi avoir la dent dure
et provoquer sans tarder
le procès
des nouveaux dogmes
qu'on nous présente sous l'emballage
très post-moderne
de la lutte

[639] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique II*, p.384.
[640] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique II*, p.393.
[641] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Mon cher double* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2007), p.42.

entre le bien et le mal
Je m'inscris en faux
tonne
et fourbis dans ma marge
les armes d'une conscience rebelle
au désordre organisé
du monde[642]

In this passage, Laâbi not only insists on his undiminished capacity to discern fake realities and to probe the new rules of modern society but he also reaffirms his ongoing scathing criticism ('la dent dure') and unchanged ability to contradict ('Je m'inscris en faux') and oppose ('tonne'; 'fourbis'). His weaponized definition of a rebellious consciousness serves as a response to the chaos of the country and regenerates his and Khaïr-Eddine's explosive aesthetics from the early period of *Souffles*. It is precisely the consistency of Laâbi's revolt that guarantees his longevity as a poet and helps him to reaffirm his identity and reinvent his poetic practice.

Laâbi's late poetry reveals something systematic and tenacious in the way in which he proclaims and celebrates his revolt. In *Tribulations d'un rêveur attitré* (2008), for instance, he goes on to establish revolt as a permanent and unconditional right: 'Du droit de t'insurger tu useras | quoi qu'il advienne'.[643] This right to rebel, he adds, is one of the conditions that secures his 'vrai nom | homme de parole | ou poète si l'on veut'.[644] In Laâbi's poetics, there is a close link between, on the one hand, the act of writing poetry as a form of commitment to the values of sincerity and rectitude, and on the other hand, the possibility of surviving after the ordeals of prison, exile, and disillusionment. Poetry, revolt, and life form an unbreakable pact, a solid trio that continues to feed the poet's desires and aspirations. Unsurprisingly, then, in *Amour jacaranda* (2014), Laâbi describes his life as 'roide | fulgurante | harcelée | ravageuse | rebelle à l'apaisement | sans dieu ni

[642] Laâbi, *Mon cher double*, p.43.
[643] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Tribulations d'un rêveur attitré* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2008), p.51.
[644] Laâbi, *Tribulations*, p.51.

maître | ni barreaux de certitude'.[645] The succession of these adjectives emphasizes Laâbi's rejection of immobility and stagnation: more than revolt itself, his poetic hallmark becomes the way in which this revolt moves, evolves, questions itself, and reinvents its forms in response to the persistent problems of the country and the chaos of a global world marked by violence, intolerance, and abuse of power.

Laâbi's late poetry is as much concerned with perpetuating revolt as with expelling nostalgia. In order to move forward, to appropriate his new status as an exile and a rebel living in the in-between, and to prevent the resurgence of old failures and disillusionments, Laâbi tries to keep nostalgia at a distance. For nostalgia, both ambivalent and perverse, rekindles fading dreams and aspirations, rubs salt in past wounds, and, as for Khaïr-Eddine, maintains at once the feeling of loss and separation, and the vain hope for recovery and return. In a striking poem from *Mon cher double* dedicated to nostalgia and entitled 'La fourvoyeuse' ('The temptress'), Laâbi writes what can be considered as his most violent indictment of nostalgia, worth quoting at length:

> La nostalgie
> cette rabâcheuse
> racoleuse
> elle nous coupe en deux
> la fourvoyeuse
> et jette les moitiés
> l'une dans le puits insondable
> du passé
> l'autre vers la nébuleuse
> du futur
> L'âme en est écartelée
> elle s'échine à voguer
> d'une moitié l'autre
> prend de l'altitude
> et s'étiole
> Quel point de chute
> choisira-t-elle

[645] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Saison manquante* suivi de *Amour jacaranda* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2014), p.84.

le puits ou la nébuleuse?[646]

Laâbi's pejorative description of nostalgia focuses on how the concept embodies repetition ('rabâcheuse'), seduction ('racoleuse'), and temptation ('fourvoyeuse'). More specifically, the word 'racoleuse', usually associated with prostitution, emphasizes the violence of Laâbi's revolt against his nostalgic desires. Nostalgia not only deepens his inner split but also leaves him wandering between two opposite yet equally hermetic spaces: 'le puits insondable' of the past and 'la nébuleuse' of the future. The open question at the end of the poem suggests that the nostalgic subject is condemned to wander with no way out between these two ends, not knowing whether he should mourn his forgotten past or long for an uncertain future yet to come.

This harrowing conundrum calls into question the position of the poet and his ability to intervene and speak up in society. In *Le Spleen de Casablanca*, Laâbi observes that 'après les actes vains' come 'les paroles vaines | donnant la nostalgie des actes'[647]. This closed loop where vain activities and utterances constantly fuel nostalgia underlines the ambivalent if not fragile situation of the Moroccan poet. The main challenge remains to free the mind from its nostalgic obsessions and reconstruct the self on fresh grounds. In *L'Automne promet*, for instance, Laâbi sets himself the objective of 'recouvrer la vue | renaître comme jamais | libéré des contingences | accru | pétillant | sismique pré-voyant | chrysalide d'un être choisi | en pleine conscience | langoureux sans nostalgie'.[648] It is noteworthy that the lexical field of freedom, life, and regeneration ('renaître', 'libéré', 'pétillant', 'chrysalide') stretches to include self-indulgent idleness ('langoureux') but still firmly rejects nostalgia as if being nostalgic would hinder the whole process of rebirth and self-reconstruction. In short, Laâbi's late poetry conceives of nostalgia as an obsessive

[646] Laâbi, *Mon cher double*, p.62.
[647] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique II*, p.160.
[648] Laâbi, *Œuvre Poétique II*, p.361.

pattern that constantly needs to be controlled and resisted. In 'L'habitacle du vide', a section from his poetry collection *Zone de turbulences* (2012), which describes the moment human beings are confronted with death, nostalgia is again acknowledged as a pervasive element that persists and outlives degeneration and absence:

> Il y a juste
> cette vieille et bonne tristesse
> qui fait des siennes
> […]
> la restitution brève
> de la douceur des êtres
> […]
> Il y a juste
> ce trouble de la nostalgie
> qui habite au-delà des humains
> même les pierres[649]

Laâbi's designation of nostalgia as a 'trouble' refers to both its original meaning of medical disorder and its effect of distress and turmoil. Moreover, nostalgia is located in and beyond the human world: stones, for instance, bear the mark of people's kindness and absence. As a result, Laâbi's attempt to expel nostalgia leads to another failure: nostalgia remains not only engraved in the surrounding world, shaping the ongoing experience of exile and separation, but also forces itself as a recurring pattern in his late poetry. Laâbi's revolt against nostalgia does nothing but reinvigorate the nostalgic motif in the poem. More intriguingly, nostalgia is often associated with the act of writing itself. In the opening section of *Zone de turbulences*, for instance, Laâbi identifies nostalgia as one of these early signs that precede and announce writing:

> dans les tripes
> une rage mêlée de douceur
> Un regain de désirs
> sans objet pour le moment
> Des accords tirés d'un instrument
> féru de nostalgie

[649] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Zone de turbulences* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2012), p.26.

