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**Addressing Extremism and Terror:
Critical Humanities in an Age of Confusion**

Ikhtilaf, Journal of Critical Humanities and Social Studies is a refereed Open Access interdisciplinary publication of the *Identity and Difference Research Group* affiliated with Université Mohammed Ier, Oujda Morocco. *Ikhtilaf* is an Arabic word that means both “difference” and “differend” (french for conflict, aporia etc...) The Journal’s mission is to stress difference in thought at a time that forced (globalized) sameness is threatening to stifle creativity, innovation and intellectual freedom. Grounded in the core disciplines of the humanities, *Ikhtilaf* encourages interdisciplinarity and seeks to bring together humanities and social studies to stress the centrality of critical discourse in our collective response to the crucial interrogations of the twenty-first century. Focusing on North Africa, the Middle East and their relations to African, Asian and European histories, realities and trajectories, *Ikhtilaf* aims to apply the distinctive research methodologies and approaches developed within the disciplines of the humanities to the study of a wide range of local and regional issues that are of global and transnational significance.



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Editorial

By Larbi Touaf.

In Graham Swift's 1983 novel *Waterland*, the narrator Tom Crick, a history teacher and a man with historical consciousness, makes this statement as a response to one of his students who said that "History is about to end":

Do you know why I became a teacher, Price? Okay- because I had this thing about history. My pet hobby-horse. But do you know what prompted me to teach? It was when I was in Germany in 1946. All that rubble. Tons of it. You see, it didn't take much. Just a few flattened cities. No special lessons. No tours of the death-camps. Let's just say I made the discovery that this thing called civilisation, this thing we've been working at for three thousand years [...] is precious. An artifice --so easily knocked down-- but precious. (207)

To make his point clearer, the narrator warns us against taking for granted the idea that humanity is going forward towards the better, towards an inevitable "progress." To believe that would be to go blindly and unconsciously towards the perpetuation of the errors and massacres of the past because, he says, history repeats itself, or rather since man makes history as Hegel believed, he never learns from the past. History, according to this vision, is a series of repetitions and eternal recurrences, it is a narrative that revolves around itself: "How it repeats itself, how it goes back on itself, no matter how we try to straighten it out. How it twists, turns. How it goes in circles and brings us back to the same place." (123)

Far from being cynical, Tom Crick's statement is actually a warning against losing sight of why History is taught at schools: to know how we got here and learn to not repeat the errors of our forebears. If humanity achieved any progress so far, it is because some people worked hard for it, not because it's a law of nature, certainly not a law of human nature, if such a thing exists at all: "'Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future.'" (117)

What prompted the narrator to deliver such a speech is the fact that faced with budget cuts, his school decided to remove History from the curriculum. Not only is it a discipline that can be dispensed with, but also it is something that no one really seems to care about that much anymore, therefore it can be

abandoned. In this sense, Swift's visionary novel foreshadowed the state of humanities as we see it today, i.e. being marginalized in society and in education. Hollowed and reduced to practical technicalities, the time-honored disciplines are under the threat of extinction in our techno-scientific postmodern times, and with their disappearance the levees that stand up against human folly and cruelty will most certainly give in.

To put this in perspective it may be useful to do a little comparative work between today's dominant discourses of xenophobia, extremism, and populist rhetoric and the beginning of the 20th Century. Indeed, a quick look at the early decades of the last century will show that the tensions that lead to the first and the second World Wars and the innumerable massacres were fueled by toxic ideologies that vilified the other, the foreigner, the different, the one with a different faith, different skin color, different culture, different language ... etc. i.e. those who are not or cannot be assimilated. We all know the result, wars, massacres, totalitarian ideologies, authoritarian regimes, and extensive destruction.

Today, with the heightened tensions surrounding the issues of migration, unemployment, and insecurity, populist and hate-based ideologies whether they claim religious or ethnic groundings, work to polarize attitudes, turning communities and nations against one another. Our context is thus wrecked by the return of nationalistic, identity and religious discourses that rose to a largely unquestioned authority not so much in political spheres as in the daily lives of ordinary citizens who are constantly reminded that their troubles are to be blamed on the others. The voluntary or involuntary incorporation of such a discourse by individuals and groups reveals profound identity anxieties affecting societies (in the North as well as in the South) and those anxieties are intensified by the impact of globalized economy and culture. Concomitant with this is an exacerbated conservatism, xenophobic movements, and the risk of violent conflicts which nourish the radicalization of a part of the youth, as much in the South as in the North.

The primary concern of this issue of *Ikhtilaf* is to highlight the crucial role of Humanities in addressing the general confusion of the 21st century and its uncertainties as inherited from the *fin de siècle* upheavals of the 1990's (the fall of the socialist/communist bloc, the first Gulf war, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the great divide it opened between the West and the Islamic world, the massacres in Rwanda, the quasi-failures of decolonization, the triumph of global capitalism and the widening gap between North and South ...). Today's challenges are many whether in the Global North or in Global the South: Democracy for which the West was and in some sense still

continues to be an embodiment is showing signs of inherent and hitherto well-hidden incapacity to accommodate ethnic and cultural differences in western countries themselves. While in the Global South, the postcolonial and independent states registered massive failures in development, human or otherwise, producing nothing more than sophisticated systems of corruption. With the upsurge of terror and blind retaliation, the world has become troubled and insecure. Deeply frustrated peoples are resorting to political extremism to express their rejection of the new world *disorder*. Whether in the West or the Rest, scores of people are falling for populist propaganda and other discourses oversimplifying the world's complexity and promising easy solutions all focusing on blaming others (migrants, foreigners, infidels...etc.) Millions of people from the Global South are forced to flee war, and environmentally stricken zones, while rich countries of the North are barricading themselves by constructing real and symbolic walls. Even inside the rich countries barricades are set up between the privileged minority and the other 99% who are suffering from poverty, unemployment and general lack of opportunity. On either side of these "walls" thrive a rhetoric of hate, fear and demonization of the other. Intellectuals, once the bearers of humanity's conscience are replaced by "experts," and critical thinking (emancipatory and transformative) is replaced with technical expertise. In this context of uncertainty, and with the dominant technicality and compartmentalization of knowledge production, the dominating discourses of techno-science, politics of fear, and politicized religion are only adding fuel to an already flammable situation.

While not covering every aspect of the problem, this issue of *Ikhtilaf* is a modest contribution to the ethical and critical debate in the humanities and social sciences championed by decolonial, postcolonial, and post-development studies. The hope is that we succeed in triggering interest in multidisciplinary critical practices that seek to renew critique and provide alternative and innovative analyses of the current crisis of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and the general resurgence of political-religious extremism across the world.

Needless to say, in most universities of the world today, the Humanities are living on borrowed time as faculties are overwhelmed by the difficulties related to shrinking budgets and deteriorating work conditions. However, the possibilities for the renewal of faith in the humanities to generate critical thinking may come from a return to immediate social concerns and to foreground values of critical thinking, historical perspective and ethical judgement that are the core of our disciplines.

In fact, in the actual wave of nihilistic skepticism that touches everything from politics to science and that finds expression in social media under names such as “alternative facts” political incorrectness and that seek to normalize racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia through vines, memes and other social media related forms, the value of critical thinking is lost in the race to turn universities into business-oriented enterprises with no or little room for humanities. Already in 2009, The New York Times (24 February) deplored the state of the humanities in American universities where it was said that after the economic crisis of 2008 “the humanities are under greater pressure than ever to justify their existence to administrators, policy makers, students and parents [...]Some of the staunchest humanities advocates admit that they have failed to make their case effectively.” While this statement predicates the crisis in the humanities on the economic downturn and on the changing attitudes of families and decision-makers to liberal education, it remains certain that at least one of the aspects of that crisis is the decline of the humanities in a culture dominated by techno-scientism.

Now, ten years after that article, the situation is only getting worse, However, nurturing critical thinking, civic and historical knowledge and ethical reasoning is our best argument especially regarding the rise of populism, extremism, and terrorism. Thus, the relevance of the humanities lies in regaining their place in promoting individual and communal development and participation in a free and participative democracy. While this is not the only way to address the multifaceted crisis, it may be worthwhile to consider ways in which academia can address the issue through opening to and engaging society, taking hold of public space and renewing the sense of the “commons” to create the conditions of peaceful intersubjective existence.

ADDRESSING EXTREMISM: THEATRE AND CRITICAL HUMANITIES

Sabine Coelsch-Foisner (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Abstract

The present paper addresses the humanities' mission to explore the critical potential of the liberal arts by concentrating on theatre. Given its public quality and direct appeal to audiences, theatre (including spoken and music drama, puppet and street performances, contemporary, dance and pantomime) plays an ambivalent role amongst the arts, which is reflected on the one hand in the long history of anti-theatrical bias and, on the other, in the extraordinary variety and dynamics of theatrical play. A case study dealing with one of the darkest chapters in European history – the representation of the Nazi regime in Lillian Garrett-Groag's *The White Rose* –, will serve as an example of how theatre can, and can be made to, raise awareness and engage audiences. To this end, I shall argue, it is crucial that we study theatrical productions, rather than merely scripts and published texts, and offer a research model that goes beyond the drama, plot and characters by taking account of audiences and including the artists and cultural professionals involved in a production.

Keywords: theatre, production studies, cultural responsibility, extremism, *The White Rose*, censorship

The relation between art and politics is necessarily one of tension. It is particularly acute in the case of theatre, given its special imbrication with society, its direct emotional appeal to audiences and its potential political impact. Unlike other formats of cultural production, theatre is not consumed individually but by crowds, and, unlike other forms of artistic expression such as sculpture, architecture and painting, theatre is experienced at the moment of its enactment. Thus, performances harbour an element of the unexpected and unforeseeable: surprise, shock, outrage, etc. The implication for theatre is a double bind: having power on the one hand, it is susceptible to external control on the other. The connections between theatre and the public are

therefore crucial for both those producing it and those undertaking to analyse it.

In the following, I shall adopt a critical humanities perspective, addressing the role of theatre in the context of worldwide outbursts of extremism and terror. By studying pertinent recent stage productions, I shall demonstrate how theatrical strategies and modes of production are apt to raise our awareness of civic and cultural responsibility, and how they may be seen as efforts to further justice, tolerance and peace in our time. For the purpose of this paper, theatre is understood to include all forms of language- and music-theatre, opera, street and puppet art, dance and contemporary. Theatre is a complex institution. Far from being identical with spoken, let alone written drama, it involves the multiple authorship of playwrights and composers, stage directors, choreographers, actors and singers, stage- and costume designers, the joint work of artists, technicians, cultural facilitators and communicators as well as the interactions between those producing a theatrical event and those receiving it.

Power and Control

The heritage of theatre goes along with a strong anti-theatrical bias. While other forms of art have enjoyed relative freedom, theatre has been feared throughout history to instill potentially dangerous ideas into audiences and incite them to action. In 1966, Edward Bond's play *Saved* produced at the Royal Court incurred prosecution, and in the same year John Osborne's *A Patriot* was censored and cut. In 1968, censorship was abolished in Britain, but – as in all countries – subtler means of controlling performances, such as funding, have continued to be at work and determine whether and how a play meets an audience.

Throughout world history, bursts of theatrical activity have prompted a backlash of censorship, as during the Roman Catholic Middle Ages and the early modern period, in seventeenth-century Japan, or in China after the outbreak of World War II. To control the apparently uncontrollable in theatre, a range of mechanisms have been put into place by governments or the Church: direct and indirect censorship, licensing practices, bans and restrictions, the requirement that plays be cut or altered, the staying and withdrawal of productions, or the forced use of theatre for patriotic and propagandist purposes. When, at the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642, theatres were closed and public stage-play was forbidden, one of the outstanding cultural, social and language achievements of the English Renaissance was brought to a halt. But the closure of public playhouses did

not stop theatre altogether, and one outcome was the first full-length, all-sung opera in England: William D'Avenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), set 'in recitative musick' by Matthew Locke, Henry Lawes, Henry Cooke, Charles Coleman, and George Hudson,¹ was composed to overcome the Commonwealth ban on 'serious', i.e. spoken drama. After the Restoration, Charles II granted patents to Thomas Killigrew's King's Men in Drury Lane and William D'Avenant's Duke's Players in Lincoln's Inn Fields and subsequently Dorset Garden Theatre. In 1732, the latter patent was transferred to the Theatre Royal Covent Garden. Walpole's Theatre Licensing Act of 1737 tightened government censorship and required every single play to obtain the Lord Chamberlain's approval. These licensing – and monopolising – practices continued until the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 (censorship of the content of plays by the Lord Chamberlain continued). The result was a bewildering range of hybrid theatrical genres performed on Victorian stages, such as pantomime, melodrama, burlesque and burletta, evolved in order to circumvent the strictures on 'legitimate' drama.

To see the conflict between theatrical activity and political interests, one need not go back so far in time. Among the darkest chapters in the history of European theatre were enforcements against performances during the Nazi regime, shaming and banning writers and composers for producing what was devastatingly labelled 'degenerate art' (entartete Kunst), which included "elements of modernism, bolshevism, and internationalism".² Consequently the political theatre of Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht and Workers Theatre Groups were suppressed. Theatrical repression in Russia and under Eastern European dictatorships constitutes another dark chapter in the history of antitheatrical bias: Czech playwright Václav Havel's plays were banned in 1969, and he served time in jail for his 'seditious' writings. At one of Salzburg's annual conferences on drama translation and theatre practice, Rumanian playwright Petru Iamandi explained the Rumanian idiom "literature for the drawer", i.e. "writing a piece of fiction or nonfiction for oneself and keeping it locked in a drawer because of its strong anti-totalitarian message and for fear the authorities might hear of it and consequently start persecuting the author or, worse, put him/her into prison".³ The example

¹ "Siege of Rhodes, The", in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, eds. Michael Kennedy and Joyce Bourne Kennedy (5 ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2007), n. pag., Oxford Reference (website), accessed August 8, 2018.

² Stephanie Barron, "Germany: Nazi Germany: Degeneracy: Censorship of Art and Music, 933-45", in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. Derek Jones (4 vols.; London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 938-41, here 938.

³ Petru Iamandi, "Avoiding Topicality in Drama Translation: A Translator's Compromise", in *Drama Translation and Theatre Practice*, eds. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Holger Klein (Salzburg Studies in English Literature and Culture 1; Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2004), 171-79, here 171.

Iamandi mentions is a joint translation he produced together with Richard Wright of Victor Clinică's play *Polonius*, a political farce about a ruthless dictator composed and "kept [...] in a drawer"⁴ in the 1980s, a time of unforgiving ideological suppression and despotism in Romania. It was amended after 1989, awarded the first prize in a national competition in 1995, and printed and produced in Galați in 1996. Foregrounding *Polonius* as a ruthless dictator who syndicates with Fortinbras, this dystopian play, inspired by, and loosely modelled on, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, shows the problematic implications of Elizabethan morality in the twentieth century. Iamandi describes his motivation for translating this piece and the difficulties he encountered. For the play's Romanian quality (he speaks of its 'Romanianness') proved particularly tricky, and Iamandi felt the need to paraphrase and explain several of the coded, ciphered utterances, as for example "The Embalmed", a posthumous reference to dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. Aware of the connotations conveyed by his rendition, Iamandi concludes: "That makes me think there is something dramatic about being a translator, wanting to explore and recreate the universe of a literary work and having to make compromises even if the cause is noble. There is also something bold about being a translator, about having the courage to 'argue' with the author and, more than that, change his text here and there."⁵

Contrary to strategies of suppressing the performance of plays, theatre has also been used by political activists for freedom to spread ideas, as in present-day Latin America or by the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. Repression and empowerment are two sides of the same coin. The latter may adopt many guises, such as the 'political tribunal' Piscator developed in Germany prior to his emigration to the Soviet Union, France and the United States. After the war, he returned and produced memorial and documentary theatre. Also in the 1960s, the anti-Vietnam happenings and critical pageants of US "Bread and Puppet Theatre" were evolved as *theatrum mundi* by Peter Schumann. Their ritualistic large-scale performances with masks and up-to-five-metre-high stick puppets and sculptures, often connecting political protest with religious content, were shown in many European capitals in the 1960s and 1970s. Protest is also the tenor of one of Austria's most celebrated contemporary writers: Peter Handke, enfant terrible of the 1960s. Playwrights from South Africa and Latin America, such as Kessie Govender, Athol Fugard, Lewis Sowden, Basil Warner, David Herbert, Enrique Buenaventura, Emilio Carballido, José Triana,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 178.

Augusto Boal, Griselda Gambaro, or Eduardo Pavlovsky openly attacked governments for oppressing the people and discriminating against ethnic groups. Political and economic stability have become central issues in the light of Britain's vote to leave the EU in 2016. Carol Ann Duffy and Rufus Norris's Brexit-drama *Our Country*, subtitled 'A Work in Progress' and first staged at the National Theatre in 2017, is symptomatic of the penchant for the mimetic in present-day documentary theatre, incorporating excerpts from political speeches and interviews with both the general public and Brexit's political stakeholders. Even where overt critique is absent from plays, the political may lurk underneath faux-naïf, experimental or absurdist tones, examples being Austria's Nobel-Prize-winning author Elfriede Jelinek, who quickly reacts to real-life occurrences, whether global catastrophes like Fukushima (*Kein Licht* / "No Light") or national issues like asylum practices. While her texts are ready to provoke and pique audiences, German-Cuban dramatist Roland Schimmelpfennig's plays tend to open up the existential dimensions of topical grievances, depicting issues like forced prostitution and immigrants' harrowing search for asylum without offending audiences. Add to these examples legion of plays commemorating individuals who opposed political terror and keeping alive the memory of innocent victims of dictatorial regimes worldwide.

Memorial, documentary and protest plays, radical street theatre and puppet shows all testify to the critical power of the stage and its corollary liability to be brought to account. To explore theatre's ambivalent status between art and public intervention, the following case study of Lillian Garrett-Groag's play *The White Rose*⁶ will serve as an example. Set in Germany during World War II, it exposes the savage terror of the Nazi regime faced by innocent individuals.

The White Rose

The White Rose (premiered in 1991 in San Diego) deals with a group of young men and women who studied in Munich at the time of the Nazi regime and actively fought against it by printing flyers under the name of 'The White Rose'. Hans and Sophie Scholl were leading members. In spring 1942, they were arrested in Munich University when distributing their sixth flyer and, within five days, brutally guillotined. The 'interrogation' was personally conducted by Roland Freisler, president of the so-called Volksgerichtshof (the 'people's court') and known as the 'bloodhound'. Groag's play chronicles

⁶ Lillian Groag, *The White Rose* (Acting Edition for Theater Productions; New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1998).

the last four days of the Scholl siblings and intersects their interrogation by Gestapo 'Kriminalobersekretär' Robert Mohr with flashbacks showing their everyday student life and political activism.

In 2018, the Salzburg State Theatre produced Garrett-Groag's play. Actress Janina Raspe explained in a public conversation I held with the production team⁷ how much she had looked forward to playing the lead, because Sophie Scholl was a role model for her – as she has been for many young women – now and in my own student days: an intelligent, courageous and emancipated young woman, who enjoyed life and had her dreams about the future, and who went to university despite the regime's pressure on women not to 'waste' their time studying, but to bear boys to feed Hitler's war machine. Sophie joined her brother Hans' and his friends' battle against a murderous war – with weapons as harmless as flyers. Janina Raspe said this role meant a big challenge for her. How could she do justice to this woman, who had become an icon of resistance and a moral stronghold of political and personal integrity, and yet was a young woman like herself? She read everything she could get hold of and studied photographs and letter. Like a pilgrim, she travelled to Forchtenberg, where Sophie Scholl was born, to Ludwigsburg and Ulm, where she had lived with her family,⁸ and to Munich University to see the memorials, a bust and photographs, and the square commemorating her and 'The White Rose'.⁹ The actress felt a particular responsibility for this woman's cause.

The *White Rose* is an obvious choice for a critical-humanities approach to theatre. The shock of the students' death and the unspeakable scale of atrocities shattering Europe and destroying the lives of millions of Europeans pinpoint the question of how theatre can tackle such dimensions of hatred and extremism. Like many committed writers, Groag, who is also an actress and a theatre director, has a multi-national family background marked by restlessness and displacement. Being an American born in Argentina, she herself was an outsider to these events in Europe, but her family shared the fate of millions of displaced Europeans. Her mother was Italian, her father was Viennese and fled to Argentina in 1938 when Austria joined Nazi Germany. Persecution and flight were to become part of her own life. When Lillian was

⁷ See Atelier Gespräche online: "Atelier Gespräch: *Die Weiße Rose* (22 January 2018)", Plus Kultur: Empowerment Through Culture (website), accessed February 22, 2019, <http://www.sbg-plus-kultur.at/>.

