

Nations of Writers

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That which is at the heart of “great literature” plays a subdued role and constitutes an optional cellar in the overall structure. It takes place here in the full light of day; whereas over there it brings about a crowd, here it entails nothing less than a halting of life or death.

—F. Kafka
Journal, December 25, 1911

They [the Jewish writers] experienced three different kinds of impossibilities (which by chance I name impossibilities of language, but one could give them a completely different name): impossibility not to write, impossibility to write in German, impossibility to write in another language (than German), to which one can add a fourth impossibility: the impossibility to write.

—F. Kafka
(quoted in Memmi)

I

In a speech given at the first Algerian National Colloquium on Culture, M. Lacheraf, a Maghrebian historian and former Minister of National Education, addressed the question of minimal requirements for the development of a Maghrebian culture, asking the following question: "At what level already or yet to be reached, does a national culture cease to be mere entertainment and become as basic as the bread one eats and the air one breathes?" In the context of the post-colonial Maghreb, it is clear that this kind of "culture," as M. Lacheraf realized, was first of all a goal "to be attained." That is why in his speech he subordinated this question and the answer it might receive to a much more radical one. He said:

To search for an answer to this question is once more to ask ourselves if a given terrain can usefully accommodate a culture that is also given; and whether such an operation does not necessitate that this "terrain," that is to say, the mass of people, should first of all be in a position to respond both to the *cultural needs* that fuel them and to the *demands* made on them by a small group of their fellows who are better equipped to satisfy these needs? (Algiers, Club des Pins, July 1964)

The situation inherited by Algeria at the time of independence is a catastrophic one: in the foreground is a deculturation of the popular masses such that the very notion of a "public" seems like a luxury, or at best a difficult goal to reach; in the background a number of writers, artists (among them filmmakers), and intellectuals are too few and for the most part "acculturated." So not only are the "products" (and the producers) lacking, but so is the "terrain" itself where such products might grow and assume a meaning, mainly the material and objective conditions for the existence of a public. At the time of independence, cultural problems are never addressed in universal and abstract terms of expression and production, but necessarily and always *in regional and concrete terms of territorialization or re-territorialization*, based on the spiritual and cultural fragmentation the country inherited, in order to found or forge a new "geo-politics." It is a question of attempting to create from scratch, but without improvisation, a new collective "subject," something like a national "entity," on the "debris" of a social and cultural community that has avoided disaster and total dismemberment *in extremis*. Here every decision, every commitment becomes clearly a

question of "life and death." To create or re-create a "terrain," to define something like a national "characteristic," to re-territorialize, is all well and good, but with which basic elements does one start?

The forgotten past? The ruins of popular memory? Folklore? Tradition? In fact, none of these elements carry as yet enough force and cohesion in them to allow the anchoring of a national culture. Better still, to believe in the possibility of a re-territorialization through folklore, the past, tradition, or religion would mean to believe in the existence *sub specie aeternitatis* of a Maghrebian norm or essence which 135 years of colonialism have left absolutely intact; it would also mean to believe that sweeping off the "leftovers" of this rule will suffice to recover the *Volkgeist* of the Maghrebian people in its pristine form. Obviously, neither this norm nor this essence existed on Independence Day: "To what norm can one return," said M. Lacheraf, "if it is not to the fleeting aspects of an essentially defunct universe, of which only illusory folkloric vestiges remain, and which would only reconstitute the past in its inoperative nostalgia?" What must be assured first of all "is the continuity of a past linked to the present by new socio-cultural facts, and by tangible and sure acts of resurrection more than of survival." If such a thing as a "national character" does exist, it is yet again a far-off goal in constant dialectic with whatever "living" and "active" component is left in the past, and not simply based on the past.