Des images muettes
couleur sépia
suggérant un lointain avenir[650]

Once again, nostalgia is part of an extremely ambivalent emotional context that combines comfort, fury, and desire. Also striking is the fact that the nostalgic impulse is associated with the representation of silence ('images muettes') and the perspective of an uncertain future ('lointain avenir'). Here, Laâbi's reference to musical chords ('accords tirés | d'un instrument féru de nostalgie') can be read as a metaphor for the quest for harmony conducted through writing: nostalgia is the always-returning sign that captures the doubt and silence of the writer, and encompasses his suspended aspirations and conflicted emotions. Laâbi's systematic rejection of nostalgia also reveals the consistency of his identity as a rebel poet, always looking forward and refusing to carry the burden of all the things lost or left behind.

While Laâbi's late poetry is marked by a strong attachment to revolt and a fierce revolt against a persistent nostalgia, the encounter of both concepts also leads, as with Khaïr-Eddine, to bitterness and discontent. While Laâbi constantly celebrates revolt and rejects nostalgia, the first always seems to lead to disillusionment and failure, and the second always returns with its charming ambiguity to haunt the poet and exacerbate his malaise. This problematic situation is nowhere more poignant than in Laâbi's recent collection *Le Principe d'incertitude*, published in 2016. As suggested by the title itself, this work is profoundly marked by doubt and uncertainty. More than ever, Laâbi is questioning his work and his position as a poet in the world: 'Le mal que je déplore | est-il vraiment dans la langue | ou dans la faillite de ma perception face au chaos du monde | et son

[650] Laâbi, *Zone de turbulences*, p.11.

insaisissable réalité ?'[651] Beyond the chaos of the world and the failure of the poet, this collection can be read as an inward exploration that confronts the act of writing with the poet's disillusionments, lessons, and aspirations. In a highly evocative section entitled 'Lassitude', Laâbi rigorously lists and details the causes of his weariness, while energetically perpetuating his revolt against the ambivalence and inconsistency of the world. In an extreme and incurable sign of bitterness, Laâbi's lassitude ends up turning against revolt itself when he admits being:

> Las
> des révoltes sans lendemain
> où les jeunes deviennent vite vieux
> sinon blasés
> — ce qui revient au même —
> ratiocinent
> comme les politiciens abhorrés
> et confient leur sort
> aux araignées de la Toile[652]

At once melancholic and scathing, these verses allude to Laâbi's deep disappointment with the outcome of the Moroccan Spring which sparked in February 2011 but was swiftly and skilfully contained by the regime through a series of subsequent constitutional reforms. Five years after supporting the '20th February' youth movement that led the protests, Laâbi criticizes it not only for failing to maintain the pressure on the Moroccan regime ('les jeunes deviennent vite vieux') but also for mimicking the politicians' attitudes ('ratiocinent | comme les politiciens abhorrés') and for blindly relying on Internet and social networks ('confient leur sort | aux araignées de la Toile'). While Laâbi's reaction is one of the rare occasions in which he criticizes revolt – or at least a certain kind of dead-end revolt –, it still sheds light on how revolt and nostalgia are intertwined in the subtext. Underlying Laâbi's discourse, I would argue, is an undeclared nostalgia for the revolt conducted by the

[651] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Le Principe d'incertitude* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2016), p.20.
[652] Laâbi, *Le Principe d'incertitude*, p.31-32.

Moroccan left in the 1960s and 1970s. This earlier revolt was not only led by charismatic and intransigent figures such as his friend Serfaty, but also based on a consistent and rich ideological input, in a striking contrast to the political shortcomings and intellectual weaknesses of the '20th February' youth movement of 2011. Of course, Laâbi's and his comrades' revolt was equally unsuccessful and 'sans lendemain' but one has to acknowledge with Laâbi that their sense of determination, their productive thought, and their ability to theorize their struggle are in sharp contrast with the limited experience of the younger generation.

The historical and intellectual gap between revolt as conducted by Laâbi's generation in the 1960s and as experienced by the Moroccan youth of 2011 throws the concept of revolt itself into question and throws Laâbi back to his silenced nostalgia. Laâbi's revolt and nostalgia are intertwined in the sense that the delayed realization of the first fuels the return and rejection of the second, and confines the poet in this other citadel of bitterness and disillusionment. In another section from the same collection, whose title – 'Ce fruit amer de la connaissance' – emphasizes this feeling of bitterness, Laâbi's revolt against nostalgia takes a more violent turn as he writes:

> Le verre et son nectar
> convoquent la nostalgie
> — cette vieille salope —
> Les veillées où la coupe
> en appelait une autre
> puis une autre
> Pour le bon plaisir de l'aube
> Dans le lit constellé
> la chair était radieuse
> […]
> Ô toi que voilà
> illustre assoiffé
> t'en souvient-il ?[653]

[653] Laâbi, *Le Principe d'incertitude*, p.80.

Laâbi's insulting designation of nostalgia betrays his total helplessness as he tries in vain to keep his nostalgia for past sensual experiences at a distance. My contention is that nostalgia remains the everlasting mirror that reflects the sore distance between moments of self-fulfilment from the past, deep disillusionments in the present, and postponed aspirations for the future. In this context where revolt as a failed project and nostalgia as a spectral horizon relentlessly haunt the poem, writing becomes the locus of doubt and uncertainty. And although Laâbi surprisingly closes his collection with an unexpected feeling of 'triomphe',[654] this only points to his success in revealing at once his ongoing desire for new revolts and his firmly uncompromising rejection of old nostalgias. Laâbi is a nostalgic rebel in the sense that he writes to revive his revolt and to defeat or at least to control his always-returning nostalgia.

Abdelkebir Khatibi: writing *with* and *between* revolt and nostalgia

In contrast to both Khaïr-Eddine and Laâbi, a more complicated dialectics of nostalgia and revolt is developed in Khatibi's poetry of 'aimance'. As mentioned in the second chapter, Khatibi's regeneration of this concept draws on the combined legacy of medieval Arab and Western forms of love poetry. The poem becomes the result of a transcultural dialogue with the past and a revival in the present, a literary construct that promotes in itself borrowing, variation, and rewriting. In this respect, Khatibi's poetry provides a rich ground for exploring the question of how a regenerated and original concept such as 'aimance' can embody both revolt and nostalgia. More specifically, I would argue that Khatibi's poetic work around this concept entails, in line with the 'double critique' developed in *Maghreb pluriel*, a multi-layered revolt against conventional

[654] Laâbi, *Le Principe d'incertitude*, p.126.

understandings of time, space, and social order, while engaging with nostalgia in a more ambivalent way, between rejection and inclusion.