⁸ See "Sophie Scholl: Lebenslauf", Stadt Forchtenberg (website), accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.forchtenberg.de/index.php?id=49>.

⁹ DenkStätte Weiße Rose am Lichthof der LMU, München (website), accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.weisse-rose-stiftung.de/denkstaette-weisse-rose-am-lichthof-der-lmu-muenchen/>.

only seven years old, her family fled from the military dictatorship in Argentina to Montevideo, Uruguay.

Groag's play was written in 1991, almost half a century after the Scholls' execution. A lot of materials were available then which were not yet disclosed when the highly esteemed German film producer and director Michael Verhoeven produced a touching portrait of these students known as 'The White Rose'. Verhoeven, a medical doctor by education, is a great psychologist of vulnerability and has dedicated much of his creative talent to the lives of those persecuted and harmed.

Verhoeven's film dates from 1982,¹⁰ when Germany was beginning to venerate 'The White Rose' as a group of martyrs and heroes, thereby trying to set them off against common humanity – and ward off possible charges of complicity with the regime or failure to act against it. Based on witness accounts from Sophie's family and friends' families, the film depicts 'The White Rose' as ordinary young men and women, individuals who were trapped in the vicissitudes of the Nazi regime and motivated by a common-sense impulse to stand up against injustice. Verhoeven's film was a provocation to those who wished not to be confronted with the legacy of the Nazi era and was promptly banned from the cultural programmes of the Goethe-Institutes outside of Germany. Consequently, Verhoeven and the victims' families fought their own battle for justice. Eventually, the film changed the law and led to a government resolution: on 25 January 1985, the 'Bundestag' declared that the Volksgerichtshof ('people's court') was not a court of justice but a brutal instrument in the service of Nazi terror.¹¹ This declaration was a significant achievement of one of Germany's leading film producers.

Both Verhoeven's film (including his political activism) and Groag's play testify to an undeniable sense of cultural responsibility.¹² These productions harbour an obvious peace mission as they pinpoint the disastrous impact of national hostilities on individual lives and on the worth of man and woman in

¹⁰ *Die weiße Rose*, dir. Michael Verhoeven, perf. Lena Stolze, Wulf Kessler, and Werner Stocker (Sentana Filmproduktion GmbH, 1982).

¹¹ This is the wording in German quoted by Michael Verhoeven in his epilogue to the film, which he dropped once the Resolution was passed: "Der Deutsche Bundestag stellt fest, dass die als 'Volksgerichtshof' bezeichnete Institution kein Gericht im rechtsstaatlichen Sinn, sondern ein Terrorinstrument zur Durchsetzung der nationalsozialistischen Willkürherrschaft war." Michael Verhoeven, "'Die Weiße Rose': Epilog zur Rezeptionsgeschichte eines deutschen Heimatfilms", 131-146, here 144, retrieved from DocPlayer (website), accessed August 14, 2018, <https://docplayer.org/34006925-Die-weiße-rose-epilog-zur-rezeptionsgeschichte-eines-deutschen-heimatfilms.html>.

¹² For a definition of this term see Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, "The (Inter)-Cultural Responsibility of Theatre", paper read at the 8th SELICUP conference on "The Humanities and the Challenges of the New Europe: Culture, Languages, Identities" in October 2018 in Alcudia, Majorca and published in *The Humanities Still Matter: Identity, Gender and Space in 21st-Century Europe*, eds. José Igor Prieto Arranz and Rubén Jarazo-Álvarez (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, forthcoming).

general. But not all plays (and films) deal with political oppression or explicitly voice concerns for justice and human rights, let alone work up the dark chapters in European history and the shameful abysses of human nature. Hence to reduce theatre's responsibility to the explicit pacifism of plays would deny the majority of theatre any claim to cultural responsibility. How then can we account for theatre's role in addressing terror and extremism? What are its peculiar ways of raising awareness and fostering civic responsibility? To answer these questions, we need to carry debates about theatre beyond issues of content.

Critical Humanities and the Study of Productions

In her entry on "responsibility" in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*,¹³ Martha Klein mainly focuses on the concept's causal, legal and moral meanings. Why the arts are excluded in her discussion might renew debates about the truth content of works of art, which has divided critics ever since Plato and produced defenses and tracts as well as heated manifestoes and declarations, from early modern apologists like Sir Philip Sidney via the Romantics to the Surrealists, the New Apocalypse and the neo-Romantics of post-WWII England. Theatre is not exempt from these discussions, because even the most fervidly committed performance evokes the ambivalence of stage-play, which is both mimetic – in the sense that it is material, involving real bodies and props in real space and meeting real audiences – and non-mimetic – in the sense that a performance is precisely not life. Klein's definition, however, is more appropriate to the arts when addressing the notion of 'role responsibility', which is derived from H. L. A. Hart's book *Punishment and Responsibility*¹⁴ and relates to the "duties (often culturally determined) which are attached to particular professional or societal or (as in the case of parents) biological roles. Failure to fulfil such duties can expose the role-holder to censure which may – depending on what the roles and duties are – be of a moral or legal kind." (*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*) Cultural responsibility, we may argue in accordance with this definition, is predicated on a pact between the stage and the audience. Each production re-negotiates this pact, re-defining theatre's rules and duties, i.e. the role it plays in the respective social, political and economic milieu.

In order to understand theatre's power to address extremism, we need to look beyond the level of plays or works and shift our focus to productions.

¹³ Martha Klein, "Responsibility", in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (2nd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2005), n. pag., Oxford Reference (website), accessed August 8, 2018.

¹⁴ H. L. A. Hart, *Punishment and Responsibility: Essays in the Philosophy of Law* (2nd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2008).

For the history of theatre as works may suggest political commitment or fanciful entertainment, but the history of productions is a different story. Even the most contrived and artificial comedy, opera or puppet play can be made to unleash the subversive potential attributed to theatre when produced and performed before an audience. Recent music theatre has shown a strong tendency towards overtly politicised productions, either adapting the conflicts of early opera to present-day scenarios of violence and transforming the eighteenth-century convention of *lieto fine* (happy-end) into timely messages of tolerance and forgiveness (as Mozart's opera seria *La Clemenza di Tito*, first staged in 1791, suggests)¹⁵ or commissioning contemporary music theatre to tackle contemporary issues, an example being the 2018 Salzburg State Theatre production of Lucio Gregoretti's children's opera *Flüchtling* ("Refugee"), composed in 2009 to the libretto by Daniel Goldenberg. It is about Djamila, a little girl from Syria, whose father dies during the flight to Germany and who is helped by a girl of her age, the latter's teacher and classmates. After many bureaucratic and legal obstacles, she is eventually given a permit to stay in Germany. Mainly performed by children (for children), the opera actively involves young audiences, which enhances identification. By placing the fate of one refugee girl centre-stage, the production gives the young audience an opportunity to vicariously experience what a refugee's fate may be like and to consider that injustice needs to be opposed. Their courage is rewarded in the end. In addition to being an opera, this was a model educational project. By making audiences 'forget' the improbabilities of sung drama, most obviously, the fact that characters sing all the time, opera actually opposes oblivion and indifference and raises awareness of the injustices and hardships suffered by particular groups in society.

Theatre is the prime site of contact and communication in the liberal arts, instilling compassion, turning audiences into witnesses, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue: notably when different traditions and strategies are combined in individual productions, or when stories and productions travel across cultures and are witnessed by diverse and ever new audiences. Outstanding examples are: French director Ariane Mnouchkine's staging of three of Shakespeare's history plays in Paris, borrowing from Japanese kabuki and *nō* theatre, or her staging of four Greek tragedies [*Iphigenia in Aulis*; *Agamemnon*; *The Libation Bearers*; *The Eumenides*], jointly titled *Les Atrides*

¹⁵ Cf. Julian Rushton, "Clemenza di Tito, La ("The Clemency of Titus") ", in *The Grove Book of Operas*, eds. Stanley Sadie and Laura Macy (2 ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2006), n. pag., Oxford Reference (website), accessed July 16, 2018.

(The House of Atreus) in Paris in 1990–1993, together with her Théâtre du Soleil company; Peter Brooks' adaptation of the *Mahabharata* in 1985; Amal Allana's staging of *Eréndira* in New Dheli in 2004, an adaptation of Colombian Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981); Ratan Thiyam's staging of Sophocles' *Antigone* at the globally acclaimed Chorus Repertory Theatre in Imphal in 1985, for which he adopted movement techniques from the conventional Manipuri martial art, *thang-ta*; Chinese–American Ping Chong's theatre pieces, such as his robotic adaptation of the Frankenstein–myth *A.M./A.M – the Articulated Man* (New York, 1982), or his interdisciplinary performance piece adaptation of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (New York, 1985); and Japanese director Ninagawa Yukio's 1985 recasting of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as Japanese samurai warrior from the sixteenth century.¹⁶

In the light of such cross-cultural adaptations of plays and aesthetic transfers in the real context of venues, props and sets, human bodies, puppets, masks and movements, a critical-humanities take on theatre presupposes a shift of attention from plays to productions. This means taking into account not only the semiophoric levels of a performance (what happens on stage), but its genetics (how it is created and evolved), as well as its paratheatrical contexts (how it is embedded and received in space and time). Production Studies explore these three interrelated parameters in their multiple interactions.¹⁷ Semiophoric refers to the meanings of a performance – i.e. what all components of a performance mean in the amalgamated spectacle. Paratheatrical circumscribes the thresholds to the spectacle – the building, the economic, geographic, socio-political and cultural environment, audiences, budgets and funding schemes, advertising, reviews, etc. Both interconnect with the genetic dimension, which involves all historical processes leading up to or influencing a performance: the history of a show and its story, of all props and materials involved, all creative processes such as artists' decisions, training and background as well as adaptation processes. A production-based approach to theatre is practice-led and brings together researchers, cultural practitioners and artists. Significantly, my case study of *The White Rose* has drawn on comments by the actress, the dramaturg and the stage director,

¹⁶ See Gary Jay Williams, "Chapter 13: Interculturalism, Hybridity, Tourism: The Performing World on New Terms", in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, eds. Phillip B. Zarrilli and Gary J. Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 551-88.

¹⁷ Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, "Das Paratheatrale, das Genetische und das Semiophorische – ein Forschungsprogramm zur wissenschaftlich-künstlerischen Erschließung theatraler Produktionen" / "The Paratheatrical, the Genetic and the Semiophoric – a Research Programme to Analyse Theatrical Productions", in *Theatralisierung*, eds. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Timo Heimerdinger (Wissenschaft und Kunst 30: Kulturelle Dynamiken / Cultural Dynamics, Heidelberg: Winter, 2016), 1-26.

whilst requiring a close reading of the play and a study of the historical and political contexts, taking into account reviews and critical literature, and involving attendance of rehearsals and performances, personal records and discussions with audiences. To round off my case study of Lillian Garrett-Groag's *The White Rose*, I shall therefore revisit its 2018 production by the Salzburg State Theatre.

Groag's play was a success: Janina Raspe's performance as Sophie Scholl was convincing, and there were two particularly powerful moments in the production revealing theatre's unique role responsibility. One was the execution scene, which, like all unspeakable atrocities, is a challenge to stage play. A realistic approach might trivialise the immensity of the act, or even worse, yield a voyeuristic spectacle.

While the State Theatre ran *The White Rose*, the Schauspielhaus, Salzburg's second major theatre, staged another play about a Nazi victim entitled *Jägerstätter* by Austrian playwright Felix Mitterer. It deals with a young farmer's resistance and his final execution. When facing his death, *Jägerstätter* recites his final letter to his wife, family and friends as he steps down from the stage and slowly walks up the aisle of the raked auditorium, literally vanishing from the audience's sight, while they still hear his voice. This was a memorable scene, converting stage play into memory and the spoken words into echoes from the past.

In *The White Rose*, the acting space was defined by a horizontal and a vertical swastika, which visualised the power relation between the Gestapo interrogator and his victims in proxemic terms. When Hans and Sophie Scholl await their execution, we see them in their prison cells, which form a third and the lowest level of the stage. They are allowed to smoke a final cigarette, she is led by an officer to the execution chamber, and then comes an unexpected loud thump – not from the off, but real. The façade of the upright swastika got detached and crashed forward onto the stage. Spectators in the front rows shrank back, as one could feel the draught caused by the fall of this huge wooden structure. One was struck with a sense of one's own inescapability and exposure in the light of the sheer force of the material hitting the ground. It was a truly Todorovian moment of hesitation¹⁸ between real danger and being just a spectator. Besides, it was a powerful way of making the audience witness and experience the play's message of something horrible and final happening.

¹⁸ See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975 [1970]).

The second moment occurred when Hans and Sophie Scholl threw down the final batch of what was to be their last flyer from the balustrade representing Munich University hall (where they were caught and arrested by the Gestapo on 18 February 1943). It was mounted as a flashback within the interrogation that takes up the majority of the play. Simultaneously, another batch of flyers was thrown from the gallery, and the flyers were sailing down onto the spectators, who grabbed them and began reading, or folded them, some just glanced at them and then gave them to their neighbours. In the play, students surreptitiously pick up the folders and dispose of them, afraid to be caught. In these moments, acting space and audience space became blurred. During the interval, the actors and actresses stood at the exits and handed out more leaflets. This time the text, however, was not from the sixth flyer of 'The White Rose', it was a personal message from these young actors and actresses themselves. They felt a need to communicate their own concern in the light of current political developments and warn theatregoers that the freedoms of speech and opinion must not be taken for granted but actively defended. It was a touching moment, when actress Janina Raspe read out the text during the public conversation I held with the production team.¹⁹ She explained to the audience that playing the role had given her a sense of great joy over the peace in which she and her generation now live, and of duty to help safeguard such peace, because it might end, just as Sophie Scholl's untroubled life had ended abruptly. Michael Verhoeven congratulated the acting team on their initiative.

The flyer intervention was emblematic of theatre's communicative role: it built many bridges – from character to actor, from stage to audience, from art to real life, and from a particular incident in history to a call for responsibility aimed at the general public. This constitutes both a fundamental humanitarian message and a testimony to the unique power of theatre in alerting the public and addressing extremist violence and terror.

¹⁹ See Atelier Gespräche online.

Reclaiming Public Space to fight Alienation and Extremism Through Art and Culture

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"Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world."

Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique Of Marxist Aesthetic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. (pp.32-33)

Abstract:

This article discusses how artistic and cultural activism in the context of social alienation can open avenues of creativity and artistic expression to the young generation that is easily attracted to diverse forms of violence and extremism. Stressing Civil society's efforts at claiming the public space for countering extremism through art and culture, the objective is to demonstrate how the fight against extremism is hinged on rehabilitating the sense of community that is shattered in our excessively consumerist realities. This enterprise underscores the importance of taste or aesthetic sensibility which as Emanuel Kant taught us is often coupled with a tendency to sociability. Kant's idea of the "*sensus communis*" understood not as *common sense* but as *communal sense* is based on the assumption that sharing artistic sensibility is a major instrument for the transmission of aesthetic values as every person is supposed to have a certain degree of aesthetic sense. Based on this, the article studies the work of two examples of the transition from political activism during the Arab Spring to cultural/artistic activism, in other words from political action that creates divisions to artistic and cultural action that brings people together. More specifically it is an attempt to study how the initiators and leaders of the 20th of February movement in Morocco (a group of young men and women with no political affiliation) worked to integrate young people from different backgrounds through art and culture.

Keywords: Morocco, post-Arab Spring, public space, extremism, cultural/artistic activism.

Introduction:

In recent years, a rich and intensive debate on the subject of how to curb extremism among the youth resulted in a general understanding that the rise

of this phenomenon was due to the lack of opportunity and unemployment.¹ Yet, while these do certainly contribute to youth radicalization, they are not its main reason, as the phenomenon is known to run across classes and makes no difference between rich and poor. Little attention however is given to questions of social and political alienation that causes scores of young people to embrace extremist ideologies or even join armed groups. In other contexts, the same feeling of alienation was behind large youth movements such as Occupy in the USA, the M-15 Movement in Spain, and more recently the *Gilets Jaunes* movement in France. Politically exploited by populist leaders and used to feed extremist agendas, the phenomenon translates states of oppression (real or imaginary) wherein large sections of the population feel excluded from the often too visible national wealth, and dispossessed of the control of their own lives and destinies in favour of an exclusive class that monopolizes everything. As a result, the feeling of alienation ends up depriving individuals of their very humanity, equating them with an interchangeable cog in a machine, deprived of control of itself.² Young people's responses to these conditions are largely an expression of the perceived disconnection from the established narrative of the nation that no longer has any meaning for them. Hence the need for some of them to look elsewhere for a cause or an alternative even if that entails loss of life, as is the case for the thousands that joined Isis from different parts of the world.

In Morocco, the alienation of young people is concomitant with an alarming lack of access to and/or interest in anything cultural³ i.e. books, magazines, theatre, cinema, art ...etc. among larger sections of uneducated or poorly educated youth, which is the result of the confluence of many factors such as the inadequacy of the public-school system, economic adversity particularly for the lower classes, mediocre cultural policies, and an impoverished media. The consequential cultural alienation strikes predominantly young people who find themselves cut off and unable to appropriate the shared narrative nor partake in the ideas of meaningful citizenship and collective aspirations to a good life. Consequently, they fall victim to religious extremist ideologies that exploits their rejection of shared beliefs and social values to lure them toward violent action. With little or no media literacy, influence from social networks

¹ ASDA'A Burson-Masteller, "Arab Youth Survey", 2016.

<https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/whitepaper/en/2016-AYS-White-Paper.pdf>

² In contemporary sociology, the concept of alienation is particularly implicit in the theories of symbolic domination and cultural legitimacy see Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel, Jean-Pierre Rivet, Claude Seibel, *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie*, Paris-La Haye, Mouton, 1963.

³ Adel Essaadani, Aicha Nouri & Mohamed Sammouni, *Les Pratiques Culturelles des Marocain Etude de Terrain*. Casablanca: Publication de l'Association Racines, 2016.

spur young people to see society as unjust, and perceive themselves as subjected to a symbolic violence on the part of institutions and dominant classes who exercise an invisible but nevertheless oppressive and hegemonic power over the entire society. Hence, the sense of "victimization" that echo conspiracy theories and cynical perceptions of the socio-political realities. Manifestations of such perceived victimization can be seen not only in the upsurge of banditry, hooliganism, crime, and many other forms of violence, but also in the increase of fanatic discourses and diverse extremist agendas.

The End of traditional public space?

Described by some as the era of "post-truth,"⁴ our epoch is characterized by an excess of dis/information accompanied by alarming attempts at mainstreaming violent and intolerant rhetoric.⁵ Moreover, the apparent general disinterest in politics that has become the dominant trait of "liberal" societies witnesses to the devastating effects that information technology has had on the public, which explains the widespread anti-elitism and distrust of politics at least as reflected in social media, which put an end to classical models of public space where issues can be publicized and debated peacefully, and where tensions and conflicts can be managed if not resolved. Indeed, in the current social media-dominated context the evident consequence is that the public sphere is taking new forms that have yet to be defined.

Ironically, this is happening just as concepts of public space, civil society, individual liberties and participatory democracy are making their way into our region. These concepts are all still new to the MENA countries and so are little theorized and even less understood by the larger number of the population. However, their importance is less and less foreign to the average citizen, as the popular demands for better policies and more transparent governance are increasing, and as the space for voicing those demands is also widening. As a crucial principle of a democratic society, the idea of public space continues to feed discussions as participatory democracy is considered

⁴ The term "post-truth" refers to the current political culture characterized by the rise in emotion and conspiracy theories in shaping public opinion. The widespread of the term was so vast that the Oxford Dictionary decided to make it the 2016 word of the year: "After much discussion, debate, and research, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is *post-truth* – an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'." <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>

⁵ see Farnce Culture's podcast <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie/faut-il-renoncer-a-la-verite>

the guarantor of good governance and the preservation of the public good.⁶ Underpinning this postulate is the crucial role of civil society organizations that represent the divergent and even conflictual interests of different groups.