That said, it still remains that the problems are abstract and the questions not very clear, because whether it takes place through folklore, the past, tradition, or anything else, the re-territorialization of a particular, "authentic" culture needs first to solve the problem of the medium or the mediation through which all this might come about: "What language should one write in? In what language should one make films? In what language should people be forced or allowed to speak? In what spaces? At what time? Or still: in French? Arabic? In Berber? In literary Arabic? Problems as concrete and vital as these ones explain the acuity of tensions, contradictions, and difficulties facing every artist in Algeria. For the writers to write, for filmmakers to make films is a question of life and death, for each one of their gestures, each one of their choices is foundational. In every case it is a matter of delineating a "terrain" and of finding, at any cost, one's way out of the labyrinth of tongues and languages: like an animal stalking out its territory, not to leave one's *umvelt*, etc. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, in their book on Kafka:

"To write [one could add to film] like a dog in his hole, a rat digging his burrow. And thus to find one's own point of under-development, one's own dialect, one's own Third World" (33).

These concrete conditions explain the complex mechanism by which it is historically the theater, and not literature in general (fictional novels in particular) or even the cinema, that will reach the goals expected of a rebirth of Maghrebian popular culture: to be the vital medium that allows a people to recognize within itself a national "character"—as an *identity* in the diversity of languages and local cultures, a *unity* in the multiplicity of ethnies and mores, and an active *solidarity* in the disparity of towns and rural settlements.

II

In what follows, I will briefly analyze some theoretical and practical difficulties that Algerian literature in French has encountered in creating, in spite of everything, its own "language," elaborating a "terrain" and encountering a "public" (three concepts, which, as I have tried to show, are inseparable in this context). I begin with an exposé of the political and ideological problems stemming from the question of language—the medium of this literature. I then illustrate this by referring to some exemplary "cases," particularly the theatrical works of Kateb Yacine and Abdelkader Alloula and also the works of writers like Assia Djebar, Hélène Béji, and Nabile Farès.

What for a long time has impeded any approach to the problem of literature in French, falsely termed literature of "French expression" (Déjeux 75) and of its literary status—both aesthetic and ideological—in relation to so-called French literature, is the illusion that after Independence, there were only two possible antinomical ways open: re-territorializing either through literary Arabic or through bilingualism (French for science and technology, literary Arabic for the "soul," identity, roots). Meanwhile, vernacular languages, still very much alive, found themselves literally shut off: in particular, dialectical or spoken Arabic or Kabyle. Such a narrow view of linguistic phenomena led, on the one hand, to the misunderstanding of an essential part of national cultural life, and on the other hand, to the impossibility of reflecting the real practice of writers, artists, and the masses.

Limiting ourselves simply to the world of arts and culture, we begin by asking, what was the situation of Maghrebian writers? All of them, whether leaning towards French or Arabic, found them-

selves face to face with a language that is itself de-territorialized, and without “deep” social and cultural roots. This was the lot of so-called Francophone writers who, writing in the language of the ex-colonial power, found themselves in an “impossible” situation. They found it impossible not to write because from their point of view as writers “the national conscience, uncertain and long oppressed, must speak through literature” (Deleuze and Guattari 30). The impossibility of writing *in any language other than French*, is for them both the sign of a limit and an irreducible distance from what they can only fantasize about, that is, a primitive Algerian territorialization, which they have the feeling of betraying constantly. Finally, the impossibility of writing in French is also, for the Algerian writer, the fated inability to “translate” the idiosyncratic traits of the society where one lives into the language of another culture. The problem facing writers is thus clearly drawn: how to live in several languages and write only in one?

Maghrebians writers have addressed these theoretical problematics in different ways, according to temperament, personal preoccupations, and ideological and political commitments: some simply stopped writing; others tried to come to terms with their acculturation by continuing to write in French, with the risk of “mis-treating” the language, but making it say what it was not always made or able to say; still others tried to write in literary Arabic and some in spoken Arabic; but neither of the last two has managed to solve the problem I raised earlier, that is, to create a relatively homogeneous cultural “terrain” and to meet with a “public,” in short, to anchor their works in a homogeneous cultural “terrain.” Contrary to what Albert Memmi¹ thought some time ago, a return to Arabic—including dialectical Arabic—was not at all sufficient to solve the contradictions that came up, and to fill in the void that separated the writers from the public; whatever medium they chose, writers ended up in the same impasse. Many reasons were invoked to account for this post-colonial phenomenon: deculturation, lack of material and human means, all of which seem to me subordinate to one essential element—namely, that the dichotomy between “high” and “low” or popular languages, or rather the false dilemma between Arabic on the one hand and bilingualism on the other, does not help us understand what is really going on in the realm of Algerian culture.² An important sociolinguistics, which might have concretely reflected what was actually happening in the country, is lacking here.