In *Dédicace à l'année qui vient* (1986), the first collection that introduces the concept of 'aimance', Khatibi's poetry is driven by a revolt against past nostalgic representations of the self and the world. As suggested by the title of the book, the act of poetic creation is overtly geared towards the future. More specifically, Khatibi's poetry refuses to be defined by the logic of commemoration and remembering. Starting from the first pages, Khatibi introduces what he calls his 'grande promesse: | Oublier ce qui s'oublie | Et aimer ce qui se perpétue'.[655] Forgetting the past allows the regeneration of the self and the poem. As Khatibi puts it, 'l'oubli est une de nos grandes consolations, il est notre émerveillement face à toute force de vie en éveil'.[656] The concept of 'aimance' endlessly regenerates desire and reactivates sensitivity between human beings: it therefore needs forgetting to reinvent and sustain relationships. In this context, poetry becomes a space of perpetuation and revival rather than of mourning, longing, or even remembering. Unsurprisingly, then, nostalgia is openly excluded from the joys and pleasures of 'aimance', as is made clear in these lines by Khatibi:

> La nostalgie n'est pas ma joie
> Mettez les reliques
> Dans des mots ciselés
> Et sous des clefs désenvoûtées
> Mettez-les dans la nuit furtive
> Que l'oubli favorise
> Dans une main en cendres[657]

Nostalgia is about vestiges, traces, remains, and ruins, all notions that refer to the idea of loss and encourage the process of remembering. Conversely, 'aimance' thrives on the

[655] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.12.
[656] Khatibi, *Le Livre de l'aimance*, p.6.
[657] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.26.

combined acts of forgetting the past and regenerating the present. Khatibi's revolt against nostalgia is evident in his call to confine the past in carved words ('Mettez les reliques | Dans des mots ciselés') and to free the self from its bewitching power ('sous des clefs désenvoûtantes'). His poem emphasizes instead the fleeting nature of both time ('nuit furtive') and writing ('une main en cendres'). In doing so, the poetry of 'aimance' seeks to demystify and neutralize the past while promoting a more dynamic understanding of time and writing.

It is also worth noting Khatibi's insistence in *Dédicace* on this 'rythme du Renouveau'[658] that regenerates feelings and aspirations in the present, and informs the poetics of hospitality and exchange embedded in the concept of 'aimance'. A tribute to the constantly renewed present, the poetry of 'aimance' seeks to grasp, describe, and perpetuate the fleeting moments of exchange and desire. In one of the fragments, Khatibi refers to his work as 'ces poèmes brefs | Sans rime visible et de raison autre | Mais au rythme du moment'.[659] As suggested by the parallel between this 'rythme du moment' and the previously mentioned 'rythme du renouveau', Khatibi's poetry works to subvert the present by making it the object of a continuing reinvention and renewal. More generally, *Dédicace* promotes a subversive understanding of temporality: the past is the locus and object of radical forgetting while the always-regenerated present is almost merged with the future, leaving little space for nostalgic evocations and reconstructions.

This rejection of nostalgia in the name of 'aimance' is sustained by Khatibi's emphasis on the yet-to-come, as suggested by the title of the work. This notion echoes Derrida's reflections in *Politiques de l'amitié*, notably what he writes of democracy : 'non seulement elle restera indéfiniment perfectible, donc toujours insuffisante et future mais, appartenant au temps de la promesse, elle restera toujours, en chacun de ses temps futurs, à

[658] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.32.
[659] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.89.

venir'.[660] Similarly, Khatibi conceives of 'aimance' as always 'à venir', an open-ended promise of well-being and enjoyment, an infinite process of engaging with the other without judgement, following the laws of respect and hospitality. At the core of 'aimance', this dynamics of openness shapes the act of writing itself, which becomes driven primarily by self-reconstruction and renewal. This is emphasized throughout the collection, such as when Khatibi presents his work as a 'prélude au nouveau nouvel an',[661] suggesting thereby an open-ended repetition that redefines the horizon of poetic creation.

Moreover, when it comes to describing the effective act of 'aimance', Khatibi significantly uses the word 'cycle', which can be understood in both temporal and poetic terms: 'Une main sous une main à la limite du corps | Et sur le corps se renouvelle le cycle de l'Aimance'.[662] On the one hand, the word 'cycle' refers to the temporal repetition embedded in the experience of 'aimance'. On the other hand, it suggests that Khatibi's poetry can be read itself as a 'cycle', namely a unit of poems composed around the particular theme of 'aimance' as a cohesive and structuring element of writing. The 'cycle' of aimance describes a unique experience of social relationship and writing based on repetition, exchange, and interaction, all exemplified in Khatibi's editing of a special issue of the journal *Poésie 94*,[663] dedicated to the concept of 'aimance' and later commented on in his complete works.[664] Writing 'aimance' as a cycle allows Khatibi to revisit the concept from various perspectives and hereby reinforces the idea of renewal and regeneration.

This reading of *Dédicace* as a poetic work that resists nostalgia and subverts the conventional categorization of time requires some nuancing. First, the concept of 'aimance' can be understood, regardless of temporalities, as primarily a radical revolt

[660] Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p.339.
[661] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.95.
[662] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.93.
[663] *Poésie 94* 53, ed. by Abdelkebir Khatibi (Paris: Seghers, 1994).
[664] Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Le Zodiaque poétique', in *Œuvres Complètes II*, pp.135-143.

against conventional modes of social relationship. Unlike love and friendship, 'aimance' encourages boundless sensuality and receptiveness, fosters active thinking and engagement, and extends the space of exchange and dialogue. Khatibi notes on several occasions that 'aimance' does not suppress or replace love but rather accepts and embodies its internal contradictions. More relevant to the notion of revolt is the fact that 'aimance' works against the repression of desires and pleasures. In one of his definitions, Khatibi argues that 'aimance' is 'à même de libérer entre les partenaires un certain espace inhibé de jouissance'.[665] In other words, the concept works precisely to free the subject from the constraint of conservatism and dogmatism, giving way to new forms of pleasure and enjoyment.

Secondly, and as in Khaïr-Eddine's late poetry, one could also argue that the subversive dimension of Khatibi's poems lies in the way in which they challenge conceptions not only of temporality but also of spatiality. This is evident in Khatibi's reference to a series of celestial elements ('patio stellaire',[666] 'pensée d'azur',[667] 'étoiles du jour étoiles de nuit'[668]) and cosmic vocabulary used to locate and define the experience of 'aimance' ('loi cardinale du partage',[669] 'équilibre astral'[670]). This extended spatiality, I would argue, serves as a way of reinforcing 'aimance' by metaphorically associating the concept with cosmic energy and with the regenerative power of the universe and its elements.

Finally, and most importantly, Khatibi's revolt against nostalgia can be balanced by the fact that his work remains pervaded by implicit yet meaningful nostalgic evocations.

[665] Khatibi, *Le Livre de l'aimance*, p.5.
[666] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.46.
[667] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.54.
[668] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.99.
[669] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.46.
[670] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.53.