Yet, one cannot help but observe today that public space as historically well-defined and where the actors or players are known, is a concept that is drowned in the overwhelming “noise” of ‘alternative facts’ or opinions posing as facts disseminated by virtual entities (trolls) and their multiple avatars. Equally, public opinion, once the sure outcome of a healthy publicity of social, political and economic issues is deformed and fragmented by the virtual world of social and digital media.⁷ Therefore, reclaiming public space for culture and artistic performance to curb the rampant wave of negativism and intolerance is of the utmost necessity in a country that is emerging from decades of autocratic rule. The importance of this move is based on the idea that sharing artistic sensibility is a major instrument for the transmission of aesthetic values as every person is supposed to have a certain degree of aesthetic sense. Therefore, countering extremism through art and culture is hinged on rehabilitating the sense of community that is shattered in our excessive consumerist realities. This enterprise underscores the importance of taste or aesthetic sensibility which as Emanuel Kant taught us is often coupled with a tendency to sociability; the “man of taste,” says Kant, is inclined to share his aesthetic pleasures, to the point of not being able to sometimes enjoy them unless he is in the company of others. Because all men have the same power of taste, or the subjective conditions of the faculty of judging being the same among all men, they can communicate their representations and knowledge to each other and share the same satisfaction; to share this feeling is to form a society, and it is even the beginning of civilization.⁸

⁶ Larbi Touaf, 2008, Introduction to *The World as a Global Agora: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*. New Castle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

⁷ A good description of the transformation operated by digital media is found in Byung-Chul Han’s book *In the Swarm : Digital Prospects* (2017): “This new medium is reprogramming us, yet we fail to grasp the radical paradigm shift that is underway. We are hobbling along after the very medium that, below our threshold of conscious decision, is definitively changing the ways that we act, perceive, feel, think, and live together.” (ix)

“Clearly, we are facing a crisis again today—a period of critical transition that another upheaval, the digital revolution, has occasioned. Yet again, a formation comprising “the many” is beleaguering the standing balance of power and government. The new mass is the digital swarm. Its features distinguish it radically from the crowd—the classical form that the many assumed.” Byung-Chul Han, *In the Swarm : Digital Prospects*, translated by Erik Butler. Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 2017. 24.

⁸ Immanuel Kant. Critique of the Power of Judgment. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, (5:293).

Therefore, Kant's notion of "sensus communis"⁹ that results from the shared principle of aesthetic judgment --understood not as common sense but as communal sense-- is foundational for the formation of community on the basis of subjectivities that by sharing expressions of their individual tastes prompt the emergence of a space of exchange as each subject is endowed with the same aesthetic sense or capacity to feel the pleasure of contemplating that which is beautiful. Such commonality which is originally lacking¹⁰ and does not require consent, but difference and even dissent is the origin of the sense of community which is continuously undermined in today's digital media-driven hyper-individualistic capitalist society.¹¹

The question then is how can we reinvent a sense of community not as the hypertrophied figure of a unity of unities built on the model of an enlarged self, nor that of an individual identity inflated into a collective identity, but as one that provides a space for valid differences and therefore a space to think and debate forms and models of common existence or co-existence?

Indisputably, it is the arts, narratives, films, music, theatre but also dance and poetry as expressions of individual and collective imagination and the symbolic that constitute the glue that puts the pieces together and make us feel more intensely that we belong to a larger body. In other words, the arts whether verbal or visual, connect individuals to one another, making it possible for the sense of community to exist and take shape. Arts and Culture as the creative and innovative energies of individualities that underpin society proceed from what Jacques Rancière calls "*le partage du sensible*" or the sharing of the sensible:

J'appelle partage du sensible ce système d'évidences sensibles qui donne à voir en même temps l'existence d'un commun et les

⁹ By "sensus communis," however, must be understood the idea of a communal sense [. . .] this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging; which is in turn accomplished by leaving out as far as is possible everything in one's representational state that is matter, i.e., sensation, and attending solely to the formal peculiarities of his representation or his representational state. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University, 2000, (5:293).

¹⁰ According to Roberto Esposito: "the community isn't only to be identified with the *res publica*, with the common "thing," but rather is the hole into which the common thing continually risks falling, a sort of landslide produced laterally and within. This fault line that surrounds and penetrates the "social" is always perceived as the constitutive danger of our co-living." *Communitas The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) (translated by Timothy Campbell) (2010) Stanford: Stanford University Press. p.8.

¹¹ What is meant here by Community (with capital C) is the concept developed by thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, and Roberto Esposito; it is defined away from the notion of communitarianism, which supposes the social division into rival identity communities ("us "vs "others"), in other words where community gathers and binds individuals together, society separates them into rival entities.

découpages qui y définissent les places et les parts respectives. (...) Cette répartition des parts et des places se fonde sur un partage des espaces, des temps et des formes d'activité qui détermine la manière même dont un commun se prête à participation et dont les uns et les autres ont part à ce partage. ¹²

The "sharing of the sensible" is a mode of perception of the world and a mode of interaction with it. It is also a staging (*mise en scene*) that gives roles and responsibilities to whoever participates. In the public space, art and culture (street art, murals, street theatre, music and dance performances...etc.) and all forms of community enthusiasm breed and stimulate a prodigious creative force. As Rémi Astruc notes, Songs, poems, slogans, novels, films, performances, are among other forms of invention and expression to manifest and communicate the outpouring that often leads to the convergence of subjects in one organic entity that suddenly becomes aware of itself. This converging is then lived with extraordinary intensity and humans feel very quickly the need to celebrate this excitement and wonderful sensitivity.¹³

Civil society and the reinventing of the community through the arts in Morocco:

In this respect, I will discuss the rise of civil society in Morocco and how it contributes to create shared values and social change through civic engagement and art. Needless to say that those forms of social activism are paramount in the grounding of a democratic praxis and this is more pressing in societies that are slowly and hesitantly emerging from political and social authoritarianism and their concomitant totalitarian ideologies. Such a context is favourable to uprisings and social-political unrest as the world witnessed with the wave of protest that swept over North-Africa and that is known as the "Arab Spring". Even though Morocco did not experience the violence that characterized the Arab spring in the neighbouring countries, yet the political and social context has been immensely impacted by the youth-led demonstrations that demanded change. Today the country, like the rest of the Arab world is at a crucial moment in its history; protests led by a collective of

¹² Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible, esthétique et politique*. Paris: La Fabrique, 1998. p.12.

¹³ Rémi ASTRUC, (2015) *Nous? L'aspiration à la Communauté et les arts*, Versailles, RKI Press.

young people known as the February 20th Movement has challenged a previously held view that the young generations are apolitical and totally detached from the concerns of their society. Ironically, it is these same young men and women who have triggered a process which many hoped would lead to a more democratic state.

However, the evolution of Morocco's civil society predates the uprisings of 2011. Since independence, civil society has existed in different forms, but it is only since the 1990s that it started to play a role in influencing the political and social changes that have taken place in the country. One of the major characteristics of Moroccan Civil Society in the 1990s is that it replaced the state in many areas both urban and rural through providing social services that the government failed to guarantee, and this became problematic as it opened the doors for massive proselytizing that was later on used for political purposes and even extremist agendas. However, after the terrorist attacks of 2003 and 2006 in Casablanca, the state weighed down heavily on organizations that it suspected of collusion with the terrorists that perpetrated attacks. Since then, Civil Society organizations were closely watched and their actions severely limited. But, with the events of the Arab spring, a "political opening" took place bringing with it some advances in civil and political rights. Particular attention was given to cultural rights, especially Amazigh language and culture, women's rights and the right to education and health.

The initiators and leaders of the 20th of February movement, a group of young men and women with no political affiliation, learned the lesson that political action may trigger political reform but not social change. Real social change needs social/cultural awareness and activism. Hence the emergence of a number of NGOs in Morocco but also in Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon whose aim is to open avenues of creativity and artistic expression to the young generation whose alienation is conducive to diverse forms of violence and extremism.

In Morocco, among the many and varied experiments of claiming public space for social innovation and change, the one that catches attention is the increasing presence of NGOs that advocate for art and culture in the streets of the country's main urban centres. Therefore, I will consider how civil society through the example of one association (Jodours/Racines)¹⁴ and a

¹⁴ On April 16, 2019, the Court of Appeals in Casablanca ordered the final dissolution of the Racines association after a series of trials. A verdict pronounced to punish the NGO for hosting on its premises a three part talk show/debate titled "Un dinner 2 cons" with the subtitle "The epic of the nihilists" (published on Youtube in August 2018) where the participants treated in particular the convictions pronounced at the end of the Rif "Hirak trial" and the royal speech of the 20th August (2018). The court's decision followed a motion filed by

“street theatre” group (Masrah El-mahgour) “Theatre of the Oppressed”¹⁵ work to create the basic foundation for public space in the midst of a general feeling of confusion and hopelessness among Moroccan youth.

In launching its ambitious programme “Culture is the Solution”, “Racines” which in 2014 released its first report titled “The General States of Culture in Morocco,”¹⁶ intended to initiate a “national action plan for culture,” based on the comprehensive study carried out by the NGO and its partners and the recommendations made by professionals, individuals, and institutions during their survey campaign. Thus, in 2016, the same NGO launched its 2nd Edition of “Les Etats Généraux de La Culture.”¹⁷ For three days, the public in Casablanca and from other parts of the country had free access to a varied artistic programming. Tens of associations and professionals of arts and culture, were invited to communicate and exchange ideas through a space of networking, but also to participate in workshops on reflection and discussion around the state of the cultural life and its impact on the people. The events targeted and sought to integrate young people from the slum areas where the young terrorists of 2003 and 2006 originated. Thus, the old Art Deco Slaughter Houses of Casablanca were transformed into a space for all genres of performing arts; music, theatre, painting workshops, dance, graffiti, circus, parkour and art exhibits. “Racines” took that opportunity to publish the results of its vast study of what it termed “the Cultural Practices of Moroccans”, a nation-wide survey of the citizens’ access to culture or lack thereof in order to evaluate cultural policies and monitor the implementation of its previous

the public prosecutor of Casablanca to ban the association for holding an activity of a political nature which the law of associations prohibits.

¹⁵ another prominent association that made a big difference in the booming art scene in Morocco is EAC-L’Boulevard (Arts and Cultural Education), a non-profit organization that advocates for the promotion and development of contemporary music and urban culture in Morocco. Since its creation in 1999, it has continued to organize activities that aimed at the discovery and accompaniment of the young alternative music practitioners, giving them multiple opportunities as concerts, trainings, workshops, meetings and festivals (L’Boulevard, Le Tremplin, BoulevardDoc ...). In 2010, the association created “Boultek”, the first center of contemporary music in Morocco. The association also publishes *L’Kounache*, a collector’s edition dedicated to alternative creation, all disciplines combined. The “Boultek” is a place dedicated to artists of alternative and contemporary, underground and urban music and cultural performance, where they can meet, exchange ideas, repeat, and play. The center has 3 equipped rehearsal studios, a concert hall, a radio studio, two training rooms and a recording studio. Since 2013 EAC-L’Boulevard launched a public painting programme called *Sbagha Bagha*, a festival of street arts, but also and above all, the opportunity to involve the inhabitants and integrate them into a local cultural program anchored in the public space. Since 2015, the association initiated *Jidar*, street painting festival that brings together artists from Morocco and around the world to compete in using public space as a canvas.

Other avenues such as *L’uzine*, *l’atelier de l’observatoire*, *les abbatoires de Casablanca*... have turned into unavoidable cultural hotspots.

¹⁶ the outcome of two years of research, inventory, diagnosis, professional and regional meetings, as well as field studies concerning a large number of artistic disciplines, and cross-sectional studies on cultural governance, training, art education, cultural diversity.

¹⁷ The 3rd edition of Les « Etats Généraux de la Culture » took place in the city of Tiznit (621 Km south of the Capital Rabat) in November 2018.

recommendations. This was the second phase in its long-term programme focused on the cultural practices of ordinary citizens in different regions of the country.

One of the major takeaways of the report was that even though the state spends large sums of money on big cultural events such as music festivals, the construction of youth centres, museums and massive theatres, the impact on the average citizen and young people is insignificant. One of the many outcomes of the survey was that top-down cultural policies are inefficient and the policy of infrastructure cannot replace a real cultural policy. Another takeaway was that the public needs to be empowered to exercise its right to control or at least have a say in public policies. Therefore, the association's aim was to provide citizens with relevant criteria and indicators so that they can assess, on their own and at the local level, the actions of the Ministry of culture and other public administrations in the field of cultural policies. That way the citizens can appropriate cultural action as a universal human right and as a duty to be accomplished and supported by the public institutions.

In short, the idea is to make citizens evaluators, not just commentators, of public policies in general and those of Culture in particular, by asking the right questions and demanding accountability from decision-makers and requiring from them that they explain their choices or lack thereof, while also highlighting bad decisions whether deliberate or the result of incompetence. The origin of this initiative is certainly to be found in the general dissatisfaction with the work of the Ministries of Culture, Education, Youth and Sport, in particular in the fields of cultural action and its proximity to different audiences. It is also related the frustration of the general public in its incapacity to articulate with precision its needs and proposals. This way Culture will no longer be exclusively the business of specialists whose authoritative discourse and sophisticated aesthetic judgment represent and assert the supremacy of scholars over the others, and of confirmed artists on novices.

Therefore, it is necessary to underscore that the project of empowering the public is not only about aesthetic judgment, but about giving the citizens access to knowledge and cultural activities as a public service and a civic duty. The cultural activities covered in assessment workshops include a set of actions or policies such as art education, amateur practices, TV or radio programming... so that people can ask questions like what is the purpose of this festival? Why doesn't the only existing youth centre in the commune work? What obstacles prevent it from accomplishing that for which it was established? Or, who decides the cultural programming, and how? Is there a

music conservatory in my commune? If so, how does it work and for whom? What are the obligations of the ministry or the commune that manages it? Do we have enough public libraries in our city?

The association's initiative comes at a time when the post Arab Spring phase is replete with all kinds of social strife as trust in the state has reached a record low. That is what compels NGOs to direct the attention of the citizens to public policies and especially cultural policies so that it can target what they consider urgent: citizens, society and the public space. This stems from the awareness of what a cultural strategy could yield in terms of raising the level of emancipation of citizens and the liberation of creativity and positive energies.

One may argue, and justly so, that NGOs also have their own political or ideological agendas, and that a report cannot faithfully represent reality with its statistics, analyses and indicators. However, Racine's initiative is more of an introduction to the basics of a bottom-up cultural policy or action, and even if its take on the situation may prove to be wrong, it's first concern is to launch a public debate on the place of culture in the development of society & country. It is a bold project considering that in societies thought to be largely conservative or religious, cultural policies are conceived with the objective of limiting freedom of creation and expression (even though these are guaranteed by the constitution) and the safeguarding of security, and moral principles. But, as true artistic creation is unpredictable, it can shake up, to varying degrees, beliefs and habits. Therefore, citizens' empowerment is the only guarantee that the authorities will not put limits to everything, for when the authorities resort systematically to pre-emptive prohibiting, the consequence is not only censorship but self-censorship which is the worst enemy of resolving controversial issues through public debate.

***Masrah Almahgour* or the "Theatre of the Oppressed"**

Perhaps one of the most prominent cultural experiences born from the matrix of February 20, and inspired by its spirit, adopting its objectives and ideas, is *masrah almahgour* or the "Theatre of Oppressed"¹⁸ referring both to a group of performers, and to the concept developed by Augusto Boal based on Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Like Freire who targeted the poor and the illiterate to get them out of the too often normalized condition of

¹⁸ Theatre of the Oppressed Casablanca (for there is another group in Rabat) is based at L'Uzine, a decommissioned factory turned into a cultural center by the owner who is also its main benefactor. They also tour the country and perform different shows in public places. Their goal is to take theatre into the open spaces where people can have access to it.

economic, social, and political oppression, Boal created this new artistic method that aimed at engaging the public in the conception and execution of performances, giving birth to a popular interactive theatre that rejects the conditions of oppression. In the Moroccan version, the word *Mahgour* (meaning oppressed or despised in Moroccan Arabic) is an adjective from the noun *Hogra* (oppression or contempt) that refers to a strong sense of oppression and disregard. The idea of starting a theatre group with this reference came from a former member of the February 20 movement, Hosni Al-Mokhlis, who previously worked as a journalist and studied theatre in Spain. In an interview with *Al Qods Al Arabi* published on 02/20/ 2016, Al-Mokhlis declared: "February 20th was not only a turning point in the history of modern Morocco, but has a very personal relationship with me as an inspiration and a guide." In Fact, a year after the protests, a group of young people decided to find alternatives and new forms of expression to sustain the rebellious spirit of the movement and to continue interacting with people. Their goal was to transform the act of demonstrating in the street into artistic expressions that are fed by the same motivations to protest, and this by being more attentive to people, and involving them in thinking and seeking solutions through art and creativity.

The street as a stage for a meaningful theatre

The experience of *Masrah Al mahgour*, which can also be seen as a version of the Forum Theatre or even "applied theatre",¹⁹ intersects with the traditional practice of public interactive entertainment known as *al halka* or ring of people around one or many performers, story teller...etc. Thus, the theatre of the oppressed, uses the techniques of *al halqa* that allows the artist/performer to involve voluntary members from the public to cooperate in finding a solution to the situation being presented to the audience. However, the difference between the two forms lies in the fact that prior to any performance, the group determines a situation that is close to peoples' daily concerns --violence, oppression, corrupt public administration, or cases of injustice and impunity-- a scene that clearly embodies a state of oppression and injustice. During the performance, the performers engage the spectators and invite them to express their opinion and start a sort of collective brainstorming to find solutions to the situation. The intervention of a

¹⁹ According to Judith Ackroyd, the diverse varieties of applied theatre have two distinguishing features: "I have identified two features which I believe to be central to our understanding of applied theatre; an intention to generate change (of awareness, attitude, behaviour, etc), and the participation of the audience." Both of these features are found in *Masra'h Al mahgour*.

representative from the audience in the scene is meant to get the neutral spectator involved in changing the state of affairs by diverting the course of the story to find solutions that often vary with the diversity of the public.

For this type of militant art, finding the spaces to expose oppression, cruelty and injustice transparently and without fear is the first step in the path of change. While it is quite difficult to eradicate these forms of injustice, the stage in a public place attracts people to an indirectly pedagogical form of entertainment that aims at making them see things differently and so exert a social pressure for change. In addition, street theatre in a context dominated by oral culture can be a practical way of opening people's minds to the fact that what affects them individually can be solved collectively provided they feel part of the larger body of the community. The experience of the "theatre of the Oppressed"²⁰ in India is good example of how such practice gives rise to an important and influential social movement that liberates individuals from their oppressive circumstances, and that empowers them collectively to be producers of their own historical forms of existence. In Morocco, this is just a first step in the process of producing a large and deep cultural and artistic movement that can sustain change.²¹

As a conclusion, the largescale movement or initiative called "Culture is the solution" is the attempt by civil society networks to put forward culture as a viable means of integrating populations with no access to cultural entertainment. It is also a call to turn culture into a productive sector that can create jobs and value where all social policies have failed. As an oppositional echo to the motto of radical Islamists "Islam is the solution," its philosophy is that without cultural empowerment there will be no political awareness nor effective participation. In other words, culture opens the minds and favors critical thinking and creativity; the two main enemies of totalitarian ideologies.

²⁰ See for example Jana Sanskriti Center for the Theatre of the Oppressed (<http://www.janasanskriti.org/>) whose mission statement goes as follows: "In order to construct a relationship with others, this website is created. Relation means freedom; therefore, relation means construction of power. Dialogue in a relation creates pedagogy where we learn together and the same relation inspires us to go for an inward journey where we discover ourselves. This discovery is what is called an internal revolution, which inspires an external revolution. Our theatre, discovered by Augusto Boal is therefore the rehearsal and the performance of a total revolution. We may have our ideology but one has not to be the slave of an ideology. Dogma cannot create the relation. Let us debate not to destroy the ideas of others but to understand others and ourselves. All of us want to evolve and grow with the objective of constructing a human society.

²¹ other leading artistic experiences that preceded the "theatre of the oppressed" in adopting the problems and concerns of the people and that sprung from the social, political and economic interactions is a theatre group called *Daba Theatre*, and the experimental *Theatre de l'Aquarium* headed by the famous playwright and director Naima Zitan, who worked especially on issues of women.