A certain number of Maghrebian writers understood very well, without always, however, confronting its practical consequences, that in the cultural space in which they had to produce literary or poetic works, they were not dealing with a single language, or even with two, nor were they dealing with "high" or "low" languages, but always, no matter what language they chose, with at least four types of well-differentiated languages:³

A. A *vernacular language*: "local, spontaneously spoken, made less for communicating, than for communing," consisting essentially of a multiple "play" of languages: maternal languages of the community or of rural origin, including spoken Arabic, Kabyle, and Touareg for example—but also a certain deterritorialized usage, "nomadic" or "typical" of a language that is neither French, nor Arabic, nor Kabyle; a language that is made up of "bits and pieces," alive with sounds stolen, mobilized, "emigrated" from one language to another: a heterogeneous and disparate mix of "proper" or "pure" French, Arabic dialect or Kabyle as spoken in the towns: "*Ouach rak bian?*" 'So, are you all right?'⁴

B. A *vehicular language*: "national or regional, learned by necessity, aimed at communication in the cities," long monopolized by French, but which has progressively tended to be replaced by Arabic on a national level or in certain sectors (commerce, industry, international relations) by English. The "vehicular" is thus the urban language of political and economic power or, in the words of F. Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* (1887), the language of *Gesellschaft*, that is in the language of the "public sphere" rather than the language of "community." But what is worth noting here is that we find ourselves facing a new "play" of languages: classical Arabic, French, and English.

One more observation regarding the subject is that because it wants to be "universal," as Gobard demonstrates, this kind of language "tends to destroy vernacular languages, whatever their sociolinguistic proximity or their genetic roots." Thus, whatever language it proceeds from, the "vehicular" is always a form of linguistic imperialism, a linguistic Attila, and wherever it passes "the affect of communities," says Gobard, carried by the vernacular (territory, way of life, food, nomenclature) dries up and perishes in the long run. The vehicular is also a language of primary de-territorialization. Being "universal" it wants to be "neutral," "objective," that is a language

of “everyone” and “anyone” (qtd. in Deleuze and Guattari, 44). Some politico-linguistic “malaises” are born of the confrontation, the clash between these two types of languages.⁵

C. A *referential language*: “functions as an oral or written reference, through proverbs, sayings, literature, rhetoric, etc.,” and is destined normally, that is in ‘non-dislocated’ cultures and societies, to carry out a cultural re-territorialization.” Here, we find once again all the languages of the “vernacular,” each carrying in its own way a few notations, or fragments of the past, as well as the two main “vehicular” languages: Arabic (the poems and texts of the Emir Abdelkader, for example) and French (the works of Francophone writers, historians, as well as the Archives . . .).

D. Finally, a *mythic language*: which “acts as a last resort, a verbal magic whose incomprehensibility is understood as an irrefutable proof of the sacred” (qtd. in Deleuze and Guattari: 10, 44). This language is mainly expressed in the so-called “literary” or “classical” Arabic, as the language of spiritual and religious re-territorialization.

I must note, after Gobard, that all these sets of languages do not share the same spatio-temporal terrain: indeed, the *vernacular* is the “*here and now*” of regional and maternal language; the *vehicular* is the “*everywhere*” and the “*later on*” of the language of cities, at once centralizing and prospective; the *referential* is the “*over there*” and the “*yesterday*” of national life; finally the *mythic* is the “*beyond*” and the “*forever*” and “*always*” of the sacred.

As I said earlier, the fundamental thing is the medium, the language, not the “expression.” But that is still too abstract. We must ask ourselves what kind of “machine of expression” can take into account this multiplicity of languages without exploding? What “machine” can “integrate” all the functions performed by these various languages, without crushing or reducing them to an abstract totality? What “machine” is capable of embracing at once so many different terrains and heterogeneous temporalities?