One of these refers to 'le retour de l'Océan',[671] a likely reference to the Atlantic coast of his native city El-Jadida in Morocco. Khatibi writes:

> Le chant de l'Océan vient de loin
> Depuis mes premiers mots soulevés
> Depuis lors ce qu'avance une parole
> L'autre le sculpte, limites irradiées[672]

As suggested by this poetic rendering of the act of writing, Khatibi's poetry of 'aimance' is woven on the nostalgic background of his homeland. Words of 'aimance' are put in dialogue with the sound of the waves and the lost music of childhood: 'Venais-tu, note de musique | Distraire mon oubli? | Renvoyer ma mémoire | A son lever ancestral?'[673] Although 'aimance' is a movement driven by endless repetition and constant regeneration, it is still grounded in the deep and nostalgic memory of the subject's own past. An object of quest and investigation, the theme of origin becomes therefore a recurring pattern in Khatibi's collection:

> Puis je t'enlace toute nue, pierres précieuses détachées
> Ainsi qu'un corps qui cherche ses secondes origines.
> Il les cherche, dit-on encore, dans le ciel
> […]
> Nous nous réveillons l'un pour l'autre
> Pareils à une plante à la quête de ses racines,
> Et que les racines obligent à se dresser dans la lumière[674]

My contention here is that the experience of 'aimance' not only reinvents and opens up the space of social interaction but it also triggers a nostalgic investigation of the self. Khatibi's reference to 'secondes origines' and to the opposition between subterranean and celestial spaces suggests that this nostalgic impulse remains deeply torn, ambivalent, and problematic. As in Laâbi's late poetry, the poem becomes the locus of doubt and

[671] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.106.
[672] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.107.
[673] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.59.
[674] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.108.

uncertainty: 'Nous sortons du rire de l'enfance et de ses voyances | Es-tu ma maîtresse? mon élue? mon amie du bel âge ?'[675] Lost in the poet's memories and designations, the image of the 'aimance' partner merges with the nostalgic figure of an old friendship from his young years. In this context, the experience of 'aimance' becomes an intricate if not impossible process, as suggested by this utopian wish: 'Puissé-je remonter le temps | De talisman en talisman aimé | Par réminiscence en devenir'.[676] This dualistic notion of 'réminiscence en devenir' points to the dual process of remembering the past and rethinking in the future. Like a time machine, Khatibi's poetry of 'aimance' is the vehicle that allows the poet to travel between past memories and future aspirations, with his memories being nostalgically recovered and repeatedly revisited and reconstructed in the poem. The present of writing is not only caught in the in-between but also enriched with the influence of both movements.

As a result, 'aimance' provides a rich yet problematic context in which revolt against and resistance to nostalgia reveal further and subtle forms of relation between the two concepts. If 'aimance' is a notion that fosters dialogue and exchange, it also relies on the combination, alternation, and nuancing of revolt and nostalgia. In doing so, 'aimance' invites the reader to reassess the way in which these two concepts are present simultaneously and are constantly interacting with each other.

Interestingly, Khatibi's writing at once *between* and *in* the presence of revolt and nostalgia is also manifest in his reflections on poetry. In the opening section of *Vœu de silence* (2006), a collection of four short essays dedicated respectively to German poets Rilke and Goethe, and Swedish poets Ekelöf and Lundkvist, Khatibi establishes a strong link between poetry, solitude, and nostalgia for a productive yet threatening silence. It is within this ambivalent silence, he argues, that poetry takes shape and grows up to help the

[675] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.100.
[676] Khatibi, *Dédicace*, p.39.

poet to navigate the world: 'les réseaux que créent les arbres entre eux – ou les fleurs – ne seraient pas perçus en leur correspondance plastique si le poète n'atteignait, au-delà de sa nuit intime, le monde féerique auquel il participe dans l'inquiétude et la nostalgie'.[677] Every poet seeks to invent his reader, which figures a desire for eternity, and to create the language of the unspeakable, which constitutes 'sa folie, son orgueil, sa nostalgie des dieux'.[678] This nostalgic quest for silence, eternity, and divinity involves not only a confrontation with the complexity of the world but also a fundamental dynamics of revolt and destruction. Khatibi observes that Rimbaud, for instance, radically disrupts the rules of poetry 'pour faire advenir l'incroyable' and crafts 'cette fulgurance féerique, cette vitesse du rythme'[679] that mark his work. In this respect, poetry can be defined as an ongoing struggle between a nostalgic quest and a revolted practice. As Khatibi brilliantly suggests, 'tout beau poème naît de la destruction plus ou moins impitoyable de ses traces':[680] if destruction is the act of revolt *par excellence*, and if the trace is what sustains the nostalgic quest and defines its horizon, the 'plus ou moins' captures the irreducible tension between these two movements.

In Khatibi's poetry of 'aimance', the poet, while struggling to rewrite the world and the self, draws on nostalgic backgrounds and uses subversive techniques of composition. If nostalgia is a fundamental trigger for the poetic process, poetry turns out to be a revolt *in* and *beyond* its nostalgic roots. To use an evocative metaphor by French psychiatrist Jacques Hassoun in his dialogue with Khatibi, the poet is like 'un géographe qui a épuisé grâce à l'écriture sa nostalgie'.[681] Poetry is the subversive act of writing to exhaust one's nostalgia. Khatibi writes to dilute his nostalgia in the subversive dynamics of poetic and critical writing. Unlike Laâbi, he is not a nostalgic rebel but rather a revolted nostalgic:

[677] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes. II*, p.173.
[678] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes. II*, p.174.
[679] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes. II*, p.169.
[680] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Œuvres Complètes. II*, p.177.
[681] Jacques Hassoun and Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Même Livre* (Paris: Editions de l'Eclat, 1985), p.28.

nostalgia haunts and takes precedence in his writings, although he skilfully manages to keep it in the background and subvert its temporal and emotional dynamics. In contrast to Laâbi's bitterness and melancholy, Khatibi revels in the pleasant game of poetic borrowing, formal creativity, and structural variation. At the same time, and unlike Khaïr-Eddine, he neither struggles with the returning shadows of nostalgia nor strives to revive his sense of revolt and dissidence. Conversely, his fragmented and decentred work, including in poetry, combines a wide range of sources and influences, and offers a more dynamic and productive interaction of the two concepts.

As this chapter has suggested, the encounter of nostalgia and revolt in the act of writing has a considerable impact on how the three Moroccan writers conceive of and practise poetry. Nostalgic quests and rebellious desires are at the core of their poetic creation and tend to be inspiring and productive but also challenging and disappointing. In this latter case, nostalgia becomes a vain attempt to retain lost landscapes and rekindle disillusioned aspirations. Each time the Moroccan writer tries to expel its shadows, it returns to haunt his memory and distort his texts. Similarly, revolt is often reduced to an aesthetic game of formal variation and metaphorical extension of spatiality. Each time the Moroccan writer tries to rebel against rigid forms of thought and creation, he risks disillusionment and uncertainty. In his correspondence with Jacques Hassoun, Khatibi writes in a striking passage:

> J'écris si peu ces temps-ci. J'ai l'impression que j'ai besoin d'un répit. J'ai trop donné à l'écriture sans savoir ce qu'elle m'a donné exactement. Plus que jamais je me méfie de sa force destructrice, j'en arpente les terrains minés. Aller doucement, oui, mûrir avec la langue, vieillir bien avec elle, oui chercher encore et encore le chant qui s'est tu.[682]

[682] Hassoun and Khatibi, p.59.