The “Culture is the Solution” movement and the Theatre of the Oppressed, therefore, seek with modest and even fragile means to invest the spaces left vacant by the state. What they strive to do is bring forth --through practical solutions and hands-on experience-- the opacity of culture and society in order to fight reductionist discourses of the extremists and social media.

Evidently the project faces a great deal of challenges such as the fierce opposition of religious fundamentalists, but also the state’s lukewarm support, the conservatives’ suspicion of any idea of cultural and social change, and, worst of all, the indifference of academia. What the latter needs to do is to shake off its apathy and get out of its isolation to find ways and means to fill the gap that separates it from civil society in order to offers better alternative to the hegemony of the populist agendas that threaten to rip society apart.

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Addressing Extremism Through Literature: An Online Cross-Cultural Conversation on Mahi Binebine's *Horses of God*

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Abstract

In the Fall of 2017, first year liberal arts students at Community College and second year Masters' Students in literature at a university in Morocco collaborated in an online and live conversation focusing on the novel *Horses of God* (*Les Etoiles de Sidi Moumen*) written by Mahi Binabine. The novel describes the lives of four childhood friends growing up in a slum near Casablanca, navigating poverty and purposelessness and being drawn to religious fundamentalism. Students in the two colleges engaged in an online discussion on Facebook and live Google Hangouts exchange in which they shared questions about the novel. Moroccan students provided cultural context for the novel and American students discovered important connections to their own lives. Their contrasting life experiences generated unexpected common ground: an acknowledgement of difference and a shared ethical awareness of ways literature can interrogate political extremism.

Key words: literature, extremism, learning community, online collaboration, dialogue, students' reflections.

Introduction

In the Fall of 2017 students from two very different college communities came together for a virtual online exchange: a first-year liberal arts cluster at a New York City community college and a second-year Masters Program in English Literature and the History of Ideas at a university in northern Morocco. The two cluster courses that served as a basis for our exchange were English Composition and French and Francophone Literature in Translation. Our project, informed by the Collaborative Online International

Learning (COIL) model developed at the State University of New York (SUNY) and currently gaining momentum at LaGuardia Community College, focused on the novel *Horses of God* written by the Moroccan author, Mahi Binebine. The novel, whose original French title was, *Les Etoiles de Sidi Moumen*, was published by Flammarion in 2010. Students read the 2013 English translation for a French Literature in Translation course. As majors in English Literature and the History of Ideas, the Moroccan students also read the novel in English translation. The film, *Horses of God*, by the French-Moroccan director Nabil Ayouch was released in 2012 under the title, *Les Chevaux de Dieu*. The writer and the director worked closely on the project and have launched cultural and artistic centers for youth in various slums and underprivileged communities as an alternative to the forces of religious extremism. The novel traces the lives of four childhood friends growing up in the Sidi Moumen slum, near Casablanca, navigating poverty, violence and religious fundamentalism. The community college students and the second year MA Moroccan students read and discussed the novel in their individual classes, and watched the film. The American and Moroccan students then engaged in a live online conversation and wrote follow-up reflections about their conversation. In preparation for their collaboration, they created introductory videos about themselves and their lives which they shared on a private Facebook page created by the MA students.

When we suggested to our Moroccan colleague that his students might collaborate with us on *Horses of God*, we foresaw the potential for rich conversations on issues relevant to all of us (insecurity and threat of violence worldwide) but also the risk (and, perhaps, the thrill) of tackling sensitive and controversial subjects. We hypothesized that literature, and this text in particular, could provide an alternative way of analyzing extremism, one that would facilitate an understanding of its causes from an inside point of view. In response to the claim in the Call for Papers by *Ikhtilaf* that, “the dominant intellectual discourses of our time seem incapable of enlightening people on how to deal with the extremely complex realities of the world,” we wanted to find out if a dialogue across cultures about a single provocative text might offer new insights into the ways students negotiate an understanding of difference.

Our collaborative project draws on two pedagogical initiatives: learning communities and online mediated virtual exchanges. Learning communities involve an intentional restructuring of students’ time, credit, and learning experiences in order to build community and foster explicit connections across disciplines. Clearly, an international conversation between American

and Moroccan university students has the potential to build community and foster interdisciplinary connections. In addition, learning community leaders have long observed that, “Well-designed learning communities can “break down barriers based on race, class and national origin” and promote “genuine exchange and collaboration across differences” (Lardner 8). We approached our project with this goal in mind, and the American college in this collaboration is a long-standing leader in the learning community movement in the U.S. As a teaching method, COIL emphasizes the interactive aspect of mutual learning that is so central to both learning communities and global citizenship. A large part of COIL’s mission is to “encourage and support the development and implementation of collaborative online international courses as a format for experiential cross-cultural learning. Participating students are sensitized to the larger world by deepening their understanding of themselves, their culture, how they are perceived by ‘others’ and how they perceive ‘others’. These globally networked courses intensify disciplinary learning in fields where engaging other cultural perspectives is key” (*Guide for Collaborative Online International Learning Course Development*, SUNY COIL Center, 1). COIL facilitates active learning, providing students with opportunities to “become active agents in constructing and construing a global culture, rather than merely consuming it” (*COIL Faculty Guide*, LaGuardia Community College, 1).

Current academic leaders studying international learning believe that, “successful educational internationalization may promote the exciting prospect of a genuinely reciprocal and multi-vocal global conversation” (Hansen and Peck 21). In addition, the Association of American Colleges and Universities is a strong supporter of initiatives that develop global citizenship. In 2011, its leadership proposed that colleges and universities “create settings that foster students’ understanding of the intersection between their lives and global issues and their sense of responsibility as local and global citizens” (AAC&U, 2011a). Finally, Martha Nussbaum, a leading contemporary philosopher, identifies some of the capabilities she deems essential to global citizenship, including “examination of one’s own traditions” and “exercising a ‘narrative imagination’ that allows one to see the world through the eyes of others” (289). We believed that a first step in a global conversation would be for students to experience an openness to another culture and to individual others, through a literary text and in conversation with citizens of another culture (or cultures). We hoped that this shared reading of *Horses of God* and cross-cultural conversation would lead to an enhanced understanding of difference.

As professors of language and literature, we were especially interested in the role of literature as a transformative agent. Would a cross-cultural dialogue about a text that dealt with poverty, violence and terrorism invite students to think deeply about extremism? How would students from such different countries as Morocco and the United States respond to the issues raised in this novel? Would this conversation enable them to discover common ground? What concerns would they have about perceived differences in their respective cultures? A key question for us was how might our international online classroom become a space where community and understanding would be encouraged, supported, nourished? We were intrigued by the potential of an extended online conversation across cultures as an alternative to more traditional models of exchange such as a junior year abroad, an experience that is costly and difficult to arrange at a public university. Would this model of exchange offer an opportunity for in-depth discussion of difficult issues, issues that students might initially see very differently based on cultural differences and even lack of information about another culture. Finally, we wondered if there were other such initiatives in higher education, and we discovered, as an example, that in 2015, the 10th International Urdu Conference was devoted to literature, art and culture as “the first line of defense against extremism.” Crafting our pedagogical work to enable greater awareness and cross-cultural conversation, echoing the spirit of *la littérature engagée*, we advocated for the use of literature as a force against extremism. We hope to show here that our students engaged in a “multi-vocal” conversation and demonstrated a beginning awareness of global citizenship.

Structure of the Project:

The community college professors met with the Moroccan professor and his students via Google Hangouts on November 27, 2017. The purpose of this initial conversation was to plan the exchange in detail and to identify relevant themes and questions for the online session. During that conversation we agreed to have both sets of students record videos that illustrated some aspect of their lives, sharing neighborhoods, school plans and dreams. This was accomplished easily because the MA students invited all of the community college students and their professors to join their closed Facebook site where students could share videos and exchange questions about their cultures.

We then set up a group meeting of the two classes on December 5, 2017 via a 90 minute online session. This took place during a regular team-taught class for the community college students and a late afternoon hour for the MA

students. During this meeting students discussed the context and events of the novel and exchanged questions about their reactions to controversial moments in the text. The three professors guided students during this cross-cultural dialogue, noting how students approached the conversation, what delicate questions were confronted, what changes in perspective arose for them, and what valuable insights and common ethical ground emerged. What follows is a synthesis of the actual conversation and post-COIL reflections submitted by both sets of students.

Approaches to Dialogue and a Note on Our Pedagogy

We were aware of the difficulties of asking students to engage with a novel that depicted terrorism, and the added challenge of inviting students to discuss this topic with students who were from the culture and country represented in the novel. Employing several strategies to create what we believed would be a safer space for dialogue, we invited to review the questions they wanted to ask in class prior to the online session. This gave them the opportunity to consider how to conduct the exchange honestly but respectfully. Students were also encouraged to think about the nature of their concerns and to consider why certain events in the novel involving women's roles and the rape of a young boy, for example, might be difficult to discuss with their Moroccan peers. Both groups recognized that these specific topics were those where cultural differences would be strongest. Considering how to frame questions about these topics was an important learning experience.

Although we collected student reflections as a way of reconstructing the learning experience and gaining insight into the specific value of online learning, we did not believe that a quantitative analysis of responses would capture the specificity of what students learned and how they learned. We did think, upon reflection after the exchange, that a pre/post survey might provide useful information about how the experience altered their perceptions of others, even their attitudes towards the text under discussion. However, some of these changes were acknowledged by students in their reflections.

Because we knew that American students were not well informed about Islam, one of the professors dedicated a class to providing background on the socio-cultural roots of radical Islam.¹ American students responded positively

¹ The lecture aimed to explain the difference between Islam and Islamism and used these references: G. Makris, *Islam in the Middle East. A Living Tradition*; Francois Burgat, *The Islamic Movements in North Africa*; and John Entelis, *Political Islam in the Maghreb*.

to this presentation and discussion, noting that the very definition of Islam, its purposes, values and goals, had never been explained to them before. Later, in American students' reflections on the events of the novel, they emphasized just how helpful the lecture and discussion had been in elucidating the distinction between Islam and radical Islam.

When we began our live online conversation, a striking feature of American and Moroccan students' responses was their sensitivity and openness to each others' identities and worlds. Most of the American students had just completed high school. The Moroccan students were in their second year of graduate school. Despite the age difference, the young American students brought something unique in this exchange. Youssra, a Moroccan student acknowledged their engagement directly: "I liked the fact that your students asked a lot of questions which were very deep and challenging. They helped us widen our discussion and get further in conversation with them." The same student adds: "I believe that our dialogue offered deep insights into some of the contentious issues that nobody seems to heed warnings about, such as rape." At the same time, there was an awareness on the part of Moroccan students of radically different approaches to specific topics such as the roles of women in Moroccan and American culture.

At the outset, American students were very up-front about a concern they had previously discussed in class: they wanted Moroccan students to understand that they wished to be respectful of another culture even though there were difficult topics they were curious about. Stephanie, an American student, expressed her apprehension: "I really didn't know where to start off and I was afraid the questions I wanted to ask would be interpreted in the wrong way." Benji, her classmate, agrees: "Yes I definitely was cautious about the questions I was asking my Moroccan peers. I didn't want to offend anyone about their view of the novel or, most importantly, their culture, by asking something that may question their beliefs. When making my video at LaGuardia, I made sure to speak about tragic events that were significant to us, such as 9/11, to give them a connection to how we have gone through tragic events too."

Moroccan students expressed a similar desire to engage in respectful dialogue. Several Moroccan students exhibited a high level of openness and critical thinking in their responses. Ferdaous, for example, liked the opportunity of being challenged by American students. “They perceived the Moroccan culture as a new platform of discussion and they were open about taboo subjects such as homosexuality and bombing.” The cultural differences and the spirit of discovery, inquisitiveness and pride were recognized by Moroccan students: “The conversation gave an insight into how these young students are open to learn more about Moroccan culture, and it is such a great accomplishment that Moroccan books are able to echo higher in the literary sky of American culture. I was impressed that we Moroccans are very dedicated and devoted to our culture. As far as our international peers are concerned, I was surprised by the number of ideas they were willing to discuss.” Moroccan students were eager to praise their American peers, and from the beginning of this conversation, faculty, both American and Moroccan, noted that their students were highly attentive, attuned if you will, to the generosity and openness of students from very different backgrounds.

Thus, in spite of the American students’ initial fears of offending their peers, they were encouraged by the support they received and were successful in engaging in a burgeoning dialogue. One of the rewarding aspects of the collaboration was the Facebook interaction that preceded the online session and continued afterwards. One student commented, “Overall the most interesting part of the project was the private Facebook page shared by the Moroccan students so our class and international peers could share and interact with each other on a more personal level. I enjoyed including videos and pictures of New York, telling them it’s a wonderful place to live in apart all the commotion that occurs here. I enjoyed their video as well; everything they included in their videos was completely different from what I had expected.” Faculty made note of this type of response and considered how the Facebook exchange added an important personal dimension that may have made both sides more receptive as they turned to the more difficult dialogue about the novel.

Engaging with Difficult Topics: Religion, the Role of Women, Homosexuality

One of the American students, Abir, began the conversation by identifying a specific concern that American students had about discussing religious difference: “One interesting thing I noticed is that although the topic of radical Islam was important, it seemed a little hard to discuss because almost all, if not all, of the students were Muslim. I can completely understand the

hesitation to discuss it in such a free manner as we would do in our [American] group discussions, but I made sure to establish that we understood and could differentiate radical Islam from common Muslim beliefs.” Abir was eager to let Moroccan students know that the American class had been introduced to this difference in a previous class lecture and discussion.

Abir went even deeper in comparing the promises of religions in different cultures: “It really hit me when one of the students explained the idea of paradise and how it is advertised for those who are without hope. There is a form of paradise in almost every religion and without this reward of paradise who would follow it? It made me compare the Muslim religion to Hinduism in which we are offered paradise as well, and I started to think about how religion is sold to communities and people; it even made me remember how Christianity was taught to slaves and used to inject the idea that there was a heaven waiting for them.” Mourad, from Morocco, articulated a recognition that Americans are more exposed to religious difference: “The idea of religion mentioned during the debate reflected a key aspect of difference. . . I can safely say that the majority of the readership, at least as far as my classmates are concerned, is of the same faith. Our friends in the U.S. showed us how a different system of religious belief shapes and indeed alters the perception of the work at hand.” To the faculty, and to students of both communities, these complementary observations demonstrated a high degree of honesty and openness, as well as an ability to reach for a broader understanding of ways religions shape thinking. A kind of meta-discourse was emerging in this exchange, one that we thought would be valuable for future discussion and even writing assignments.

American students also raised questions about women’s roles and homosexuality, and they sensed hesitation on the part of the Moroccan group. “The question I asked about women and their role in society caused the room to go quiet,” Destiny observed, “since a woman’s role is much like in the book.” Brenda corroborates Destiny’s perception: “One of my classmates asked a sensitive question about the different treatment that women receive compared to men. The women [in the book] are more judged and they are expected to do better compared to men. For example, Nabil (the son), and many other people, judged Tamu (his mother) because she is a prostitute (sinful) but if the guys Yachine and Nabil have sexual intercourse they do not get called out. I noticed that the Moroccan students were just looking around seemed uncomfortable and nobody wanted to answer. It took a while until someone said, ‘it is because homosexuality occurs behind closed doors while

prostitution does not. That is that why prostitution is judged more.” American student reactions may also reflect a lack of understanding about differences in communication styles. In a follow-up discussion in the American classroom, faculty asked students to consider what a moment of silence might mean—that it does not always mean “discomfort,” but perhaps a need for reflection because the question is complex and deserves a thoughtful response. Students agreed that assumptions made about silence might be incorrect. Faculty asked themselves if a discussion of how to (or not to) read the responses of others would have benefited from conversation—in advance of the live session.

Following the brief exchange about prostitution and homosexuality, an American student, Valeria, summoned the courage to ask the Moroccan students about a violent scene in the novel: “Why do you think the author included the gang rape of one of the boys?” One of the Moroccan students offered an explanation: “We believe the author included the scene in order to call attention to the consequences of sexual oppression.” Jihane expressed her surprise at the American students’ reaction to this difficult scene, and her understanding of why. “They were surprised at the homosexual scenes in the novel. I think that they assumed that such acts do not happen in Muslim communities, just because the Islamic faith prohibits homosexual acts in general, and also because it is not really heard of widely.” Faculty were impressed with the framing of the initial question because asking about an author’s choice brought forth a very forthright response, an awareness of a writer’s desire to show the consequences of a kind of oppression. To us, this was one of the stronger moments of the exchange, including Jihane’s follow-up observations regarding common assumptions Americans may have about Islam.

At various points in the conversation, American students assumed that the text reflected the reality of women’s roles in Morocco today. Stephanie, for example, conflates the two worlds: “Their culture in my opinion involves a lot of violence and restrictions for women; but in my culture, we are equal to men.” She continues: “I wanted to ask why in the book women were viewed as home-makers and only they were blamed for the temptation of men. I wanted to know their personal experience without making them feel uncomfortable.” Mariam, a Moroccan student offered a contrasting view and revealed a degree of awareness that American students were making unwarranted assumptions: “This collaboration made me discover that our international peers do not know about our culture as much as we know about their culture.” American faculty felt that their students might have benefited

from a more in-depth advance discussion of women's identities in both America and Morocco. For an eighteen-year-old American female student to announce that "we are equal to men" is a statement that would probably not have gone unchallenged in our own classroom; conversely, Mariam's statement that their international peers "do not know about our culture as much as we know about theirs," while probably true, made us curious and begged for more explication. We noted this for future online conversations.

As much as the American students tried to be careful and cautious so as not to insult their Moroccan peers, their assumptions surfaced. But Moroccan students made their own assumptions as well, as evidenced by this reflection by Rania: "As a part and parcel of a culture and religion that are frequently attacked and regarded to be synonymous with violence and hatred, I learnt to be open-minded, patient and kind to set the best example of a peaceful and loving Muslim female." To an American audience, Rania's comments felt slightly defensive, but the professors also saw this as an opportunity for a follow-up in-depth discussion of what constitutes global awareness in relation to gender roles.

In spite of delicate questions about women, sexuality, religion and violence, overall, what characterized the dialogue among students was openness, inquisitiveness, the courage to address difficult questions, and pride in one's culture. There was also evidence of stereotyping and some defensiveness—bridges still to cross. However, a first step is recognizing how assumptions interfere with understanding. Students were not immediately able to overcome stereotypes and assumptions about each other's culture, but their awareness of this problem was surfaced by the exchange. The tensions led the professors to reflect on effective pedagogies for addressing these assumptions. On the one hand, faculty believed it was important to anticipate and develop advance conversations about key areas of possible conflict, misunderstanding, and even stereotyping. On the other, it seemed pedagogically valuable to allow these moments of difference to arise through the students' comment, rather than over-preparing. We reasoned that a good online exchange can always be enriched by follow-up discussion in individual classrooms. A future goal Moroccan and American faculty agreed upon was to have the exchange extend over an entire semester, so that the most complex issues, and contrasting beliefs, could be revisited.

My Culture in the Eye of the Other: What Have I Learned? Commonalities

During the Facebook conversation that preceded the Google Hangout session, three of the Moroccan students created a short video in which they explained to the American students that while they were not from Casablanca, they were familiar with the slum, Sidi Moumen, that is the setting for the novel. They indicated that they came from poverty and could relate to the young men in the novel. American students shared this connection, noting that “it’s the same over here,” referencing areas in the greater New York City area where poverty and violence are common.

In this way, the novel helped students from both cultures think more deeply about identity and the social conditions that may contribute to violence. In response to a discussion of Sidi Moumen where the novel is set, the American student, Quan, commented that, “there are poor sections of New York City where young people may be drawn to drugs and gangs.” His classmate, Kelly, echoed this emphasis on commonalities across cultures: “the conversation made me realize how society is so judgmental about others because of their race, religion, or even on how people look. The thing that was illuminating to me while talking to them was that they are humans just like us and they should not be judged.”