If we think of the works of scholars such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, or Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, what immediately comes to mind is that it is the novel that can best fulfill this “demand.” But in the sociocultural conditions of “dis-location” and quasi “dis-integration” that I have described, the novelistic or narrative “take-

over” could not be easily effected. It is only in the “integrated” nations, that is to say in the countries that have not been subjected to colonial “dismantling,” that this kind of fictional take-over could be exercised. I am thinking, here, of what Carlos José Mariátegui, for example, wrote in his *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*:

In the history of the West, the flowering of National literatures coincided with the political affirmation of the Nation. It formed part of the movement which, through the Reformation and the Renaissance, created the ideological and spiritual factors of the liberal revolution and the capitalist order (qtd. in Brennan 68).

It is only in the West that we can say without a major risk of error that the novel, as a literary form, like journalism, has been “one of the conductors of the essential force that preceded the emergence of Nations and of Nationalism, and remains an important part of this phenomenon.” (Anthony Barnett, “Salman Rushdie: A Review Article,” qtd. in Brennan 68 n. 15)

In the context I have analyzed, it is not the novel, but the theater that would play a role in “the formation” of a national, popular culture. What a writer like Kateb Yacine and a man of theater like Abdelkader Alloula understood well is that while the poet and the novelist often stumble on a word, a dialectal expression, a “national” (trans-individual) trait, popular theater knows virtually no obstacles. Because it is an oral art, the theater can “stage” and set in motion all that is necessary for it and play on various registers: speech, gestures, mime, and music which, even if they are regional, will be able to “merge” the accents and the sayings and tales that will contribute to “narrating” the Nation. It is true that this kind of “merging” will be done with more or less success, talent, or genius, but still with a certain ease that poets and writers—limited as they are by one language—can only dream about. Blessed are the men and women of the Maghrebian theater who can express themselves in all of the country’s languages that run through them and nourish their artistic talents. These are languages in which it would be possible to express, even in a confused way, the national “sentiment.” There is a difference between writing “*Krrr! Krrrr!*,” as in Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*, which does not mean much to a Francophone reader (in spite of the translation at the bottom of the page, which informs us that this expression means “Confess!”), and hearing an actor say it

or scream it in a play where both French and vernacular Arabic are at play.

In opting for the theater and in returning to “orality,” Kateb Yacine and Abdelkader Alloula searched less for a linguistic anchor in spoken Arabic than for a nomadic shift of de-territorialization that would allow them to adapt French to Arabic and also to mobilize all the languages of everyday life, and to provide the means to experiment with popular affects. In this sense, there is some Kafka in Kateb Yacine, the Kafka who was interested in Czech or Yiddish popular theater. There is perhaps, at the same time, an uncanny reminder of Artaud, the theoretician of the *Theater of Cruelty*, who, reflecting upon his relationship to language, says:

As for French, it makes one sick
It is the great sick one
Sick with a disease, a fatigue
That makes one believe that one is French,
That is to say all done
The undone! (qtd. in Thévenin 56)

For Kateb, as for Artaud, it was a question of “vanquishing French without leaving it,” for like Artaud, Kateb had held French in his tongue for fifty years, while at the same time he had “other languages under the tree”: French, Arabic, and Berber. Indeed, Kateb Yacine did not hesitate to use these three languages, to obtain what Artaud expected from his anti-nationalist theater: “A chant that is stressed, secular, non-liturgical, non-ritualistic, and non-Greek, between Negro, Chinese, Indian, and French” (56).

If post-colonial Maghrebian literature in general, and Algerian literature in particular, had been confined only to the production of theatrical works, the problem of language would have been solved, and it would have been unnecessary to question it further. Contrary to what Albert Memmi predicted, the three countries of the Maghreb have restricted themselves neither to the production of theatrical works in spoken or literary Arabic nor to literary works in classical Arabic. If writers have used much of their time and energy producing and writing theatrical works, with the exception of Kateb Yacine and Malek Alloula, the majority are known, after all, as novelists. It seems paradoxical that it is as novelists that Khatibi, Farès, Djébar, Meddeb, Dib, Béji, and other recognized Maghrebian Francophone post-colonial writers have placed themselves on the literary scene

as “authors”! In spite of the alienation that the French language represented for these writers and the contradictions caused by this situation of “deterritorialization,” each of them has been known, first of all, as an author of poems, novels, and essays.