In this space of introspection and exchange that is epistolary correspondence as opposed to the sensitive and fragile domain of poetry, Khatibi's reflection reminds the reader that writing in a postcolonial context is also an exhausting and destructive process. My contention is that the persistent return of nostalgia and the enduring desire for revolt are part of this ongoing process. Both concepts keep the writer aware of his challenging mission of exploring the malaise of the self and, at times, responding to the broader forms of political and sociocultural discontent. The respite mentioned by Khatibi requires a further movement beyond the necessarily closed loop of revolt and nostalgia, although this can also lead the writer to either silence or utopia. Facing the Moroccan postcolonial malaise, in both its individual and collective forms, needs a dynamic writing both within and beyond the loop: rekindling a sense of revolt and dissidence in the present, giving way to a productive and inspiring nostalgia between the past and the future, but also resisting both movements to alleviate the persistent burden of bitterness and disillusionment.

Conclusion: Legacies and Lessons from Moroccan Literature

In the first pages of his late autobiography *Le Scribe et son ombre*, Abdelkebir Khatibi takes on again his role as a sociologist and tries to sketch out some of the personality and social traits of the Moroccan subject:

> Ne pas regarder la loi en face, telle serait la ruse voilée du Marocain. Le respect de la loi et sa transgression sont associés dans le même regard, le même geste […] Tantôt il s'efface devant l'autorité, tantôt il compose avec elle […] Quand il se révolte, il balaie tout devant lui, ou bien il se tait.[683]

Although Khatibi's description may sound essentializing, it still pinpoints some of the most paradoxical aspects of Moroccan identity, at least as expressed in the postcolonial age. When it comes to dealing with laws and authority, the Moroccan subject has a fascinating ability to shift from one attitude to its opposite. Revolt and submission are two possible faces of the same movement, driven by a peculiar intelligence and remarkable coping skills. If this can be seen as an advantage in social and political life, it also reveals a certain fragility in the construction of Moroccan subjectivity. This fragility is grounded, according to Khatibi, in a specific tension between individual and collective spaces. As an isolated individual, the Moroccan subject is 'un être problématique et fragmentaire, souffrant d'un dédoublement de la personnalité et d'une image fragile de soi' but, as a member of social groups and units, (s)he becomes 'un tacticien habile et expérimenté, héritier d'un guerrier farouche'.[684] Solitude and isolation, not always well seen in Moroccan modern society, reveal the deep wounds and contradictions of the local psyche. Conversely, collective identity and social belonging shed light on the Moroccan's strategic negotiation of everyday life and struggles.

[683] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.10.
[684] Khatibi, *Le Scribe et son ombre*, p.11.

My contention is that revolt and nostalgia remain deeply inscribed in this contradictory and at times challenging landscape. This study has proved that facing the Moroccan postcolonial malaise, on both individual and collective levels, requires a skilful negotiation of both concepts, a back and forth movement between the rebellious desire for resistance and change, and the nostalgic representation of loss and mourning. As a rebel, the Moroccan writer engages with a long tradition of refusal and protest but also faces various forms of violence, isolation, and disillusionment. As a nostalgic subject, he perpetuates a collective longing not only for lost personal spaces and temporalities, but also for an alternative Morocco that remains out of reach, ensnared in either missed opportunities to develop the country or unfulfilled aspirations for a better yet invisible future.

As this study has demonstrated, the expression of both revolt and nostalgia operates on various levels, from strictly personal experiences to overtly political discourses through aesthetic experimentation, formal innovation, and transnational dialogue. Rethinking the Moroccan postcolonial malaise requires both a constant navigation between these levels of literary and intellectual response, and an acknowledgement of the specific, distinct, and at times intersecting individual experiences of each writer. Obviously, there is a significant contrast between Khaïr-Eddine's transgressive poetics grounded in a tormented life of separation and wandering, Khatibi's intellectual revolt as expressed through his efforts to decolonize sociology, resist the neglect of popular art, and oppose dogmatic thinking, and Laâbi's conception of poetry as a medium of protest and resistance that works alongside political activism to denounce authoritarianism. Thus, the three writers' performance of revolt is related, although to different degrees and more acutely in the 1960s and 1970s, to the political and sociocultural scene in postcolonial Morocco. Conversely, the emergence of nostalgia in their subsequent texts, deeply influenced by wandering, travel, or

incarceration, reveals the prominence of their strictly individual experiences in comparison with broader forms of discontent and longing. While the political continues to haunt their texts, the combination of new forms of revolt and nostalgia is dominated by a deep-seated feeling of bitterness and disillusionment.

Reading Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi in the light of the recent transformations in Morocco and across the Maghreb and the Arab World suggests that both revolt and nostalgia have ultimately failed to negotiate the ongoing malaise. This failure has to do mainly with the fact that the Moroccan writer has been caught up and struggling in what can be defined as the inevitably closed loop of revolt and nostalgia.

On a collective level, failed or unfinished revolts from the 1960s up to now have been fuelling the prospective nostalgia for an alternative Morocco that remains out of reach, endlessly reconfigured by new hopes and fresh apirations. Similarly, returning nostalgia for periods of political activism and opposition has continued to sustain the unsatisfied desire for effective revolts that can give sense to the country's long-awaited transition to democracy, social justice, and economic prosperity.

On an individual level, the Moroccan writer works at once *with* and *against* the combined shadows of revolt and nostalgia. Rebelling against the burden of dogmatic thinking, political totalitarianism, and conventional modes of literary and intellectual production amounts to an engagement in a losing battle against the ultra-powerful structures of Moroccan authoritarianism, the persistent manifestations of traditional preconceptions, and the stinging failure of the educational system. At the same time, longing for a bygone or yet-to-come Morocco and invoking or resisting nostalgia in the process of self-construction eventually emphasizes the tension between the reality of loss

and the uncertainty of recovery, and both end up generating more frustrations and disillusionments.

The impact of this disillusionment casts a shadow over a number of works published in recent years. In his book *Un autre Maroc*, for instance, Laâbi returns to the epistolary form to address his fellow citizens and describe this collective disillusionment in a vibrant passage which is worth quoting at length:

> De ce moment faste qu'a été l'indépendance, je me souviens encore avec précision. Avec les jeunes de ma génération qui avaient eu la chance d'entrer à l'école puis au lycée, de parvenir enfin à l'université récemment créée, je partageais la conviction que notre pays avait de vrais atouts pour dépasser le traumatisme colonial, se redresser, s'arracher au sous-développement et s'engager résolument dans la voie du progrès et de la modernité. Nous pensions, peut-être naïvement mais sincèrement, que ce bond qualitatif était à notre portée, et nous étions prêts à le servir avec la fougue et l'honnêteté propres à la jeunesse.
>
> Très vite, hélas, nous avons dû déchanter.[685]

Laâbi goes on to describe how the post-independence priorities of economic and sociocultural development were indefinitely postponed and lost in the struggle for power, which eventually turned in favour of the monarchy. Beyond the acuteness of his political and historical analysis, Laâbi's missive is infused with a deep sense of frustration and disenchantment. By referring to the energy, the honesty, but also the naivety of his generation, as opposed to what he calls 'les jeux occultes de pouvoir'[686] in postcolonial Morocco, Laâbi hints at the unhealable rift between the Moroccan people and their ruling elites.