Mariam, a Moroccan student, noted the novel author’s incisiveness in pinpointing the roots of violence: “I think that Binebine succeeded in showing the roots of evil and the social reality of terrorism through the portrayal of a group of young men as victims of the social conditions in which they were raised. Even though the group of young men that were portrayed in this novel are Moroccans, I think that the way the story is told shows that every human being, if raised in the same set of circumstances and lived the same experiences, can threaten the peace of the society. In addition to that, those young men are not the ones to be blamed, since their choice to bomb themselves and die was not a choice in the first place.” The key question for us was, did the literary text, serve the goal of exploring, exposing and challenging extremism? Faculty were impressed by the desire, on the part of both Moroccan and American students, to point to commonalities in social conditions that are conducive to violence, and to share their awareness that Binebine was effective in humanizing the young men who were inducted into terrorism.

Connections between worlds were expanded as American students indicated that they recognized similarities between the impoverished community, Sidi Moumen, and areas of New York City that are also places without hope and that foster gangs, drug use and crime. Students from both countries voiced their awareness of their relatively privileged life conditions.

Crystal noted: "I was raised fortunately in a place where I had everything I needed and enough to get things I wanted; hearing about the struggles that are very real in life open my eyes to how fortunate I really am." Mourad, from Morocco, commented, "I liked the fact that we shared some similar perspectives on how poverty affects the individual, their sense of identity and the behavior resulting thereof. The insights of our friends were interesting in the sense that they showed that though the cultural setting and backgrounds are different, the main ideas the author wanted to communicate to his readership were indeed delivered successfully. Valeria observed: "My major take-away from this collaboration that might help me in any aspect of my education and life experience was that a book can have a powerful impact on one's life." One American student, in advance of the collaboration, volunteered that she couldn't stop reading the novel and that this had never happened to her before.

A majority of students took pride in their common rejection of violence. Jihane, from Morocco, noted that the collaboration was helpful in illuminating cultural difference but also a shared abhorrence of violence: "This session offered a concrete example for both sets of students, not only to compare the literary text, *Horses of God*, with the movie but also to discuss both with real people from each culture. What was illuminating about this online session was the recognition that we belong to different cultures, religions and beliefs, but we still reject any kind of violence that can be seen in any society." Valeria, from New York, expressed her frustration at the terrorist act: "The act didn't change the world; it only took innocent lives." She even had a message for suicide-bombers to be: "These mission leaders you admire are using you because you feel you lack purpose. Prove them wrong. Choose to live."

The importance of education was debated by both sides. An American student commented, "One thing that the Moroccan students said was how these kids from *Horses of God* were taken advantage because they didn't receive any education growing up. That is true because since they didn't have any knowledge they had to follow whatever they heard was good." During the online session, a Moroccan student also emphasized the lack of intellectual or ethical education and the way this lack of knowledge leads to violence. The relationship between education and a decision not to follow a violent path was corroborated by the American students' observation that the only novel's character that decided not to blow up himself is the one who had some schooling in his life. Another American student commented, "it shows just how important education is and just how much it impacts our lives. This is something that one from any race can relate to."

Students from both countries agreed that this experience should be continued. Stephanie observed, “I honestly do recommend this project to be passed onto the next class, I really think they would enjoy it just because it gets them out of their comfort zone.” They showed appreciation of uniqueness of this exchange and expressed desire for continued and deeper dialogue. The desire to pursue this collaboration is evidenced by Jihane’s email accompanying her reflection: “I sincerely think that this international project has huge potential and that, if continued, it will greatly benefit English and English literature students worldwide. The very concept of choosing a literary work, reading it together, and discussing it with students from other places and backgrounds is a wonderful opportunity to open up to other ideas and insights. But also, and most importantly, it has the ability of enabling students to contribute to an enriching and inspiring debate on world issues that touch us all.” Jawad, from Morocco, concluded: “The most interesting thing to me during this little adventure is to know that no matter what one's culture or nationality are, when it comes to the fundamental issues of the human condition they cannot help but agree with you, or at least see your point. It is probably the ease with which I will approach other international collaborations because now I know that it is a door through which one can explore different perspectives and share ideas with those who are not necessarily affiliated with my own culture.” Both sets of students enthusiastically endorsed the project as one that encouraged cross-cultural conversation and confidence that this kind of dialogue affects their learning and belief in the possibilities of global citizenship. In addition to the salient commonalities discovered by students, they diverged on several major issues. These differences were as instructive as the commonalities.

Differences

While students agreed on the centrality of education in deterring terrorist threats, some demonstrated an important awareness that lack of education may not be the only cause. Brenda, commented: “The Moroccan students said, ‘education is the key in stopping terrorism.’ I feel this is true in some ways; however, there are still people that were educated and they still became terrorists. For example, 9/11 with the twin towers, all the terrorists were educated people.” This student’s reaction is perhaps a result of a class discussion, prior to the online conversation, about 9/11 attacks perpetrated by educated middle class young men.

Not surprisingly, Moroccan students had a more politically connected, personal understanding of the novel. One student put it in the larger political context of the Muslim world, beyond the limited space of the Arab world.

Mohamed observed, “Given the fact that it deals with the subject matter of the recent conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims in today’s world, means that the novel emboldens the readers to open an interesting debate.” Eager to point out that Muslims are unfairly singled out as terrorists, Mourad states that, “terrorist attacks have killed more Muslims than non-Muslims,” emphasizing that the novel “tries to show the misuse of Islam.” If the comments of this Moroccan student leaves the impression that he is on the defensive, his passion suggests that he was eager to dissect misunderstandings about the Muslim world.

Jawad, effectively summarized the differences between the Moroccan students’ understanding of the book and that of the Americans, revealing an astute awareness of the ways our cultures shape us: “The main idea illuminated by the collaboration was the perceptible difference between the two counterparts. It showed me what issues are imperative to them according to their culture and social conditions in comparison to ours. They were able to read notions of stereotypical depictions of women and double standards between the lines of *Horses of God*, while we attempted to dissect concepts like religious dogma, sexual suppression, and class hierarchy, issues that are pressing in our culture.” Mourad offers another insight into the complexities of their inside understanding versus Americans’ external one: “Another interesting point is the alienation our friends seemed to have experienced from the narrative of the book. The life experience of the characters was not as identifiable for them as it was for us as Moroccans. However, this particular idea presented us with a challenge; I personally found it difficult to articulate the point that though we may partially relate to some of the events or experiences of the characters, we still are placed (intentionally or not) outside the sphere of a world that is fictitious. Some of us saw the slums and the kind of life people could lead around them; some of us even had friends from such an environment and, for me, this is what explains our ability to make projections while we were reading the work of Binebine. Still, it was by no means a world we could pretend is ours. This is something that I think is a major point of difference in our experience of *Horses of God*’s local readership, as opposed to an international one.”

We noticed nuanced differences in the intellectual level of understanding in the two groups of students, and we believe that some of these differences may be associated with the different levels of education as well as the Americans’ lack of prior exposure to the Moroccan culture. Moroccan students made a sophisticated effort to understand and explain these differences in sociological terms while American students emphasized their

perceptions of difference and also of connection. Moroccan students found common ground in the entire group's rejection of violence. American students strove to understand religious parallels as well, as when Abir connects the promise of paradise in Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Both groups recognized the relationship between poverty, hopelessness, and violence but they also noted that not all terrorism is committed by the poor or disenfranchised. Finally, they were united in their desire for future conversations.

So What? Valuable Takeaways for Students

If the community college and MA students' learning was enriched by reflecting on the key themes and issues that the novel, *Horses of God*, explores, what did each group learn about the other? What commonalities emerged? What cross-cultural connections were made? What was the specific value for them of the online exchange?

One striking example of cross-cultural connection was that the dialogue allowed an American student to voice his feelings about prejudice against Muslims and African Americans, as both groups are often blamed for being violent. Benji commented, "This reading made me think about myself and my race because African American men are all perceived as violent when that is not the case. There are very well educated and successful African American people out there who are not violent. These stereotypes should not be based on other people's actions because it's not fair to the ones who try to break the stereotypes but also come close to succeeding but come short because of society." Students were united in their recognition of the problem of stereotyping and a conversation that began with the text broadened to reveal their knowledge of difficulties based on poverty, lack of education and de facto segregation of certain communities.

Several students commented enthusiastically on the uniqueness and value of having a cross-cultural conversation. Andy noted, "people often have to work or collaborate with people they're not familiar with." His classmate, Destiny, was also enthusiastic about the connection: "I now know students miles away that I can connect with through literature." The Moroccan student, Ferdaous, appreciated American students' "ability to communicate about serious issues without any prejudice." Her classmate, Jihane, adds: "I also appreciated the fact that they seemed to be a harmonious and open-minded group." Crystal, an American student, observed, "This collaboration made me realize that there is more to the world. That as a people we need to realize there is a need to be more aware of difficulties others face." Jihane,

from Morocco, noted the specific value of cross-cultural conversation: “I realized that diametrically opposed backgrounds, instead of being a hindrance to such a process, are a source of inspiration, reflection and insight and contribute greatly to shape our personality, open-mindedness, and respect for other people.” Finally, Abir comments, “The major takeaway from this project is that it broadened my horizons. These Moroccan students are halfway around the world and they share some of the same great ideas and have amazing ones of their own; it was an honor to meet them and I felt I grew as a person in terms of experience and character from being able to have a discussion with them; it was a quite rewarding experience.”

Faculty Responses and a Note on Online versus Traditional Classroom Dialogues

Was the COIL collaboration an effective format for enhancing students’ understanding of their own, and of each other’s, cultures? Did a common ethical ground emerge? Alternately, in some instances, is a recognition of and respect for difference a better, or more appropriate, response? Is it important that students be faced with a culturally dissonant experience, something that, as one student suggests, forces them outside their comfort zone, for genuine learning, specifically, global learning, to take place? What were the specific benefits of conducting this conversation in an online format? We asked ourselves how this online collaboration helped students to respect difference and to think critically about ethical issues that the literary text foregrounded. Here, we share our responses to student dialogue and reflections.

During the conversation, we noticed several things about differences in ways students responded to each other in the online format. American students were especially intrigued to find out how Moroccan students would speak about events in the novel. Moroccan students were thrilled that a Moroccan novel was the subject of study for an American literature class. But it became clear in initial class conversations in the U.S. that students were apprehensive about discussing the material, fearful of offending their Moroccan peers. As a result, they were more careful in composing their questions, and, we believe, more attentive in listening to answers. Some of their comments also suggested they were making an effort to interpret non-verbal cues, body language, and even silence, for example. While there was little room, or time, for ice-breaking conversation, the Facebook page was an extremely valuable addition to the conversation. Both groups of students enjoyed sharing their communities and, more specifically, it gave some of the Moroccan students an opportunity to provide American students with a better

understanding of the novel's context. One group Moroccan males explained that they connected with the young men in the novel, because they too came from poverty, but the choices the characters made were very far from their experience. What we as faculty took away from this is that there may be distinct pedagogical advantages to the online (and live skype) exchange: attention, focus, respectful listening, and initiative to share and teach another community about your own.

We agreed that the most productive aspects of the experience were related to student enthusiasm for an inter-cultural dialogue and their generous commitment to an open exchange. They eagerly sought connections, commonalities and, they asked, and answered, difficult questions. Not everything discussed was resolved, or resolvable, and it was not possible to avoid some stereotyping. But it was important that students were often able to recognize stereotyping when it occurred. They also observed differences in the level, and kind, of cultural knowledge each group brought to the conversation. There was a genuine consensus that students wanted to continue this kind of conversation, that they saw the value of a cross-cultural dialogue about a literary text and its potential role in fighting extremism. The fact that we chose a text set in the outskirts of Casablanca that examined poverty and purposelessness and traced young men's induction into terrorism gave the Moroccan students a difficult task. Yet they rose to the challenge of thinking critically about the novel. Amal summarizes the author's effective delineation of the causes of terrorism: "I think that Mahi Benebine was successful in spotting the main causes of terrorism." But she also understands the author's emphasis on the ethical complexity of the situation for the young men: "What is significant about the novel is that terrorists are also considered victims of their own violent acts. From the beginning of the novel, their lives were a product of many social imbalances. Benebine tries to convey the message that as long as there is injustice, poverty and illiteracy in society and as long as the growing gap between rich and poor is deliberately ignored, there will always be suicide bombers who will kill themselves and others to go to "paradise." Jawad concurs with Amal in speaking of the vulnerability of these young men: "With all the inner and outer turmoil these kids have incurred, and all the suppressed emotional and sexual drives that make no sense to their troubled psyches, they had to find something higher and purer by means of which they could perhaps give meaning and purpose to their lives." However, the Moroccan students also noted the ethical failures of these young men: "They did not manage to develop a correct sense of morality in this lawless quasi post-apocalyptic wasteland of Sidi Moumen. And

that is exactly when they are introduced to the religious fanatics who want to purge the world of sin. The vulnerability of “The Stars of Sidi Moumen” is exploited as they [the terrorist leaders] give them a sense of legitimacy by making them feel that they belong to an Islamic nation, “an imagined order... Thus, whatever they did was morally correct according to their newly held beliefs, and even had divine reward at the end however atrocious and inhumane it is.” We found these reflections rich and nuanced in students’ recognition of the young men’s vulnerability and implicit quest for purpose. In identifying the fact that Binebine depicts not only the atrocities of terrorism but also engages our sympathy for the young men, they illustrated the way literature can help students identify the complex ethical dimensions of a problem. We agreed that this dimension should be a key area for follow-up in future online conversations.

In reviewing student responses, we learned that assumptions persist despite the best intentions. For example, American students sometimes seemed to view Muslim students as a monolithic singular identity. There was evidence in their responses that looking at a classroom in which all the women are veiled had this effect. If we want to enhance awareness, we need to get students to see that assuming any group shares a single ideology is a form of stereotyping, one that was noted by Moroccan students who were quick to defend themselves when they thought American students were judging them. We agreed it would be productive to find time to talk about these assumptions and their dangers in a second or third conversation.

Overall we discovered that the COIL collaboration offered us an important opportunity to examine our pedagogy together, to reflect on topics that needed more advance clarification and support, and to observe and appreciate the generosity and courage that students manifested in their engagement with their peers. Participating in this kind of online community differs from a live collaboration in subtle ways. We noticed that students were more respectful of their peers, possibly because they did not have the luxury of knowing them better. There was a heightened awareness of areas of difference, given the subject matter of the novel *and* the reality of interacting with individuals from very different cultural communities. Finally, it was clear to us from this collaboration, that we three professors look forward to developing our next COIL project, using literature in ways that will engage students in a more extended dialogue. We hope that this kind of exchange will facilitate an interrogation of assumptions and an expansion of boundaries and a deeper understanding of difference. As one student commented, “I realized that diametrically opposed backgrounds, instead of being a hindrance to

understanding, are a source of inspiration, reflection and insight and contribute greatly to shape our personality, open-mindedness, and respect for other people.”

Students emerged from this dialogue with an enhanced understanding of others who differ from them in significant ways, and with a critically humanistic awareness of the sources of violence and terrorism. Their responses illuminated the complex ways that conversations about literature and culture may function as a powerful force against prejudice and extremism.

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“Always the border, (...) you belong here, you don’t!” Moroccan students at Universities in Germany

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Abstract

For universities in the occident countries, internationality is publicity; likewise for Germany. Yet, behind the friendly welcome and the open doors, a powerful play of distinctions and prejudice, bias and favoritism remains often unrevealed. This article tackles the tension between openness and exclusion from two perspectives, from outside and from inside. First, this article reflects the dilemma of difference. Based on an empirical research with qualitative interviews to generate data and to debunk distinctions, it tackles furthermore the perceptions of international students from Morocco at universities in Germany. What suggestions could be derived from this to improve the Institution University as a place of knowledge? This was the question of a study from Kiefer (2014), which could be located between sociology, and educational sciences with a strong racism-critical accent and which wanted to bring the perceptions of international students into a serious discussion in Germany. Now, this article aims to introduce into the Moroccan discourse about migration, identity and differences some results of this study.

Keywords: Dilemma of difference, international students, belongings, racism, internationalization, othering

Whenever a terrorist attack takes place in the West, the European media and the general public turn very quickly to describe the perpetrators: They live in the peripheral suburbs of Paris, or of Brussels, they are radicalized or even illegal immigrants; they are unqualified, social losers, hopeless, and poor. In individual cases this may be true, but in general, this image is wrong.

On the contrary, not a few terrorists or sympathizers of radical groupings are highly qualified. The most well-known example may be Mohammed A., the head of the terrorist group behind the attacks of September 11, 2001, who first seemed to be a well-integrated student in Hamburg, as well as, less well

known, but more recently, at Darmstadt University, also in Germany, Malik F., an inconspicuous doctoral student with a scholarship for mathematics, who became an IS sympathizer before he was taken off the university's register and prosecuted. It is to be assumed, that the process of "*communitization*", the experience of community, emotionality and belonging is more important than the educational level and the economic component. Furthermore, the fight against social injustice may also be a motive in a process of vicarious victimization, as well as the lack of perspective and participation, in short, the failure of social inclusion. Anyway, it may be worth to have a look on the situation of migrant students and their perception of belonging.

However, this article neither has the intention to give explications concerning the process of radicalization of international students or highly qualified migrants nor to formulate strategies against it. Rather, it just aims to present experiences of international students coming from Morocco, an example of a country with low per capita income, to Germany, a Western industrial country. At the same time, it wants to introduce into the Moroccan discourse of migration, difference and identity a German study about the perceptions of students from Morocco at Universities in Germany (Kiefer 2014), that reflects the dilemma of difference from a combined perspective of sociology and transcultural pedagogy with a racism critical accent. Nevertheless, the pointed-out ambivalence between welcome and rejection, between openness and exclusion, may also be helpful when we talk about the feeling of belonging, participation and inclusion or vice versa, when it comes to exclusion, rejection and radicalization.

The approach to the subject of the experiences of Moroccan students in Germany is tackled from two different angles, from outside and from inside: On the one hand, the structural conditions are reflected, the barriers and the discourses that international students have to cope with at universities in the West; on the other hand, based on a qualitative research, their individual perceptions, their strategies and their capacity to act were considered. The author knows both societies, the Moroccan and the German, and argues as a (trans-) migrant with hybrid identity; yet, conscious of the ambivalence of her own privileged position. The aim was not to talk on behalf or about Moroccan students, which would have been arrogant, or naïve, but more likely to talk 'beside' them. Furthermore, the study initially wanted to make the positions of Moroccan and/or African researchers and writers visible in a debate about migration and education in Germany and last but not least to discuss in the light of this background recommendations for the internationalization of Universities.

Students from Morocco in Germany

The community of Moroccan migrants in Germany is characterized by a very big heterogeneity, from illiterate people to high qualified students and scientists. However, since the nineties, the number of Moroccan students going to Germany increased enormously. For Germany, as for other Western countries, the internationalization of universities is also a figurehead and there is a global competition. Few years ago, the French newspaper *Le Monde* described this competition as “a wild, aggressive hunt for talents” [and a] “war for brains”¹ (Vinokur 2008: 10). In general, international students are considered as privileged “elite migrants” (Rommelspacher 2011: 35) or as somehow “glittering wanderer” (Terkessidis 1999: 3). The idea that international students are privileged compared to other migrants and also that migration for education is a great opportunity, especially for those from countries with low per capita income, is commonly taken for granted, and it also fits well in a complacent self image of the admission of students as a form of generous development cooperation.² However, in general, the particular national and economic interests of the destination countries, like Germany, in this case are less often emphasized, as well as the difficulties for the acting persons of migration; or these difficulties are viewed simplistically as personal deficits and not considered as structural problems.

Indeed, “[f]or the intellectual an exilic displacement means being liberated from usual career [...]. If you can experience that fate not as deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own patterns [...]: that is a unique pleasure” (Said 1994: 46). However, on their way, international students also have to overcome important barriers and difficulties, as shown by the results of a large-scale quantitative social survey of the German National Association for Student Affairs (DSW) about the internationalization of studies in Germany, according to which the orientation in the study system, the financing and the contact situation are perceived as the three main difficulties among students from abroad (Isserstedt 2008). It remains to be noted: In Germany and elsewhere, internationality is publicity, universities promote it, but at the same time it encounters structural, financial, immigration and bureaucratic

¹ « un braconnage agressif des talents (....) une guerre des cerveaux » (Vinokur 2008 :10)

² Development can also be understood as « a semantic heritage » (Bessis 2001:126) of colonial terminology: « D'emblée, il est fait l'héritier sémantique du terme de la civilisation, à la connotation coloniale désormais trop marquée, et le sésame de l'entrée dans la modernité, l'autre synonyme contemporain de la civilisation » (Bessis 2001:126).

obstacles that make it difficult for international students to study successfully there. As it is shown below, in addition to these university-related aspects, social self-images also play a role, which means that migrants are placed in a position of non-belonging. As a result, one of two international students drops out of studies in Germany. (Isserstedt 2008).