We know today that all these de-territorializing movements are inseparable from the problem of language: there are Francophone intellectuals in a country that soon opted for Arabization; Arabophone writers in a country that inherited 85 percent of illiterate people after Independence and where French dominates in administration, universities, and towns; there are the Kabyles, the Mozabites, or the Touaregs, who must abandon their language when they leave the country or the desert; there is also dialectical Arabic which everyone speaks but few people, with good reason, read or write. What can be done with this linguistic mush? Or as Deleuze and Guattari put it: “How does one become the nomad, the immigrant, and the gypsy of one’s own language?” (19). How can one account for what is “specific” to the Maghreb when one can only write in the language of the former colonizer? And most of all, which social status will be given to Algerian Francophone writers in a “nation” that is in the process of switching to Arabic? Kafka said: “To snatch the child from the cradle, to dance on a tight-rope.” And this is what it is about: to write, to think in a foreign language “like thieves,” to submit the dominant language to the craziest of uses, to the wildest of transformations: “L’enter’ment di firiti i la cause di calamiti!” ‘The burial of truths is the cause of calamities.’

“To snatch the child from the grave” means to redirect French from its first mooring in order to define and create one’s own situation. For the Francophone writers of the Maghreb, there were at first apparently only two possible ways: either one would artificially “enrich” French, stuffing it with all the resources of a “delirious” symbolism, onirism, and allegory, as in the works of Mohammed Dib, Rachid Boudjedra, and to some extent Farès; but in the end such efforts meant “a desperate attempt at symbolic re-territorialization, based on archetypes of sex, blood, and death, which only accentuates the break with the people” (Deleuze and Guattari 34). Or one could opt for the ultimate in sobriety and stylistic “poverty”; towards “white” writing or the zero degree of writing—that of Boudjedra in *L’escargot entêté*, Dib’s poems, Mouloud Mammeri’s novels, or Assia Djebar’s *Le Blanc de l’Algérie*, for example.

That said, it would be a surrender to remain at the level of such grand generalizations. Such a path has led me to see more and more

clearly that the forces that have carried these writers cannot be understood out of context, and very precisely outside of the inscription of their work within the history of the Maghreb since independence. What we can see more clearly today (in 1998) is that this “hand-to-hand” combat with the languages of the country cannot be separated from a combat otherwise more trying and more difficult to disentangle: that of the writer becoming aware of the status of his or her “fabulation.” Indeed, if on the eve of independence, the goals of producing an “entity” or a national identity were to be attained by any means possible, it quickly became clear that things would not fall into place without difficulties.

To make things simpler for the sake of argument, I would say that concerning Algeria at least—but we can easily extrapolate the same argument to the other countries of the Maghreb—we can come up with at least three well-differentiated stages in the process of forming (or “narrating”) the Nation. I situate the first period during the years preceding the war of national liberation, with writers such as Mouloud Feraoun, Malek Bennabi, and the first Mammeri, that is to say, with writers who found themselves still in the colonial “domain” or sphere of influence and whose writings already alluded to a form of Algerian or Maghrebian territorialization, but without truly developing characteristics that would really detach it from the colonial hold. In the period of “acculturation and mimetism,” as Jean Déjeux has well observed, one speaks of the Algerian “problem” or “malaise,” of assimilation, equality, and new rights and liberties, without being able to detach what we might call the “desired” nation from what we begin to define as its chains. The Maghreb, and more so Algeria, are still the Maghreb and Algeria as “seen by a native” (Déjeux 58).