Not least is the ongoing isolation of Moroccan intellectuals and the problematic marginalization of their discourse. As evidenced by Laâbi's opening hesitations regarding his legitimacy for addressing Moroccans, the missive provides a striking example of what Orlando aptly describes as the experience of 'writing as a marginalized and alienated

[685] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Un autre Maroc* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2013), p.15.
[686] Abdellatif Laâbi, *Un autre Maroc* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2013), p.15.

intellectual'.[687] More than half a century after the launch of *Souffles*, the Moroccan intellectual, whether a political activist like Laâbi, an iconoclastic poet like Khaïr-Eddine, or an erudite scholar like Khatibi, is still condemned to operate in the margins. Both his renewed revolt and his relentless nostalgia struggle to reach a wide audience. The problem of the epistolary form chosen by Laâbi lies not only in its temporality and 'ability to only capture the fleeting events of a particular moment'[688] but also in its implicit suggestion that other literary forms and intellectual mediums of interaction with Moroccan people are totally inefficient.

Five years after the publication of *Un autre Maroc*, Laâbi's calls and prescriptions for the construction of an alternative Morocco, based on democratization and secularism, as well as on social, economic, and educational development, have remained mainly unfulfilled and, in most cases, have resulted only in further postponement. The Moroccan postcolonial malaise continues to flourish in the persistent chasm between the centre, embodied by the powerful 'Makhzen' and its agents, and the margins, scattered in the dislocated and unequal landscape of Moroccan society. Paradoxically enough, this margin was once considered by Khatibi as a fundamental opportunity for self-construction as he wrote in 1983: 'Sur la scène planétaire, nous sommes plus ou moins marginaux, minoritaires et dominés. Sous-développés, disent-ils. C'est cela même notre chance, l'exigence d'une transgression à déclarer, à soutenir continuellement contre n'importe quelle autosuffisance'.[689] In contemporary Morocco, self-sufficiency and resignation have outlived both the rebellious and the nostalgic discourses seeking to inflect the future of the country and to reinvent the postcolonial identity of its subjects. The question of how to get rid of or at least reduce the impact of the Moroccan malaise remains unanswered.

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[687] Valérie K. Orlando, '"Crier dans le désert": Abdellatif Laâbi's Epistolary Reflections on the Role of the Moroccan intellectual in *Un autre Maroc*', in *Expressions Maghrébines* 15.2 (2016), *Les Vies multiples d'Abdellatif Laâbi*, pp.85-103 (p.88).
[688] Orlando, 'Abdellatif Laâbi's Epistolary Reflections', p.90.
[689] Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, p.18.

I would argue that Moroccan culture needs an urgent and deep self-critique that builds on previous failures and lessons learned from past and present disillusionments. It is particularly revealing to see Laâbi admitting in *Un Autre Maroc* that the real meaning of Moroccan exceptionalism, namely 'la révolution en profondeur, à caractère pacifique'[690] that operates in people's minds and translates into their active citizenship, as seen recently during the Arab Spring, has been for so long totally ignored by political parties and activists, including the Moroccan far left and the radical organization he belonged to: 'Même quand elle pensait révolution, elle avait en tête la nature du régime qu'il fallait changer, non les archaïsmes ancrés dans les mentalités et régissant largement les relations sociales'.[691] The revolt of Laâbi's political generation was at times more interested in winning a head-on confrontation with the Moroccan regime than in serving a revolution of ideas and mentalities, directed against the deep-seated sources of stagnation and failure.

One could extend Laâbi's self-critical reflection by noting that if revolt has missed its target, nostalgia as a cultural trope has been too hastily indicted, denied, or dismissed as a suspicious and unproductive concept in the Moroccan context. Khatibi's relevant calls to renounce the nostalgic search for origins in favour of an enriching engagement with alterity and a genuine embrace of plurality should not prevent an inward reflection on the positive uses of nostalgia. 'As a predominantly positive emotion, nostalgia may contribute', according to some psychological studies, 'to a broader thought-action repertoire […], fostering creative and productive thinking' through its 'motivational implications'.[692] Notwithstanding the attempts to resist or discredit the concept, nostalgia remains an essential and productive way of documenting the extent of individual and

[690] Laâbi, *Un autre Maroc*, p.103.
[691] Laâbi, *Un autre Maroc*, p.105.
[692] Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, and Denise Baden, 'Nostalgia: Conceptual Issues and Existential Functions', in *The Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, ed. by Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, and Tom Pyszczynski (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), pp.200-214 (p. 210).

collective loss, regenerating forgotten and silenced histories, and expelling successive disillusionments, not only by longing for a bygone past but also by taking seriously what Boym has called 'the future of nostalgic longing and progressive thinking'.[693] More specifically, prospective nostalgia reinforces collective awareness of missed opportunities and opens a vital space for creative thought and conjectural criticism, which can prove useful for both individual development and global political reform.

The future of this self-critical assessment of revolt and nostalgia remains particularly topical in contemporary Morocco. On the one hand, and despite a remarkable celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the journal,[694] the *Souffles* generation still suffers from the same initial lack of engagement with the popular masses. Their respective works, some of which are tragically out of print and unavailable in bookstores, are still mainly read, studied, and discussed in academic and literary circles. In 2018, neither Laâbi's humanist commitments and public appearances nor Khaïr-Eddine's explosive poetics and identification with Amazigh culture, nor Khatibi's highly intellectualized and recognized contributions to postcolonial, literary, and sociocultural studies have gained access to wide Moroccan audiences. This is due, among other factors, to the lack of interest in cultural production, the slow pace of translations into Arabic, and the ongoing chasm between the widely spoken languages (mainly Moroccan Arabic and Amazigh languages) and the limited proficiency in both written Arabic and French among the population.

On the other hand, the new generation of Moroccan authors is often too hastily celebrated for being more interested in engaging with the global world than in tackling the local malaise. In an article published in 2013, Orlando suggests that contemporary

[693] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.xvi.
[694] In 2016, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of 'Souffles' in Rabat included an exhibition by painters from the journal, an academic conference followed by the publication of a collective volume, *Une Saison Ardente* (Casablanca: Sirocco, 2016)

Moroccan authors, such as Fouad Laroui and Youssouf Amine Elalamy, 'no longer dwell on the angst of the postcolonial condition, the traumas rooted in tensions between modernity and traditionalism' and promote instead an 'Afropolitanism' that 'connotes movement forward, to engage in becoming something other than the pessimistic stereotypes associated with Morocco as well as the African continent'.[695] The concept of 'Afropolitanism', as defined by Cameroonian thinker Achille Mbembe[696] and supposedly embodied by the works of the new generation, refers to the dynamics of the transnational and multicultural connections of African writers, and marks a departure from previous literary movements developed in the aftermath of decolonization.