Because of this, intercultural trainings are often recommended, for instance by Bouchara (2010), according to him preferably even before the migration for study. However, I think of this critically, because such trainings need the 'others' as a basis for work and to be reproduce again and again. Instead of giving students theories about foreign cultures, we should rather talk about making the power transparent, that once there will turn them into 'others', and about addressing the assumption that Europe is the center of all knowledge: "Intercultural work must therefore question and challenge the Eurocentric perspectives – knowing as well that a non-Eurocentric perspective is an impossibility" (Castro Varela 2010: 118). From this follows the simple demand that I would like to put, before the following chapters on the dilemma of difference and the perceptions of Moroccan students in Germany: In principle, the Universities should ask how to learn from whom we don't believe, that 'we' could learn something (Castro Varela 2010: 127).

The Dilemma of Difference: 'Forget that I'm different'; 'never forget that I'm different'.

"Love for the homeland instead of Moroccan thieves"³ – this slogan placarded the Austrian FPÖ party in an election campaign in 2012, clearly before the general shift to the right in the Austrian (and European) politics and public debate. Although it can be assumed that racism in today's political and public life in Europe may be rarely so exclusively related to a particular group and at the same time so frighteningly open, clear and easily identifiable; it is interesting to keep in mind the racist slur and how it manifests itself and the effect of that slogan: While 'Moroccan' here becomes synonymous with criminal, 'we' are automatically characterized as honest and good, and while 'we' should love 'our homeland' 'we' are advised to protect ourselves from the 'dangerous others'. Of course, there was an outcry and legal consequences, but meanwhile, the term 'homeland' also has experienced a veritable renaissance in political and public debate of German-speaking countries.

However, exclusion is not only to be expected in open racism, but also in the subtle, suggestive and hidden aspects of everyday life. Because after all,

³ "Heimatliebe statt Marokkaner-Diebe", is the original slogan, which rhymes in German, on a FPÖ election poster in Innsbruck, Austria 2012

the core of racist thinking is the figure of a mostly derogatory and discriminating binary distinction between a socially constructed, national-ethno-cultural, 'us' and 'not us'. (Scharathow 2011: 11). These are individual, institutional and structural practices of making or reproducing images, mindsets and narratives about groups of people, but they are largely normalized, commonplace and banal, and therefore they became invisible. In addition, the cultural difference is, according to Wieviorka (2000: 36) more frightening when it is postulated by poor people than by the rich one. It's clear, that the concepts of race, class and gender intersect with cultural implications. Cherkaoui (2012), a former student of electrical engineering, in Aachen; writes as a tip for future students from Morocco: "You will notice some things immediately. Most Germans behave reservedly. They are not so sociable and talkative – especially in public (...). When you meet people, you are often asked the following three questions: Where are you from? What are you doing here? Do you return home afterwards? Do not let that annoy or confuse you. It may also happen that people would not want to sit next to you, but rather look for another place or stop. Hidden or open discrimination is not uncommon. You have to find a way to live with it" Cherkaoui (2012:1). To put it clearly, it must be noted that even international students, despite their allegedly privileged position, may be affected by racism and not least because racism, although largely hidden, has become an everyday phenomenon pervading the whole society.

Therefore, it is important to reflect on how this situation can be dealt with in order to enable a more professional and contemporary approach to differences. In fact, it is a dilemma: Not paying attention to differences or going over them would not do justice to the particular situations or lives of people; at the same time, talking about differences solidifies precisely these differences. Much more poetically, the black poet Pat Parker states this as an "advice to the white woman who wants to know how she can be my friend: First, forget that I am black. Secondly, never forget that I am black" (Parker 2001: 66). Forget that (...); never forget that (...), also means, that I'm foreign, female, Jewish, Muslim, or just somehow different. This basic dilemma between inevitability and impossibility has to be endured and in everyday life at university and beyond, it must not lead to a paralysis, in the sense of 'I do not want to do anything wrong' nor to the arbitrariness in the sense of 'it does not matter, I cannot do it right.' (Foitzik 2011: 66). There is obviously no way out of this dilemma. However, the recognition of ambivalence in the sense of a self-reflective transgressive opening may be a viable option inside of this dilemma, although it is a balancing act that

demands a lot of reflexivity, exact perception and sensitive communication. Therefore, an interweaving of different disciplines and approaches is necessary: The inter- or transcultural pedagogy and diversity work, which stands for the appreciation of differences and various belongings, postcolonial studies and migration research of various provenances to understand the backgrounds and interests of individual students, the approaches of social inequality, racism research and critical whiteness studies because of their awareness of discrimination. All in all, it could be concluded so far: "(...) Difference is an engine for testing the functioning and legitimacy of institutions. This is an interesting challenge if you do not consider confrontation and change as something fundamentally bad" (Terkessidis 2010: 73).

Perceptions and Experiences: "Always the border, (...) you belong here, you don't!"

The subjective perceptions of students from Morocco in Germany also reflect an ambivalent image, ascertained by using problem-centered interviews according to Witzel (2000). The focus in this connection was primarily on the difficulties that these international students have or had to deal with during their stay in Germany. As for the procedure, the intention was to find out transindividual common experiences and to illustrate them in narrative portraits (Meuser/Nagel 1991). As expected, there were, especially at first, very substantial questions of concern, such as the access to the university system and the associated legal status, as well as the financing and the housing search. But in addition to these easy to detect hard factors, more difficult to grasp soft factors such as perceived attitudes and unpronounced judgments of 'the others of the others' played an important role. Nevertheless, it can be anticipated that all seventeen respondents, regardless of the duration of their stay, were satisfied or very satisfied and described their migration for studies as a succeeding of successful project or at least as a positive and enriching experience, which they would also recommend to friends and acquaintances. However, it should also be noted, that not all could be said, (it is not sayable) and that not everything is even in the range of what we can imagine ourselves potentially saying. Thus, many experiences are probably not articulated or they are relativized in advance, out of respect for the host country or out of gratitude to be allowed to study there at all.

Nevertheless, it has become obvious that international students are still often perceived as 'other' students and tend to be labeled with deficits, for which cultural patterns of explanation are used. "You have always the border,

they make always the border, you're a buddy, you belong here, you don't" (Tarik, *ib.*: 304). The experience of exclusion affects both the everyday life and the study at university, for instance, when it comes to group work: "Everybody thinks, (...), why should I do it [the seminar paper] together with a foreigner? He does not master the language and after good marks, they will say, but he didn't do anything, we made it" (Zakaria, in: Kiefer 2014: 308); as well as outside the university, such as in housing or job search, e.g.: "But first, where are you from? – From Morocco! – Yes, we call you back, yeah bye, like this, I already know this, this is a bit, what bothers me here" (Yassir, *ib.*: 284).

While an extensive pre-test among 160 applicants in Morocco had shown that, before their migration, they were afraid of getting homesick, most of them apparently coped well, which even surprised themselves sometimes (Kiefer 2014: 303). It may be an indication that the students have arrived well and participate in their new environment. "Why should I feel homesickness", Tarik (*ib.*: 303) asked for instance, stressing that he was very happy with his German girlfriend. Revealing was also a student, who spoke of 'parentssickness'⁴ (Omar, in: *ib.*: 302) instead of homesickness. Homesickness, so can be presumed, is felt less than a yearning for Morocco or a missing of friends there, as experienced in the replacement of the parents, combined with the challenge to have to do everything without the support of parents: "(...) – and suddenly you are alone, you have to cope and so on" (Omar, in: *ib.*: 302). However, it also became clear that all respondents made great efforts, for instance to make contact with Germans: "(They do not come to you (...); they always need time to get used to others. (...) the first step always must be done by you" (Abdellatif, *ib.*: 305). In view of the described difficulties it is astonishing and deserves respect, how quickly and decisively many of them, develop successfully appropriate strategies and manage their situation with firm will, perseverance and networking – as well as with wit: "With all these blondes Slowly you will also become a potato; I am like them, now" (Amina, *ib.*: 302) and elsewhere: "It's really a different world, (...) – but it's worth going there and studying (...), but you have to stay who you are" (Amina, *ib.*: 313). All in all, it is possible to observe how new identities emerge, which are, to a large extent, transcultural or transnational in nature, but also that identities continue and, especially when it comes to religion and gender aspects, that identities are enforced by being labeled as 'others': "And the first question she [the teacher] asked me, was why are you

⁴ In German: 'Elternweh' instead of 'Heimweh'

wearing a headscarf” (Amina, ib.: 310). While she had to justify herself for it, another student reported how she felt overstrained, as she has to explain perennially why she does not wear a headscarf and why she wants to study as a Muslim woman at all (Sana, ib.: 310). So, the female students in Germany are also confronted with the image of the oppressed Muslim woman. At this point, the experiences of the interviewed women differ from male students, while they are similar in many aspects in terms of concrete study experiences. Nevertheless, it became clear, that the subjective positioning is influenced by several separating lines of differences which intersect each other.

University as a space of transgression: “(…) movement on the border and across this border”

What is now to be learned from those who we don't believe ‘we’ could learn anything from? For the first time, Glick Schiller (1992) defined connections across different borders as “(…) processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated ‘transmigrants’. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations (…) that span borders. Transmigrants (…) develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 1). But at present, encounters engaged at ‘eye-level’ which really recognize differences as potentials of a diverse society in their entirety, are obviously not reality.

However, migration for studies represents an opportunity not only for the acting persons of migration or possibly for their countries of origin but also for the aspired university and the post-migrant society of destination. Because, the institution University as a place of knowledge is fundamentally a space of transgression: “University is movement on the border to the (un)usual and across this border. (…) University is compelled to transcend or at least to want it” (Mecheril/Klinger 2010: 86). So to speak, the transgression of different borders, not just origin-related, but also technical, epistemic or Eurocentric ones, belongs to the mode of functioning of universities, and at the same time, can be regarded as a preparation period for a transgressive way of life. Thus, a university that appreciates differences is useful for all students and contributes to no less than an improvement of the University as institution. Then, however, one should no longer ask what could be done to facilitate the integration into 'our' university and 'German' society for these 'other' students from abroad. Rather, it would be necessary to

reflect what a university, a town and a society in Germany or elsewhere that want to be international, could do to meet the special needs of international students. Of course, when discussing this question, 'delicate' aspects such as the financial and legal sphere should not be left out or put aside as a personal problem that does not concern the study in the strict sense. In addition, I would like to propose with Mecheril/Klinger (2010: 110) a diversification of the forms of learning and the delimitation of the study time, as well as courses of the scientific language for all students and in general, more attention to the introductory phase of studies as well as the institutionalization of monitoring.

Last but not least, it should be added also that this article and the sketched study (Kiefer 2014) with the suggested approaches are certainly not free of unwanted effects and paradoxes. I, too, am in the dilemma between inevitability and impossibility of understanding when approaching the issue of openness and exclusion. Understanding always remains an illusion. Nevertheless, I hope that the perceptions of international students in Germany will help raise awareness of the situation of high qualified migrants and that their suggestions and hints will contribute to a more active implementation of transnationalization or transgressive openness and will thus offer perspectives for a more subject-oriented internationalization.

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Special Section: Creative writing

Blown

by

Lucy Lauretta Melbourne

*Abdelhay Mohammadi, lycéen . . .
apprenti kamikaze dans la commune
de Sidi Moumen . . .
Tous les jours après l'école,
Abdelhay se rend à la petite mosquée en tôle
ou il apprend à faire des tas de choses
formidables, et même de vraies bombes . . .
Abdelhay sait qu'un jour ou l'autre,
il passera à la télé.*

Miniatures 46, Youssouf Amine Elalamy

Rose, thou art sick.

*"Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ,
to inspire generations of the weak and
found out thy bed
the defenseless people."
Cho Seung-Hui
love*

Oh,

*The invisible worm
That flies in the night
In the howling storm
Has*

*Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret*

*Does thy life destroy.
William Blake*

The minute I got them home they began to expand. In the medina, tightly packed and deprived of water, they lay in forlorn bunches, piled into straight-jacketed uniformity.

"Une douzaine, madame?" the vendor smiles ingratiatingly.

Lifting shaggy stems, he rapidly scrapes thorns and leaves, his blade finally lopping diagonal tips. He holds the bouquet aloft, pivoting for my approval.

“C’est bon?”

I nod, and he bundles the bunch into green paper securing it with a red ribbon.

“Et, voila!”

The fleshly petals, compacted into whorls, gradually open to reveal the delicate erect pistil, its drop of sticky moisture quivering. Some are labial pink, deepening to a coral center, others pulse with red velvet and copper, the colors of the taste of blood.

In only three days the roses are full blown.

* * *

That Saturday morning, I knew something was wrong. As we step out of the petit taxi, the blue iron gates of the Rabat American School are clamped shut. Side streets strangely deserted, a bristling row of orange traffic cones bars the curbside.

“Baseball, sidi?” I ask the guard, puzzled.

“Non, madame, pas aujourd’hui,” not today.

But Ibby’s Astros were to play the Pirates in a double header and we had even brought juice and potato chips. Then I see the hand-printed sign: SCHOOL CLOSED REGRET INCONVENIENCE. Neatly choreographed knots of armed policemen dot the perimeter; the nape of my neck tingles with apprehension. Suddenly, I know.

Here in Morocco they call them kamikazes, the mostly illiterate young men from the bidonville Sidi Moumen, the notorious sprawling slum crouching just outside the gleaming glass towers of Casablanca. This latest incident was preceded by another, four days earlier, when cops raided the hideout of four kamikazes, three of whom detonated themselves, and it is also a stepchild of the Casa cyberbomber. A month ago, prevented from accessing a radical Muslim internet site blocked by websnoops from Moroccan security, a volatile youth first harangued the café owner—and then just blew.

Saturday’s episode occurred early in the morning on a graceful tree-lined boulevard near the American Language Center and US Consulate. Using a compound of acetone, the main ingredient in nail polish remover, three kamikazes detonated themselves, scattering fragments across the pavement in wavering patterns like the flickering shadows cast through tattered palms.

* * *

“We Moroccans are as shocked as anyone,” Lahcen, a university colleague, assures me on Monday, sounding just like Captain Renaud in Casablanca. “Shocked, just shocked.

But we know the police are doing a terrific job, a wonderful job,” he repeats for emphasis.

My train home clicks past the fomenting bidonvilles around Salé, a world away from prosperous international Rabat on the other side of the Bouregreg River. Stretching for blocks, tin-and-plastic-roofed hovels are all capped with a parasitic “parabole” sucking out the living marrow beneath. Rusting miniature amphitheatres, they offer not the redemption of tragedy but only flat-roofed despair, existence reduced to the dead end of THINGS.

In Morocco’s highly charged political atmosphere, the ineptitude of these explosions—their casualties limited to only one bystander—highlights a symbolic rather than conspiratorial significance. Against an international background of war and unrest in the Arab world and framed by the upcoming legislative elections here where the PJD, the Islamist party, is expected to make major gains, these deafeningly silent film noir-ish Keystone Kamikases beg explanatory subtext. The press eagerly obliges.

Sighing, I open the International Herald Tribune. Predictably, it hypes the violence but unable to establish any link to Al Qaida can only infer a plot by relating Saturday’s explosion to others, to Algeria, finally to 9/11. The individuals who have committed suicide are journalistically obliterated, the very label “terrorist” immediately meshing, Velcro-like, onto our own fears to condemn en masse an entire culture. The westernized Moroccan Francophone press also revels in language like “PANIQUE” superimposed on a lurid montage of cops in urban battle fatigues, menacing black balaclavas and businesslike machine guns. The domestic message is clear: the government is fully in control and the Islamists discredited. A narrow sidebar identifies the dead; one was nicknamed “the rose.”

Beyond this murderous political calculus, the algorithms of loss and gain, a photograph that takes root in my mind and sits like a cold hard rock in my belly: the home, the parents of the cybercafé bomber, the rotund mother swathed in a bathrobe and headscarf, the father on his haunches in prayer posture, both intently staring at the only vista in this windowless stone-walled cell: an enormous television. The television screen looms over the small figures in the foreground, skewing even further an incomprehensibly claustrophobic perspective. The size of an oblong closet, this bare moldering mausoleum has walled up alive an entire family of people who eat, pray, quarrel, make love, and sleep here. Illiterate, unemployed, and sexually repressed, the only outlet for a seething magma of frustration is not just the ideology he absorbs from the imam or Al Jazeera—but simply UP.

There is only UP because here there is no horizon, no wave-rippled shore beckoning across the Straits of Gibraltar to Europe, no books to inspire the alternative universe of imagination or situate the self within the landscape of human history; artisanal skills lost in this urban wasteland, no expectation of employment; there is only

UP—POW! Self-immolation to evade the confining skin of the hopeless isolate self unable to enter into the body of another like the lapped petals of the rose enclosing the flesh in an embrace of lover of fetus in the womb, of the infinity of human generation: no, only the present expanding into a timeless unbearable tension that ---

* * *

I am always amazed when survivors are able to talk in complete sentences but, mostly, that they are still normal in appearance and not, like a Picasso “Guernica,” jagged fragments with exclamation-pointed fingers and eyes staring like sprung watchsprings.

One survivor related quite coherently what had happened: the first time he was shot in the shoulder and decided to play dead; but when the killer returned, systematically quartering the rows of desks, he felt a sting in his thigh, then another bullet thudded into his buttocks. He said he tried not to move. Few moved. Some did jump out the window, others heroically tried to block the door, but most were transfixed and most died. He was so organized, so methodical, so effective. Although his hapless actors might be unsure of their lines, here at least he could be confident; he knew the script: like Borat, he had written it himself. And it was all about UP.

No “terrorist” from Sidi Moumen, this “troubled youth” was an upwardly mobile South Korean immigrant from his parents’ \$400,000 home in lush green Chantilly, a suburb bordering blue-blooded Virginia hunt country. A sister is at Princeton. She is studying economics. But in America he remained a loser, an English major at a state university known for its topnotch engineering program. By the measure of a competitive Protestant ethic which decrees “just do it” and sees salvation reflected in salary scale, he was one of the unredeemed. A disappointment to his family, he wrote plays so envenomed his professors alerted the police who, unable to read text, dismissed these scenarios as mere “fiction.” The poet Nikki Giovanni, more clearly understanding the power of words, put her career on the line by refusing to teach this apprentice. Lexically precise, she spelled out the euphemism. Not “troubled youth,” she insisted: “He was mean.”

In a long feature, Newsweek eschews the term “terrorist” to dissect “The Mind of a Killer,” trying to medicalize madness, seeking Western scientific rationale in case studies and statistics. It locates the self-destructive worm in a gene that “planted an evil seed,” sees it nourished by the hothouse pressures of American immigrant expectation to finally curl around the trigger to blow away 32 people.

A photo of this –killer, kamikaze, terrorist, troubled youth, murderer, maniac, mean – covers two pages of the magazine, a blow up smugly supplied by the artist. After filming himself in iconic TV gangsta rap poses, he had paused between cuts to mail NBC News advance rushes of his starring video. The ultimate theatre of the real, this grand guignol of aggrieved martyrdom moves between illusion and reality, word and deed, image and language, allusion and acting, in a realm where the apprentice’s access to webcams, recorders, cell phone cameras, IM, blogs, facebook, MySpace identities, and cut and paste do-it-yourself YouTube shorts all aid in constructing the ego of an American Dream blown out of all proportion. Cho was indeed a loner; sure, he was even a nutzoid—but he was no loser. Unlike the Casa Keystone Kamikases, ultimately Cho got it: a 21st century entrepreneur, he understood that America is really all about virtual UP.

* * *

The other night at a literary soirée set in a gorgeous Arab riad, I chatted with Tarik, a distinguished Moroccan political analyst. Underneath the stars, surrounded by Moorish tiles and fret worked plaster blooms, next to the courtyard fountain floating with rose petals, we sipped tiny golden glasses of the ubiquitous Moroccan mint tea.

“Ah, yes, the Blacksburg killer,” Tarik nodded. “Can you imagine if he had been Muslim? Oh là, là,” he gestured in the air, paused: “Not one report mentioned his religion.”