This new trend is widely lauded and encouraged, especially in France, where Parisian-centralized institutions continue to legitimize Francophone authors through literary prizes and awards. Moroccan author Leïla Slimani's second novel, *Chanson douce*, awarded the prestigious Goncourt Prize in 2016 and already translated into several languages, was praised for its cosmopolitan and decentred perspective. One reviewer of the novel contends that 'while Slimani is of Moroccan origin, neither she nor her publishers have capitalised on her ethnicity' and argues that the novel 'demonstrates that Maghrebi writers no longer respond' to 'thematic and stylistic expectations'[697] from French readers. Such interpretation, I would argue, is problematic, for it tends to silence in one go the political manipulation of Maghrebi authors in France, the persistence of the Moroccan malaise back home, and the dismissal or misunderstanding of its intricacies by the new generation of writers who often live either abroad or between Morocco and Europe. To observe with Orlando that 'contemporary Moroccan narrative is universal, linking the

[695] Valérie K. Orlando, '*Being-in-the-world*: the Afropolitan Moroccan Author's Worldview in the New Millennium', in *The Journal of North African Studies* 25/3 (2013), pp.275-291 (p.275).
[696] 'L'afropolitanisme est une stylistique et une politique, une esthétique et une certaine poétique du monde. C'est une manière d'être au monde qui refuse, par principe, toute forme d'identité victimaire' (Achille Mbembe, 'Afropolitanisme' in *Africultures* 66 (2006), pp.9-15, p.14).
[697] Jennifer Howell, 'Book review: *Chanson douce*', in *The Journal of North African Studies* 22/2 (2017), pp.301-303 (p.303).

individual to the greater, global collective'[698] should not occlude the narrative, commercial, and political strategies adopted by the new generation, and their divorce from if not negative and nonconstructive approach to the ongoing question of how the Moroccan postcolonial malaise should be treated in writing.

First, these more recent works often feature characters from privileged and well-educated classes whose trajectories and concerns are largely foreign to Moroccan popular masses. In contrast to Laâbi's generation, popular culture and practices remain unprocessed in the Moroccan contemporary fiction promoted and celebrated in Europe and often quickly passed on to the world through translation. Central characters in Fouad Laroui's novels, including *Méfiez-vous des parachutistes!* (1999), *La Femme la plus riche du Yorkshire* (2008), and *Les Tribulations du dernier Sijilmassi* (2014), are Moroccan engineers or economists living abroad like the author himself. Other works seem overtly tailored to French rather than Moroccan audiences, such as *La Vieille dame du Riad* (2011), a novel about a couple of Parisians who acquire a riad in Marrakech. A third category of Laroui's works strategically builds on hot topics in Europe, such as Islamic radicalization in *Ce vain combat que tu livres au monde* (2016), and extremism in the now world-famous Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek in *L'Insoumise de la Porte de Flandres* (2017). In doing so, Laroui's novels, all published in France, strategically respond to the ongoing thematic expectations from French and Western readership while evading the question of Moroccan reception of and identification with the proposed narratives.

Secondly, the new generation, often educated in French Mission schools, offer to Western readers reproductions of reductive if not biased representations of Morocco and Moroccans. Slimani's acclaimed novel, for instance, features a Moroccan nanny and

[698] Orlando, '*Being-in-the-world*', p.285.

former prostitute, Wafa, 'arrivée en France grâce à un vieil homme à qui elle prodiguait des massages, dans un hôtel louche de Casablanca' and to whom she eventually offered her body 'suivant ainsi son instinct et les conseils de sa mère'.[699] While one could argue that Slimani is incidentally denouncing the well-known and persistent issue of sexual tourism in Morocco, especially in cities like Casablanca, Marrakech, and Tangier, her brief description fails to deliver a comprehensive and thoughtful account of the question, and ends up, I would argue, reinforcing a well-established and stereotyped image of Moroccan women not only in the West, but also in other regions, such as the Gulf countries. Under the guise of crime and post-identitarian fiction, Slimani's work perpetuates the Moroccan postcolonial malaise on the basis of strategic and tactical marketing. Moreover, her highly critical and unbalanced stances on French radio about Moroccan law and society,[700] and her recent appointment as the French president's personal representative for Francophone affairs throw into question her levels of engagement with and understanding of the complexities of the Moroccan context.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this new generation of Moroccan writers seems uninterested in either subversive aesthetics or nostalgic poetics. Their styles are instead driven by the primary need to offer an easy-read, accessible, and enjoyable literary product. Laroui's collection *L'Etrange affaire du pantalon de Dassoukine*, for instance, awarded the Goncourt short-story prize in 2012, is celebrated by the publisher for its 'humour décapant' and 'rythme endiablé' which 'nous conduit à l'irrépressible éclat de rire devant l'absurdité de la condition humaine'.[701] Similarly, Elalamy's debut novel *Un Marocain à New York*, largely inspired by his academic stay in the US, is a series of brief

[699] Leïla Slimani, *Chanson douce* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), p.115.
[700] For instance, during an interview on 'France Inter' on 4 November 2016, while commenting the arrest of two homosexuals in Morocco, she declared that 'la législation au Maroc est complètement moyen-âgeuse, complétement déconnectée de la réalité', Radio France Inter, 4th November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQd0SPePAmA> [accessed 10th March 2018]
[701] Fouad Laroui, *L'Etrange affaire du pantalon de Dassoukine* (Paris: Julliard, 2012), blurb.

and fragmented chapters that makes extensive use of puns and plays with language in 'un mélange d'humour, de dérision et de fantaisie'[702] that fails to grasp the complexity of the American city. More recently, while Slimani's style 'has been heralded as simply poetic',[703] an article revealed that she previously attended a writing workshop where 'eminent editor at Gallimard' Jean-Marie Laclavetine took her 'as a protégée and encouraged her to purify her style, ignoring her characters' thoughts and focusing on their actions'.[704] Interestingly, the same article reveals that Slimani now considers this advice 'among several keys that made [her] understand why, without doubt, [her] first manuscript had been rejected'.[705] This is to say that the aesthetics of Slimani and others are not only persistently shaped and influenced by French readership and institutions but also deeply inflected by the prejudicial and biased pressures of the Western market. Stylistic purification and attention-grabbing action guarantee a wide audience but obviously leave little space for formal transgression and innovation. Commercial success is, to a certain extent, conditioned by the dismissal of subversive aesthetics and the creation of clear and mundane structures.

A direct consequence of the above is that most of these works lack historical depth and tend to focus on creating immediate effects rather than reflecting on the circulation of meanings between various temporalities. Nostalgic – like subversive – poetics, is sacrificed in favour of temporal stability and historical simplification. In his book *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson suggests that one of the features of the postmodern is precisely a 'weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to

[702] Youssouf Amine Elalamy, *Un Marocain à New York* (Casablanca: La Croisée des Chemins, 2014 [1998]) blurb.
[703] Howell, p.303.
[704] Lauren Collins, 'The Killer-Nanny Novel that Conquered France', in *The New Yorker*, 1st January 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/01/the-killer-nanny-novel-that-conquered-france> [accessed 13 February 2018].
[705] Collins.

public History and in the new forms of our private temporality'.[706] In Jameson's theory, this loss of historicity is compared to a schizophrenic position, defined as 'a breakdown in the signifying chain' that creates 'an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time'.[707] This process is perfectly illustrated by the opening sentences in Slimani's *Chanson douce*: 'Le bébé est mort. Il a suffi de quelques secondes. Le médecin a assuré qu'il n'avait pas souffert'.[708] The present of death is isolated and introduced to the reader in a sudden and striking move, drawing on 'a materiality of perception properly overwhelming' and 'a mysterious charge of affect',[709] here skilfully woven around the harrowing yet fascinating motif of a baby's death.