Book reviews

The dead-end of Political Islam:

Review of Hassan Aourid's "Al-Islam Assiyassi fi al-Mizane- halat Al-Maghrib" (Political Islam in Question, the Case of Morocco) (Tusna, 2016),
(132pages) حسن اوريد (الاسلام السياسي في الميزان (حالة المغرب)

Soumia Boutkhil (Université Mohammed Premier, Oujda)

The major challenge in talking or writing about "political Islam" is how to do so without engaging in a polemical or a situational debate. For most people, the concept of "political Islam" refers to a politically and intellectually aggressive conservative movement claiming historical legitimacy to build a society away from "imported" political models and in which religion plays the central role. In the context of a Muslim world that is weakened by violence and terrorism, the project of a variously defined "Islamic state," is set up in fierce opposition to other political and societal projects that seek to build the state on the basis of modern political concepts and doctrines that have proved to guarantee a qualitative stability for the societies that had adopted them.

The history of the contemporary Arab world has proved beyond doubt that all political regimes whether socialist, capitalist, and even nationalist, have failed to advance a societal, economic, and political project. No wonder then that the reality of Arab-Islamic societies continues to be plagued by poverty and illiteracy, and most of these societies are at the bottom of the scale in terms of human development and political awareness. That is the background on which some movements sought to elaborate another project, a third way to find solutions in the cultural-religious heritage of Islam, which after all is not only a religion, but a social and cultural system that can accommodate a variety of political readings since it contains general principles that govern the relationships between ruler and ruled.

In this debate, Hassan Aourid's book: *Political Islam in Question, the Case of Morocco* (published in French in 2015 under the title *l'Impasse de*

l'Islamisme and in Arabic in 2016 under the title (الاسلام السياسي في الميزان (حالة المغرب)¹ gives a new and daring perspective. The author begins by outlining the most important stages of the evolution of political Islam in Morocco and its intellectual and ideological expansion across the Islamic world. The roots of this phenomenon go deep in the collective consciousness of the people of this region. Therefore it is crucial to understand the historical trajectory that contributed to the crystallization of many concepts that these religion-based intellectual systems utilize, starting with the defeat of 1967 (war with Israel), the Iranian revolution, the fall of the socialist bloc, Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the first Gulf war, the disruption in 1991 of the first free elections in Algeria after the victory of the Islamic Front of Salvation, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and finally the eruption of Arab revolutions (The Arab Spring) that started in 2011.

However, in the case of Morocco, the author draws attention the fact that political Islam as an intellectual concept did not gain visibility until it was encouraged and employed by the state to counter leftist movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Like the rest of the Arab monarchies, Morocco considered the expanding Arab nationalism and its socialist ideology with apprehension, seeing it an imminent danger. (p. 22)

In this context, the writer invokes the idea of "inventing" traditions that contributed greatly to the creation of a favorable environment for the emergence of an identity and heritage based consciousness. According to the concept of "the invention of tradition" as theorized by Eric J. Hobsbawm,² the Moroccan state in the era of Hassan II employed this strategy to curb the expansion of the leftist and modernist forces that were opposed to the policies and orientations of the regime. This process was associated with the use of religion as a basis for providing legitimacy to the political institutions, and consolidating it with the dissemination of a system of beliefs and values to strengthen them. (p. 22). This was followed by many laws such as the criminalization of eating/drinking/smoking in public during the time of fasting in Ramadan; a law targeting mainly left-wing students and the followers of Arab nationalism who viewed tradition and heritage as factors that cripple society (P23). The educational policy played a key role in the regime's political manipulation of religion by way of promoting tradition through the insertion of religious (Islamic) instruction within the system of national

¹ Published by Tusna (Rabat) in 2016, the book was first written in French (2015) and then translated by the author into Arabic. No English translation is available. The English title provided here is a translation for practical purposes.

² Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*. (London, Cambridge University Press, 1983)

education. The underlying assumption was that critical thinking fuels insurrection and protest, and therefore it must be checked.

In this regard, Hassan Aourid cites the testimony of the expert in education, Mohammed Shafiq, who was asked by the late King Hassan II to do a study on the pedagogical value of teaching the Koran in the traditional "Koranic schools." Shafiq's report concluded that this type of education is one of the main reasons behind Morocco's backwardness (p.25). Later, the Royal Cabinet commissioned him to send a memorandum to the Minister of National Education asking him to spread this type of teaching throughout the Kingdom because "it encourages a culture of submissiveness."

Hence, we can say that the Islamist movement in Morocco was born out of the regime, but it took a trajectory that was totally different from what the state had intended for it. The movement owed its strength and expansion to the impoverishment of education and its transformation into a conservative system devoid of critical thinking. While the regime employed religion and tradition in a gradual process (development, control, revision, modernization), the Islamist movement resorted to political opposition to the point that it overran left wing parties only to end up in turn in disarray and division into factions. Some of these remained in the opposition, while others accepted the rules of the game and entered into the political system thereby preparing consciously or unconsciously for what the author after Marcel Gauchet³ calls "the exit of religion from the public space. This development is the same as the French writer Olivier Roy had predicted in his famous book *L'Echec de l'Islam Politique* (1992)

Evidently, it is political pragmatism that determines such shifts, and in this sense the path of the Islamic movements is no different from that of the leftist parties, whether in Morocco or Europe, especially after the experience of the French Socialist Party with Francois Mitterrand and the rest of the Communist parties after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In all of those cases, the political ideal has been abandoned in order to enter the political game, which requires political bargaining so that it can gain a seat at the table. On the other hand, as is the case with the left, the opposing party that rejects the conditions and consequences of participating in the political system remains outside the political zone and limits itself to reaction which may even include violence.

At the end of the day, the two sides of referencing religion, whether moderate or extremist, contribute both in the process of removing religion as an ideology and a permanent reference so that it falls within the monopoly of

³ Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde. Une histoire politique de la religion*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1985)

a central institution i.e. the “Principality of the Believers” (headed by the King) and its subsidiaries throughout the country. Thus the “project” of “religious reference” and the Islamization of politics remain no more than electoral slogans. Consequently, the idea of the ‘Islamization of modernity’ as advocated by Abdessalam Yassine the leader of the brotherhood “Justice and Charity”, for example, came to a dead-end and finally just disappeared as an objective. This is mainly due to the oversimplification of the concept of modernity, as is the case with the majority of political concepts in the discourse of political Islam. Modernity is a complex and even contradictory philosophical, literary, sociological, and political concept as illustrated by the French writer Jean Baudrillard in his famous article on the subject in *Encyclopedia Universalis*. Indeed, the reduction of modernity to materialism and moral decay by Islamist thinkers makes their discourse on the matter so superficial that it cannot be taken seriously. Thus, the will to ‘Islamicize’ modernity indicates a lack of familiarity with the intellectual and literary currents that subjected the concept to criticism from within

The failure of the project of the ‘Islamization of modernity’ eventually led to what was rejected by the followers of political Islam, i.e. the necessity of the emergence of a modernist Islam that stems from its deep-seated principles of tolerance, equality, social justice and freedom which make it a universal religion. What is happening now, according to the writer, is a kind of secularization of the state with the direct or indirect participation of the ruling ‘Islamist’ party (i.e. PJD) that dominates the political arena. By trusting the religious affairs with the institution i.e. the “Principality of Believers” that avoids entering into narrow political calculations, the Islamist party acknowledges that since Islam is a common heritage to all Moroccans, no one has a monopoly over it.

In conclusion, *Political Islam in Question* raises the issue of the origin and the future of political Islam in Morocco, since the latter cannot be isolated from a turbulent historical context that began with the shock of colonialism and the emergence of an awareness of the need for reform to modernize the state and society. But the issue of reform collides with the problem of references, premises and even ends. This diversity and contradiction produce conflicting and confusing discourses. What gives credence to the book’s basic premise that Political Islam has reached a dead-end is that to this day, no Islamist movement has been able to develop a viable political system nor an satisfactory emancipatory vision. All experiences that used religion as an ideology ended in failure, starting with the Iranian revolution and ending with the botched experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the decision

of the Tunisian Islamist “Renaissance Party”, which decided to abandon its proselytizing activism to focus on politics. Interestingly, however, the relative success of the Turkish and Indonesian experience, which has not received much attention from the writer, remains intriguing. Therefore, even though it is too early to tell, an “Islamic modernity” whose contours are not clear yet is on the verge of appearing, and if anything, it can only be a model that publicly and formally embodies the separation between what is religious and what is political.

“Riding the wave of fear, The rise of The Islamophobia Industry.”

Review of Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*. Pluto Press, 2012. (248 pages)

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Even though *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* by Nathan Lean was published eight years ago, it still remains an indispensable tool to understand how the time-honored tactic of fear manufacturing in the 21st century has become more impactful and therefore more dangerous to societal stability because of the extraordinary development of information technology. Nathan Lean's book is thus an exhaustive and genuine demonstration of how fear mongers, namely the right wing, market Islam and Muslims as socially and religiously unfit to adapt with American culture and values. The book's thrust is that the wave of Islamophobia that is sweeping across Europe and the United States is not a sudden reaction the shocking violence of some Jihadist groups. Rather, Islamophobia is the design of a right-wing corps of intellectual peddlers, bloggers, bigoted politicians, self-appointed experts, and religious extremists who manufacture and thrive on hate and xenophobia. These puppet-masters portray Islam as a violent religion by definition, a religion that infringes borders, and whose followers' identity is primarily and inevitably shaped by their faith. The book's seven chapters explain just how in the 21st century America and Europe “Muslims became receptacles for societal anxiety, and the right wing, knowing full well the power of fear, used the uncertain time to their advantage.” (p. 8)

Projecting monster movies, Lean argues, was how Americans chose to deal with fear. Monsters, repeatedly depicted in the form of easterners, were eventually defeated by American military intelligence and operations. The safety of the American mode of life is then dependent on conquering and vanishing the eastern villain. Such narrative mechanisms, according to the author, tend to exploit the American perception of threat. They can intentionally or unintentionally inculcate fallacies and twisted realities that would “...pull us back into the darkness where our rational fears are fed upon by individuals who seek to benefit from increased societal angst.” (p. 20) The

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scene is similar to the time when they started to allegedly claim, back in the late eighties, that the pillars of Christianity are bound to be dismantled by the rise of the Illuminati; which was apparently Europe's fate.

While exploring the precarious mechanics of sponsoring fear and intimidation among Americans, Lean unveils many official governmental strategies in the first chapter. German and Irish immigrants were believed to conspire against the existence of American Protestantism in the early nineties. Some governmental leaders declared the protestant community under attack. Catholicism was portrayed in their speeches as the new invader hidden behind socially and economically unfortunate immigrants seeking a better future. The same scenario surfaced when the Soviet Union launched the first earth-orbiting satellite; Sputnik. Many official documents and statements exposed the communist enemy endangering American freedom. Soon after, the alarm of radical Islam was unleashed immediately after the Iranian revolution in 1979, and was progressively nourished until it reached its peak after the 9/11 attacks. The right wing has successfully managed to lure the public opinion into linking Islam with violence as some statistics revealed back then.

Electronic media, Lean argues, effectively served the spread of anti-Islamic views for those who could not express them in respected journals and academic fields. "The role of the internet in fomenting hatred and prejudice cannot be overstated. Unlike fear campaigns of the past that relied on more traditional means of communication, the blogosphere has allowed ordinary folks with a bone to pick to disseminate their message far and wide." (p.50) Pamela Geller's online journal, *Atlas Shrugs*, was probably the most active by reaching a traffic of 200.000 visitors a month. She was able to attract anti-Muslim commentators and share her bigotry among emotionally wounded Americans of after 9/11. Various media platforms, riding the trending wave at that period, introduced her as a patriotic icon defending the state's social safety and ideological stability. Such circumstances facilitated the spread of blog entries full of falsehood and misconceptions.

Using and abusing her fame and applauding fans, Pamela Geller vigorously disapproved establishing a Muslim community center in Manhattan, two blocks away from the twin towers' debris despite the prior approval and appreciation of the project from the Lower Manhattan Community Board, local businessmen, and even some family members of those who died in the attacks. The building that was supposed to encourage peaceful dialogue and focalize paralleled grounds between major faiths, was condemned to be a secret headquarters for terrorist organizations. According to her blog, it

would dishonor the lives of innocents who lost their lives nearby. The mosque that was part of the community center plan, along with its imam and its “fascist book”, were merely facades of Muslims monstrosities. It was even accused of conspiring with the Saudi government to establish what would become the “New Mecca”.

Getting assistance from other right-wing islamophobic internet activists, such as SIOA and SIOE, Stop Islamization of America/Europe, who were able to instigate anti-Muslim sentiments while supporting Israeli settlements and occupation in Jerusalem, June 6 was set to be the rally date against Park51 project. The date purposely symbolized the American intervention against Nazism and its evil practices in 1944; and by the same analogy, Americans should revolt once again against Islamic Jihad and its terrorist tactics. Lean tried to demonstrate how such frenzied media platforms have drastically shifted the public positive evaluation of Islam and Muslims towards a more biased radical perception, especially after consecutive dramatic incidents targeting innocent Muslims based on their faith or race.

Just as internet media platforms, the Islamophobic industry similarly exploited the right wing’s evangelical militants to bestow the Christian community with anti-Islamic discourses and messages. Bill Keller, a notorious internet evangelist, ex-convict, and a devoted student of the fundamentalist preacher Jerry Falwell, managed to gather an email list of more than 2.5 million subscribers. Homosexuals, liberals, and abortionists were the enemy to address in his daily devotional emails every morning. The night of September 11 however, he broached into tarnishing Islamic teachings. He described the ordeal as a sign from god that called for Christian action; and since the enemy is explicitly in the open, emails insulting the prophet of Islam and its followers were quite common. Gradually gaining fame and expansion outside the restrictions of the virtual arena, he managed to launch a television show providing spiritual advice and prayers for 250.000 viewers. His radical comments even landed on some of the states’ prominent newspapers. Topping it all off, he considered Barak Obama’s presidential candidature fulfilling the famous Islamic prophecy based on his campaign symbol; referring to the sunrise from the west, one of the end of time Islamic prophecies. Eventually, Keller’s artificial aura faded away, and all his plans for building a “911 Christian Center” as a counter reaction of the Muslim community center were unaccomplished due to lack of funding.

Lean investigated such evangelical fundamentalists, along with the official orientation of the Tea Party political conservatism to demonstrate that “the link between religious values and political agendas is also a goad to bigotry.

The Christian Right is so labeled not only because they fall along the right-wing, or conservative, side of the religious spectrum, but perhaps more so because their religious beliefs overlap with their rightist political preferences.” (p.83) In other words, much of the rightists’ political choices and decisions are governed by the overall traits of their theological preferences. Hence, the growing visibility of Muslims in social and professional domains is unavoidably disturbing for a supposedly biblically devoted society. Lean also draws our attention to the politically and prophetically overlapping concerns over the state of Israel. Many Christian and Jewish Rightists protect Israel’s interests and security, support illegal settlement plans, and even foresee the cleansing of Muslims from Palestinian lands just to materialize the end of time prophecy regarding the coming of the Messiah. Though interpretations on the outcome of the prophecy vary in both Christian and Jewish scriptures, it will not be fulfilled unless Palestine is freed from Islamic existence.

Towards the last chapters, Lean unraveled many American policies that were unfortunately generated and forced by Islamophobic indoctrination. The anti-Muslim discourse has effectively shaped the political mind of many official leaders. Muslims have suddenly become a real threat to the national security of the USA. Despite their commitment and adoption of the American cultural and social life, they were accused of being treacherous to the country that guaranteed them food and shelter. Therefore, it was narratively impossible after 9/11 to disassociate Islam and terror from the prevailing discourse. Without any solid evidence, Muslims were ferociously tortured during long hours of unpredicted interrogations in suspicious cells just to uncover even a tiny link to terrorist implications. “Bookshops, foreign food stores, hair salons, and libraries all soon became beats for cops acting as human cameras zoomed in on the Muslim population.” (p. 150) Anti-Muslim literature was used to train and inspire new FBI recruits. In their training facilities, they teach new agents how the level of violence in a Muslim depends on how devoted he is to his religion, and how the Quran legitimizes any war against the non-believers.

The emphatic impact of these momentous accusations and ideologically oriented narratives against Islam will expressively erupt after Oslo’s barbaric attacks. Prior to revealing the true identity and faith of the attacker, many news channels, prominent newspapers, and officials declared it a Muslim act of terrorism once again. Yet, when Norway’s butcher happened to be a blond Norwegian Christian whose 1500-page manifesto explicitly explains his motives, researchers and terrorism specialists shifted their focus to what

inspired the act itself rather than its perpetrator; “...if the authorities ultimately ruled out Islamic terrorism as the cause of Friday’s assaults, other kinds of groups or individuals were mimicking Al-Qaeda’s brutality and multiple attacks.” (p. 165) There was not enough room in the Christian community to include this man. The general public will later blame the man’s delusional mental condition for his horrific deed as the Forensic Commission concludes. In France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Britain, hasty Islamophobic reactions lead to the implementation of many laws and regulations that restricted Muslims’ freedom of religious practice.

For Lean, the Islamophobia industry is on the rise, and the diligent ventriloquists controlling its alarming manifestations in the USA and Europe should not be overlooked. Knowing the power of fear, they have mastered the art of manipulating and exploiting the public’s sentiments and perception of the foreign Muslim for the sake of empowering their political rightist ideology. Multiculturalism and religious pluralism is vital to insure a democratic stability among any society. There is an urgent need to stand against those who systematically discriminate other religious, racial, or ethnic groups; those who thrive in slicing societies into numerous minorities while watching them ripping each other’s’ lives. “Only by protecting one another from the fracturing of societies, only by refusing to fall prey to this vicious and ceaseless movement to antagonize, isolate, and persecute Muslims in the United States, Europe, and everywhere around the globe, will this fear factory, the Islamophobia industry, be rightfully, forcefully and finally stamped out.” (p. 184)

Politics of Trolling, Alt-Right's insidious extremism

Review of George Hawley's *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 2017). (218 pages)

Hicham Tizaoui ¹ & Larbi Touaf (Université Mohammed Premier, Oujda)

The ongoing changes in the world's political scene coupled with an unprecedented upsurge in information –real or fake-- result in a deep confusion in the perception and understanding of world for almost everyone. In such situations, misinformation and misrepresentation can easily creep up, sometimes unintentionally but most of the time quite deliberately to serve the agenda of many opportunity takers. It seems then that the need for more efforts to clear these areas from all kinds of obscurity becomes a pressing necessity to stop all kinds of brain washing and propaganda defusing.

Although not directly claiming it, this is, in fact, the right goal that George Hawley sets for his book *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. The book tries to shed light on the newly emerging movement that has been labelled Alt-Right. In the 218 pages of the book, Hawley meticulously investigate the main aspects of Alt-Right, or Alternative Right. It covers its history, inception, transformation and current status; its leading figures, inspirational sources and defenders; its strategies, declared and secret; and its borderlines, similarities and differences to other movements and concepts. Another asset of the book which the reader might well detect as they turn its pages is the diversity of sources that Hawley uses to gather information about Alt-Right, from books and articles, websites and forums, to e-mails and personal interviews.

George Hawley, an associate professor of political science at the University of Alabama, is a devoted researcher to the conservative movement in the United States. Though Alt-Right can by no means be equated with the Republican party, it remains without any doubt a natural derivative of the conservative movement. If conservatism has developed to address socio-political changes, it is quite logical, as Hawley demonstrates, that the movement will witness opposition related to one or other issues and will by consequence affect the trajectory of its growth and the offspring that it might yield. The appearance of both neo-conservatism and more recently paleoconservatism bears witness to the challenges that mainstream conservatism faces. When Alt-Right was still forming, the battle between the

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two ‘conservatism prefixes’ was already harsh and the question of who takes the lead was at its peak. However, Alt-Right was born with a quite different agenda. It is even arguable to deny such connection as Hawley highlights “the genealogical link between mainstream conservatives and the Alt-Right, as I have emphasized, is weak. Unlike some commentators, I do not see much of a connection between, say, the Tea Party and the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right views itself as entirely separate from mainstream conservatism—and to a great extent it is.” (P.42)

The Alt-Right has been considered a questionable movement to be allied to or even linked with not only by the mainstream conservatism but also by other seemingly close movements. Alt-Right and mainstream conservatism departs on a number of issues to the extent that one may well consider the other as deserving exclusion. Mainstream conservatism, for example, accuses Alt-Right of racism as it advocates the unity of the white race under one state while excluding other races from any mixing state projects. This white identity politics that Alt-Right endorses plays double and contradictory roles in the accusation exchange between the two camps. In getting engaged in such debates, conservatism finds itself inconsistent with its own principles. “Yet there are parallels between the Alt-Right and certain elements of American conservatism, parallels that lends a certain irony to the conservative war on the Alt-Right. Conservatives have been quick to argue that the Alt-Right should be condemned as a racist movement. But in doing so, conservatives sound just like the so-called commissars of political correctness that they have mocked and condemned for years in articles and entire books. This creates a problem for conservatives, who are in an awkward rhetorical position when faced with the Alt-Right.” (P. 42). This question of race brings the Alt-Right in opposition to other movements like Libertarianism which opposes all kinds of identity politics.