One consequence of this historical simplification, according to Jameson, is a redefinition of personal identity as 'the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present'.[710] In the Moroccan context, this schizophrenic effect is not only manifest in the ongoing clash between traditional and conservative views and representations of Moroccan identity, but also emphasized by the new writers' lack of interest in both reprocessing the past and exploring the future. While the past is meant to be 'the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future', it becomes, in Jameson's words, 'a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum'.[711] A relevant example here is Moroccan author and artist Mahi Binebine's tenth novel *Le Fou du roi*, a personal narrative that weaves together the stories of his father, who served as a court jester of King Hassan II, and his brother, a soldier who was involved in the first coup attempt against the Moroccan monarch and spent several years in the prison of Tazmamart. While the novel has the merit of superimposing personal

[706] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.6.
[707] Jameson, p.27.
[708] Slimani, p.13.
[709] Jameson, p.27.
[710] Jameson, p.26.
[711] Jameson, p.18.

and collective memory in an attempt to revisit the history of postcolonial Morocco from a new perspective, it tends to focus on the atmosphere of the royal palace as a site of theatrical and oral performance, exaggerated curtseys, and struggle for power between the courtiers. Binebine himself argues that his work 'a la fantaisie du conte lointain et la gravité du drame humain'.[712] As a result, the novel does not 'attempt to recapture or represent the "real" past, but always make do with certain cultural myths and stereotypes about the past',[713] here strategically built on Moroccan curiosity about and representations of monarchical power, space, and body.

The process described above, which Jameson calls a 'nostalgia for the present'[714] is a further sign of anxiety and discomfort in Moroccan contemporary literature. My contention is that the dismissal of retrospective and prospective forms of nostalgia and the divorce from subversive aesthetics redefine the Moroccan present as a site of ephemeral longing and impossible revolt. The persistence of the Moroccan malaise thrives on the effacement of history and the absence of a fresh assessment of revolt and nostalgia in the new age. In line with the self-critical approach mentioned above, contemporary Moroccan literature needs, to borrow Jameson's words, a work of 'cognitive mapping', namely the reconstruction of a sense of time and space enriched with 'a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'.[715] This approach is less about returning to the aesthetic and poetic tools elaborated by Laâbi's generation than about recovering the overarching history and geography of revolt and nostalgia in Moroccan postcolonial writing. One practical way of

[712] Mahi Binebine, *Le Fou du roi* (Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2018), blurb.
[713] John Storey, 'Postmodernism and Popular Culture' in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.147-157 (p.151).
[714] Jameson, p.18.
[715] Jameson, p.54.

implementing this approach is to promote an active engagement with editorial and archival material and to probe the oft-neglected relationships between writers, publishers, and other mediators on the model of Ruth Bush's study of African publishing in France and its valuable attempt to 'restore an informed historical awareness of the material conditions'[716] faced by African authors in the years of decolonization. Such an effort would generate a historical depth, a critical distance, and a deeper engagement with the dynamics of subversion and renewal currently at play in Moroccan society.

The legacy of Khaïr-Eddine, Khatibi, and Laâbi as well as the recent transformations in the region suggest that this effort needs to be carried out not only on a local level in Morocco, but also in connection with regional and global geographies, including across the African continent and the Arab World. As this study has revealed, the Moroccan postcolonial malaise has been constantly influenced by and in dialogue with transnational experiences of struggle and failure. Literary and intellectual production has often been the alarm that prefigured popular uprisings or the mirror that reflected their subsequent achievements and losses. In the Maghreb, for instance, the recent surge in theoretical works reflecting on the consequences and the lessons of the Arab Spring, and the emergence of a new generation of Francophone authors like Kamel Daoud and Kaouther Adimi in Algeria, and Azza Filali and Yamen Manaï in Tunisia, invite us to reconsider the most recent expressions and forms of resistance to the malaise in the Maghreb from a broader comparative perspective. In France, the high visibility of some authors such as Kamel Daoud and Leïla Slimani, the increasingly blurred boundaries between the role of the writer and that of the public figure, and the controversial reception of the new generation of Francophone authors in the Maghreb create new forms of malaise that will be not only voiced in creative writing, but also processed and reconfigured in

[716] Ruth Bush, *Publishing Africa in France: Literary Institutions and Decolonization 1945-1967* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p.26.

public and academic debates, undoubtedly calling for new investigations. In this context, extending the study of the Moroccan postcolonial malaise needs to take into account the plural identity of the Maghreb as a site of multilingual and multicultural exchange and influence. Besides the dominant genre of the novel, the malaise requires further investigation in oral poetry, popular theatre, and other forms of artistic performance. One specific aspect that needs more attention is the interaction between Francophone and Arabophone expressions of the postcolonial malaise in the Maghreb, and more broadly the role of language and translation in shaping and perpetuating or resisting these expressions. The poetics and politics of both revolt and nostalgia in literary production in Arabic[717] can encourage comparative approaches and enrich the understanding of the various modes of writing and facing the malaise in the region.

Another area for further inquiry has to do with the future of the Moroccan malaise in the age of digital media and under the increasing pressures of the global literary market. In a letter addressed to Laâbi on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *Souffles*, Haitian writer and former contributor to the journal René Depestre writes that 'la commémoration de son précieux labeur culturel peut être le point de départ du nouveau souffle dont a besoin le monde de la révolution numérique en cours'.[718] Depestre's rather optimistic reflection is interesting, for it desperately tries to catch up with the ongoing digital revolution, which has more or less excluded the past generation of writers by imposing on literature its own rules in terms of strategic marketing, commercial expectations, and rapid consumption. Depestre is right, however, in suggesting that any future reading of Moroccan writing and its notions of malaise, revolt, or nostalgia, needs to build on the achievements and failures of the *Souffles* generation. Understanding the Moroccan malaise requires a cross-temporal study of the modes of transmission and passage between past,

[717] See for instance Wen-Chin Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).
[718] René Depestre, 'Lettre du 19 octobre 2015' in Collectif, *Saison Ardente*, pp.48-49 (p.48).

present, and future. Since the development of Moroccan and global politics might locally trigger new discourses of revolt and nostalgia, it would be extremely interesting to follow the evolution and interaction of the two concepts in the next few years. With specific regard to Francophone North African literature, the economic and cultural dependency on the French centre and the stronghold of Parisian publishers will continue to fuel a tension between the modes of understanding and engaging with the malaise in the Maghreb and abroad. This malaise, in Morocco as elsewhere in the region, is a regenerative and dislocating process that continually attracts and repels demonstrators, writers, intellectuals, and academics alike. It requires, now and in the future, a critical, dynamic, and multidimensional mode of thinking – one which the study of literature can deeply inspire and enrich with new insights.

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