The convergences and divergences of Alt-Right with other movements and ideologies are clearly demonstrated in Hawley’s *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*. While browsing the book the reader is exposed time and again to comparisons between the movement’s principles and other movements that are seemingly close to it. Hawley draws a comparison between the Alt-Right and its predecessors: white supremacy, white nationalism, white separatists, identitarians, to mention but a few. Even though they agree, for example, to a great extent with their vision of race², they still differ in some details

² Even if white supremacy, white nationalism and Alt-Right agree on the principle of race identity politics, they still differ, as Hawley shows, in how the white race should deal with other races, namely as separates or a superior-inferior co-existence.

especially concerning their strategies in dealing with this issue. Alt-Right, as opposed to other white nationalism movements, adopts a non-violent strategy that avoids direct confrontation with the opponents in favor of more distressing provocations. The Alt-Right becomes distinguishable with such innovative strategies as irony and humor. As Hawley mentions, "The Alt-Right presents itself as a fun movement, one using Internet jargon to tech-savvy millennials and eager to needle established journalists, academics, celebrities, and politicians." (P. 20). Alt-Right members infiltrate online groups, especially mainstream discussions, and inject comments that are meant to disturb the status quo. The internet trolling, that Alt-Right members masterfully use, enables them to reverse the way of thinking of groups without the need of violent confrontation. It is also important to mention here the movement's concentration on online activities as its members use the internet as their primary source of communication with the world. "The Alt-Right is almost exclusively an online phenomenon. It has no brick-and-mortar think tanks distributing policy papers to congressional staffers. It does not run any print newspapers, have a meaningful presence on television, or broadcast its message on the radio." (P. 18).

Hawley's effort to bring every aspect of Alt-Right under scrutiny pushed him to go beyond library research and make as much contact as possible with almost every person associated with the group. These vary from personal interviews, email exchanges to forum and closed groups penetration. Hawley, in fact, tries to follow every trace of the group even if this was not easy due to its secretive nature. The group does not possess, as already mentioned, any locale to turn to when in need of documentation; even worse is its lack of genuine leading figures.

It is no wonder then that with this lack of authority over the group, it is hard to substantiate any fact about the Alt-Right, and that is perhaps the whole objective of the group's initiators. Indeed, contrary to all the other groups and movements, Alt-Right has no leader to control and direct it, nor authorities to turn to. Even its members are not publicly known, as Hawley mentions: "No major politician or mainstream pundit is a self-described Alt-Right supporter. It is predominantly anonymous." (P. 18) This is exactly why Alt-right has been defined differently and associated wrongly with many movements, and this is also why the search for documentation about the group can frequently lead to frustrations. And that is exactly the value added to this book; it is among the few academic published works on the topic. Hawley deserves much praise for entering a real challenge on doing research about a group that is both distracting and discreet.

One of the book's merits that should not, and probably will not, go unnoticed is Hawley's use of political events as basis for his analysis. The very beginning of the book evokes the story of a heckler who stopped Hilary Clinton's speech on an election day with the word 'Pepe'. Many would not understand the event and connect it to Alt-Right; in fact, 'Pepe became the mascot of the "Alt-Right"'. (P. 2)

The most remarkable event that brought Alt-Right to the spotlight was the election of the US president Donald Trump. If there is any leader whose ideas would be most likely associated with the views of the Alt-Right, then Trump seems to be the right person for that position. His ideas about immigration are so extreme that Alt-Right could see Trump a kind of spokesman for the group. Although many have made such association between Trump and Alt-Right, Hawley rejects any connection. "There is no evidence that Trump or any significant figure in the White House desires the mass expulsion of all nonwhites from all or part of the United States, which is the core belief of white nationalists. Trump and his administration can and should be criticized for their significance of tenuous connections between the White House and the Alt-Right is potentially dangerous." (PP. 132-3)

Reading *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* will only raise more curiosity to read more about the group and the related movements. Hawley invites us to think with him about a number of issues without the pressure of an ideologue and leads us convincingly to examine evidences before making judgements by adopting a rigorous procedure. And through his academic intuition about its future that Hawley concluded his work about Alt-Right. The group's future seems not flourishing if it does not institutionalize itself for the purpose of changing the politics of the United States.

The West's Eternal Muslim Monsters

Review of Sophia Rose Arjana's *Muslims in the Western Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Review by Imad Youssefi¹ & Larbi Touaf

The publication of Said's groundbreaking book *Orientalism* in 1978 traced an intellectual path for literary, cultural and media studies researchers into Western imagination and representation of the East or the Orient. Sophia Rose Arjana's *Muslims in Western Imagination* can be situated within this ongoing debate over the representation and construction of the "others" of Western civilization throughout history. As Assistant Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Western Kentucky University, Arjana considers her book "in Islamic language," as "a jihad – an effort– to reveal Muslims as human beings instead of the phantasms they are often presented as" (p.16). And as representation is fundamental to all kinds of cultural productions, the book explores a wide range of what human imagination can manufacture (literatures, artworks, and television and cinematic productions) over an extended period starting from the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to the modern times. Arjana's main thrust is "that imaginary Muslim monsters have determined the construction of the Muslim in Western thought" (p.1). Her objective, then, is to attempt to prove "that the imaginary violence perpetrated by Muslim monsters, as well as the figurative harm inflicted on these villainous characters affects real Muslim bodies" (p.3). To this end, Arjana structures a great many sources chronologically and manages to establish a smooth link between Western stereotypical images of the present with Western Muslim monsters of the medieval ages. She, for instance, traces the ancestry of modern werewolves, vampires and zombies back to Othello, the black Moor, and the Turkish-Jewish Dracula.

The book adopts a historical analytical approach based on the Foucauldian notion of discourse along with Bourdieu's understanding of the notions *habitus* and *doxa* to reveal "an archive of Muslim monsters," and account for the power of the western imaginaire in generating and perpetuating monstrosity

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discourse (pp. 16–17) that culminates in casting the Muslims as archetypal monsters through themes of cannibalism, blackness, evil, exoticism, violence and terror(ism) which recur in American and European mass cultural productions. “Saracens,” for instance, “are often described in medieval texts as cannibalistic giants” (p. 46), and even when these characters are not dehumanized, “their darkness indicates that they are evil” (p. 49). Working with the flawed binary oppositions of the western mind, the author provides numerous examples that consolidate the binary logic of West versus East, placing the latter as utterly savage and in direct and plain opposition to a more civilized West.

Fantasies of brutality and bestiality persist into the Renaissance as “the black Muslim continued to occupy a place in the Christian imaginary as a nefarious figure and enemy of Christendom” (p.67). More images are invoked by Romanticism and the Gothic and, then, by Orientalism to nurture the overall picture of Muslim monsters. Spanning time and space, these images cross the European borders to reach the Americas where they will be appropriated to legitimize the extermination of the new monsters; for “conquerors and settlers thought of Indians as monsters, as seen in the genocidal campaigns launched against them, which included rape, torture, dismemberment, and murder” (p. 133). The captivity discourse and tales of rescue devoted to Indians “are later applied to Africans, Muslims, and African-Americans” (p. 134).

For Arjana, the Jew and the Muslim endure a similar denigrating position in the Western imaginary, as the two “appeared as dog-headed men in a number of medieval texts and paintings that identified them as monsters associated with the devil” (p. 56). *Dracula* represents “many monsters—a Jew, a Muslim, a dracul, the devil” (p. 129). The Jew and the Muslim continue to haunt Western imagination into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the Muslim has to take the road all alone to the contemporary. She suggests that werewolves, vampires, mummies, zombies and the rest of aliens shown on American movies after September 11 represent Muslims: “The standard zombie narrative introduces a monster, or monsters, who steal life from the innocents, much like the Muslim terrorist” (p. 171). The problem here is if it were only for such images to determine present and future acts exerted on real people, how could the Jews counter these tropes to gain the West’s sympathy and reparation while Muslims did not? Do not Muslims or at least some of them have their share of responsibility in what was and is happening to them?

Toward the end, Arjana returns to the question posed in the opening lines of her book, regarding the despicable acts by and against the United States of America, relating to the terrorist attack of 9/11, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and so on. “How did we get here?” is a question she answers by referring to the central character in this book, which is nothing more than the historical Muslim monster of Western imagination, whose perpetual presence in popular culture, political discourse, the media, and the cinema continue to feed often undeclared animosities towards and fears of the Muslims. This becomes atrocious when it goes beyond representation to actually trigger and justify the torture, the killing and the dehumanization not just of individual but an entire civilization. The impact can be observed “in the heinous and inhumane atrocities on Muslim bodies at Abu Ghraib, GTMO, and other sites we have not thus far been able to witness” (p.178). Being aware of the predicament of disconnecting such deeds from their real political context, Arjana thus states that “[t]he existence of the Muslim monsters in this study only partially explains Abu Ghraib,” since “the United States of America has a long history of brutality and violence toward its enemies” (p. 181).

Surveying an extraordinary amount of documents (images, paintings, narratives, TV shows, films etc.. the author arrives at this disturbing but sound observation that what lies behind these crimes, a question rarely asked in the West, or at least not receiving enough attention, is “the belief that Muslims are less-than-zero—post-human.” (p.183) “Muslims” the author adds “are so dehumanized in public discourse that treating them as just bodies, Agamben’s “bare life,” has become, in fact, acceptable. Muslims are not just represented as monsters—they are monsters.” (183)

The post-human condition of Muslims is something that has yet to be undone. At the writing of this book, GTMO was still open; and lest we forget, the commander who came to “Gitmo-ize” Abu Ghraib, Major General Geoffrey Miller, was transferred from Guantanamo Bay, suggesting that what we know of Abu Ghraib has happened before and will happen again. Abu Ghraib and GTMO are but two cogs in the large and complex machinery of hate and dehumanization. In these spaces, the obliteration of Muslim humanity is complete.

The Forty Rules of Love

Review of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* (Penguin Books, 2015.) (234 pages)

Soumia Ben Rochdi

The Forty Rules of Love is one of Elif Shafak's international bestseller novels, first published in 2010 in English, and later translated into Turkish and other languages. With an effect of magic, it slowly and smoothly creeps into the reader's soul, moving the intellect and the heart away from their comfort zone. Once you open the book, Shams of Tabriz – the protagonist – tells you: “When I was a child, I saw God, I saw angels, I watched the mysteries of the higher and lower worlds.” Yes, it is teasing. Actually, everything revolves around questioning our short-sighted prejudices and quick and shallow interpretations.

The profound transformation that Ella Rubinstein – the contemporary protagonist – undergoes within a year (2008–09) is implicitly inspired by the still-living soul of Shams (sun in Arabic), as she reads *Sweet Blasphemy* – the novel within the novel, and corresponds with its author Aziz A. Zahara (born Craig Richardson in Scotland and converted to Sufism during a professional journey in Morocco).

In the prologue, the narrator starts by drawing a beautifully subtle image: a comparison between the effect of throwing a stone into a river and that of throwing it into a lake. The lake stands for all that is stagnant: mainly our inner universe shaped by our habits of thought and conduct. A space that gets easily upset and troubled because closed to otherness, difference and change, overprotecting itself. It is the reason why “if a stone hits a lake (···) the lake will never be the same again.” (1) The river, on the other hand, draws its strength from its continuous flow, its permanent renewal, and that is why the stone thrown into it is “Nothing unusual. Nothing unmanageable.” (1)

Ella's life was a lake. A forty-year-old housewife, who had a college degree in literature and had been married for twenty years to a wealthy dentist constantly cheating on her, and was the mother of three children. “Every wish she had, every person she befriended and every decision she made was filtered through her marriage.” (1) Yet, she did not consider love, or any deep emotional bond as a priority in that same marriage. Throughout

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the story, life throws pebble after pebble into her “quiet” inner lake, leading her to eventually question her condition, her values and the meaning of life as such.

Sweet Blasphemy, this first manuscript that she is to review for a literary agency, is about the mysterious and strong emotional and spiritual bond which had tied together, once and forever, the souls of Jalal ad Din Rumi, “the best poet and most revered spiritual leader in the history of Islam” (14) and Shams of Tabriz, a uniquely controversial wandering dervish, back in the 13th century. In the beginning, she has no interest in reviewing an old Sufi story which seems “irrelevant to her life” (12). But she is struck twice as soon as she starts reading it.

As her elder daughter, Jeanette announces that she and her boyfriend have decided to get married because they love each other, she overreacts, discovering thus – to her own surprise and at her own expense – that her life is devoid of love, that she is *unhappy*. As if reading her mind and feelings, *Sweet Blasphemy* challenges in the very first page the conception of love she has just thrown in the face of Jeanette to dissuade her from her project: “*despite what some people say, love is not only a sweet feeling bound to come and quickly go away.*” (15)

Then she reads:

“In many ways, the twenty-first century is not that different from the thirteenth century. Both will be recorded in history as times of unprecedented religious clashes, cultural misunderstandings, and a general sense of insecurity and fear of the Other. At times like these, the need for love is greater than ever.” (15)

She is already shaken, both by the family events and this strange coincidence.

Back to Shams of Tabriz, we are startled throughout the novel by his spiritual power, even before we start viewing the world from his lenses. His own murderer – a professional killer – reveals the unprecedented heavy torment he has been experiencing for four years, ever since the night in which he murdered him. No sound came when he threw him in that well! Then, Shams tells the story of his own murder, which he saw in one of his conscious visions. “It was always like this. (...) The more you talked about love, the more they hated you.” (33)

Actually, there is nothing usual about Shams’ concept and practice of love. Nurtured and inspired by his eternal quest for God, by long years of wandering, meeting and speaking to all imaginable sorts of people – especially society’s outcasts, his spiritual power penetrates the novel’s characters

deeply, only to last forever after he has departed. So many amended hearts has he left behind. So many, broken.

He reinterprets Samarkand's innkeeper's apparent violence and dark skepticism as he reads his palm. The latter's wife and unborn baby did not suffer when their home was burned by the Mongols, and they are now "traveling in infinity, as free as a speck of light. (...) You can become a lamb again." (33) Shams assures him.

At the dervish lodge in Baghdad, both the Master and the Novice are 'trapped.' The Master is profoundly saddened to have to let Shams join his promised companion Rumi in Konya, after having delayed his departure for nine months altogether. As to the Novice, he always feels penetrated by Sham's stare, and is always bewitched by his thoughts, intrepidity, and weird manners. He decides to join him in the journey to Konya, but fortunately or unfortunately for him, he fails from the very first test.

Instead of throwing a coin in his bowl, or simply avoiding him like everybody else because of his visible sickness, Shams approaches Hasan the Beggar, kneels down to his eye level, and asks his name. "I laughed. 'What does a man like me need a name for?'" (122) He then offers him a mirror and says: "It will remind you that you bear God within you." (123)

Shams also saves Desert Rose the Harlot from the rage-driven crowd chasing her, and showering her with insults, for having entered a mosque disguised as a man, to listen to Rumi's sermon. Shams addresses the boiling crowd thus: "But why did you notice her in the first place? You go to a mosque but pay more attention to the people around you than to God? If you were the good believers that you claim to be, you would not have noticed this woman even if she were naked. Now, go back to the sermon and do a better job this time." (125)

After the incident, he has a quiet conversation with her. She realizes that she has been seeing herself through society's eye and believing she was *dirty*. There is no 'self' and no 'other' as long as the whole cosmos is one unity chanting God. Time is an illusion that may swallow a person if they let their past define them forever. Eventually, Desert Rose fulfills her eternal dream by running away from the brothel. She finds refuge in Rumi's house, where she vows herself to God's service.

As to Rumi, he keeps seeing the night of Shams' murder in his sleep-dreams for some time before even meeting him. The grief that this premature separation causes him, nobody can describe or understand thoroughly. One day, Shams finally comes to Rumi's house, only to turn his life upside down! As soon as he comes in, they shut themselves up in Rumi's library for forty

days, discussing the *Forty Rules of Love* which Shams has been working on throughout his life-long spiritual journey. It is the legacy he wants to pass on to such a special companion.

Rumi is famous and revered by the masses, his sermons followed by hundreds of people. Yet, he has never directly dealt with society's outcasts. He has never tried to put himself into their skin. It is true that Shams has a great influence – considered by all as a curse which has befallen Rumi, but no less true that Rumi is most thirsty to embrace it. So much he is absorbed in Shams that he starts neglecting his wife and family. His vision of people and the world is modified forever. Moreover, he survives many of Shams' tests, because he just trusts him, loves him and believes in him profoundly and spontaneously.

No wonder then that Rumi accepts to throw his dearest books into his garden's fountain at the request of Shams. A symbolic manner to undo all previous knowledge, beliefs and opinions. Later on, he consents to go to the tavern where Suleiman the Drunk is used to spend time. He sits for a while, talks to the people there and brings two bottles of wine back home, again at the request of Shams. This is the very test in which the novice in Baghdad had failed in, because "he cared too much about his reputation to take the plunge. His concern for the opinions of the others had held him back." (236)

Rumi ends up forsaking his sermons, writing poetry (which is a devaluing art for a scholar at the time), learning the dervish whirling dance created by Shams and performing it in front of the crowds. He loses his reputation, the respect of people, and the love of his family, but feels so fulfilled, so inwardly satisfied to love a person in the company of which God's love is more meaningful. Yet, his apprehension of their inevitable separation is equally strong. It seems that everything and everyone is sacrificed to the triumph of this extraordinary bond, which is one of the story's bewildering aspects for the reader.

Another one is the interesting and hot debates between Shams and representatives of the religious authority on the *sharia*, understanding and interpreting the Qur'an, unity and universality... Many divergent opinions in this sense are put forward throughout the story, and everyone is offered plain space to make their point, to lend their lenses to the reader. Then, one is left face to face with their own inner truth, away from all sorts of disturbing "noises." It is up to everyone to decide how they would want to interpret the overall purpose of the novel and how they would want it to enlighten them.

Now, Ella and Aziz, these totally contrasting characters, end up falling for each other. In one of their email exchanges, Aziz reveals: "I meditated and

tried to visualize your aura. Before long, three colors came to me: warm yellow, timid orange, and reserved metallic purple. I had a feeling these were your colors. (...) I asked a granny to choose a tapestry (...) she pulled a tapestry from a huge pile behind her. I swear to God (...) the one she chose for you was composed of only three tones: yellow, orange and purple.” (92) About a year after having left everything in Northampton behind: her family, her home, her life, it is in Konya that Ella buries her beloved Aziz, together with her old self. This brings us back to the opening of the book: “I watched the mysteries of the higher and lower worlds. I thought all men saw the same. At last I realized that they did not see...”

Special Section: Art.

Tribute to Elyazid Kharbache

The second Issue of *Ikhtilaf* wishes to pay a tribute to Elyazid Kharbache, a Moroccan versatile artist who works and lives in Oujda.

A remarkable visual artist working between Morocco and Europe, notably France, El Yazid Kherbache tackles art with audacity and a perpetual spirit of innovation. His work is a "synthesis of temporalities" in which a multitude of references are interwoven to form a deep and fertile whole where an extended idea can transport the viewer to a lofty pleasure.

In his work, painting, tapestry and sculpture, resonate and echo each other to form a surprising and reflexive contemporary reflection on the times.

Kherbache is an artist of desire whose work provokes a tremendous impulse for life and creation echoing Deleuze's view that "To desire is to construct an arrangement, a context, in which desire flows."

The following tapestry works use a similar technique: thread and plastic bottle caps.













cover illustration “untitled” by Elyazid Kharbach

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The opinions and views expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the editors.

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