The second period emerges gradually in the 1950s in works as different as those of Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun, Jean Amrouche, and Malek Haddad or Assia Djebar,⁶ and this will be a period of “the affirmation of one’s identity and of combat” according to Jean Déjeux: “The writer, as Malek Haddad would write, is more the product of History than of Geography. . . . One does not become Algerian just because one wants to. . . . *Literary nationality* is not a juridical formality and is not of the competence of the legislator, but rather of history” (Déjeux 72). During this period, which I call the “Fanonian period,” any compromise, any reconciliation, any exchange even with former colonial France is now rejected, and

what motivates the writer is what I would call mythical thought, or, to use Jean Luc Nancy's own words, "mything thought" (la "pensée mythante"), which is not "different from the thought of a founding thought, or the foundation through fiction": writing remains contemporary and synonymous with laying the ground for the nation to come. With the authors I have cited, far from being adverse to one another, the two movements of *mything* and *thinking* converge into a "mythical idea of myth": art, poetry, and creative imagination are invoked in order to promote the formation of "Algeria," that is, an Algeria "to come" that the "new man," according to Fanon, was supposed to achieve and "realize." In this sense, what characterizes this "epoch" is that the myth it creates is not (yet) susceptible of being analyzed according to another truth that is foreign to its own, and consequently especially not in terms of "fiction": to write the "fiction" of Algeria is to write "Algeria," is to give (oneself) an Algeria which, although "mythical," is not less real or "authentic" because it is (still) "necessary"—and it is necessary because it is desired, desirable, and "narratable." Seized within the twisted logic of mythical autofiction, the myth will no more present itself as the product of a *sui generis* truth, but will rather tend to become truth "itself." Therefore, we have the relatively happy times when the decolonized writer sincerely feels that he or she is participating in the effort of national "edification": what he or she "narrates" about Algeria (through myth) is "true" and this truth that mythical fiction has conferred upon the myth of Algeria (as a unified narrated country) only reinforces itself during the first decade following independence.

It should be noted, though, that at the same exact moment when this narrative of foundation takes place, a voice of dissonance starts to emerge, and does not take long before it makes itself heard. It is, it seems to me, with the work of Nabile Farès that this voice finds its first literary expression in the Maghreb. I am according a special position to Farès's work here, since it is in his work that is formulated for the first time in the Maghreb both "poetically" and "theoretically" what I would call, along with Jean-Luc Nancy, the first "interruption" of the pseudo-founding myths of modern Algeria. With Farès, it is indeed as if the act of writing inaugurated itself out of a radical questioning of the "transparency" and "validity" of myth and mythologizing in general. Indeed, for Farès, the "new myth" whose name is "Algeria" (that is to say that which has succeeded French Algeria) would not be only dangerous, but vain and misleading.

ing, and this is not only because it would be fictional and would not account for the “real” Algeria or the Maghreb, but mainly because it would be essentially blind to what constitutes it as an “originary” myth and/or “myth of the origins.” Farès’s great discovery was “forgetfulness,” that which the “nation,” every nation, owes to myth and the process of “fictionalization” that corresponds to it. It is, at the same time, the realization that the appeal to the power of myth, whether it is “poetic” or “political,” is always two-sided: here, the “narrative of foundation” (myth) and “fiction” are but one:

The explanatory great *forgetfulness* is what (only) a poetics can make heard. Kateb Yacine has expressed this poetics of Algeria in *Nedjma*, in spite of the fact that *Nedjma* is only the first approach to the poetic Algeria. To put it differently, the trap of Algeria was her beauty, and, nowadays, the trap of Algeria continues to be a realist vision. This is because any real approach to Algeria—ARTISTICALLY SPEAKING, POETICALLY SPEAKING—can only be the discovery of the allegorical reality of the beauty of Algeria. (Fàres 35)

By noting that the Algeria of Kateb Yacine comes from a “poetics” and that the latter is but a “first approach,” Nabile Farès showed, at the beginning of the 70s, that he was not duped by the “allegorical” character of Algeria, as he says, that is to say the “mythical” aspect of a certain construction of the Algerian (a)historical reality. In the same way, he denounced what a certain mythological “realism,” or in other words, how a certain naiveté towards the “fantasizing” power of myth could be dangerous for the “emerging” Nation. It is this particular “sensitivity” to the power of allegory that gives Farès’s work a very particular status in contemporary Maghrebian literature. His work marks a turning point and “anticipates” the “tragedy” that will follow in Algeria. But in 1971, Farès had neither the desire nor the intention to play the role of Cassandra. His tone still had a certain optimism, for he believed, like many of his fellow-citizens, that a country that had carried out such a difficult war of liberation would be equally capable of *fighting* the “allegorical” combat and *overcoming* it:

This is why we will witness (we the inhabitants of the peninsula) the passage from an allegorical reality to an allegory that has become reality. Hence our unmeasured hope; to see artistic expression offer reality a density that it has not yet obtained. (37)

A good disciple of Fanon and of James Baldwin, his mentor in *Un Passager de l'Occident*, Farès still believed in the power of the artist's "myth" within the framework of the Nation; he still believed in the power of an independent Algeria to conduct its "second" revolution—that is, *a revolution of mentalities*: "The artist today is very important," he wrote, citing James Baldwin, "for he makes it possible to impose realities. He is capable of changing mentalities." But at the same time Farès knew the risk that a certain "realism" would ultimately carry him away, and that was why he added, quoting . . . James Baldwin: "I even believe that *it is too late*. They are too stupid . . . and *they have killed all my friends*" (38).

With writers like Farès—but we could show the same thing with others, such as Khatibi in Morocco, Meddeb in Tunisia, or Assia Djebar in Algeria—we begin to notice not only a simple "denunciation" of such and such national "myth" as a "passage from an allegorical reality to an allegory becoming reality," but also its "interruption." With these writers, and this is the third movement or "moment" I mentioned, the myth (of the Nation) is going to be "interrupted." Through this interruption, the voice of an "incomplete" community will emerge and be able to speak "like the myth" without being a mythical speech: "There is, then," as Jean-Luc Nancy says, "a *voice of interruption*, and its schema is imprinted in the rustling of the community, which is exposed for its own dispersion. . . . There is a voice of the community that articulates itself within the interruption and by the interruption itself" (qtd. in Farès 156).

In Algeria, this "voice" (of interruption) is literature, and it is the writers who will assume responsibility for it. It is the voice of a literature that will become more and more irreconcilable, or in the words of Maurice Blanchot, "unbecoming," because it is far from reinforcing such and such "myth" of origins, or certain "fictions" of the Nation or of the community, that are always already given; this literature will transform itself into a privileged instrument of the demystification or rather of the *de-mythification* of a nation that has been reduced to being but the cultivation of a state that has not been able to meet its task.⁷ Hence, what remains to be shared will not be the one "nation," unique and unified; neither will it be the communion or even the completed identity of all in each one, "but the sharing itself and, consequently, the non-identity of all, of each one with himself and with others, and the non-identity of the *oeuvre* with itself, and of literature, at last with literature itself" (qtd. in

Farès 164).

The writer who has, without doubt, best understood this dimension of things and its tragic side is Hélé Béji, who wrote in *Le Désenchantement national*:

The national conscience and the nationalist power are no longer in the same historical trajectory, even if a similar discourse brings them together. The freedom that joined them (the dialectical movement of the national conscience towards the constitution of a State) separates them today. Placed back to back, the national conscience as movement, and the nationalism of the State as fixity, have functions that are radically opposed to one another in terms of liberty. (Béji 18)

Notes

1. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. See the sections entitled: "The school of the colonized; colonial bilingualism and the situation of the writer," and the following passage in particular: "The colonized writer is condemned to live his renunciations between maternal and colonial languages to the bitter end. The problem can be concluded in only two ways: by the natural death of colonized literature; the following generations, born in liberty, will write spontaneously in their newly found language. Without waiting that long, a second possibility can tempt the writer: to decide to join the literature of the colonizing country. Let us leave aside the ethical problems raised by such an attitude. It is the suicide of colonized literature; in either prospect (the only difference being in the date) colonized literature in European languages appears condemned to die young" (111).

The problem is not to say that Memmi was mistaken, but to note that the most important Maghrebien Francophone writers were born after independence, and that we continue to see more new, talented Francophone writers.

2. We could apply, with the necessary "adjustments," the same analysis to the other countries of the Maghreb: Tunisia and Morocco.

3. In what follows, I rely on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and of Henri Gobard, *L'aliénation linguistique: Analyse tétraglossique*, which is also cited by Deleuze and Guattari.

4. An expression where we have words in French and words in Arabic, and a pronunciation (or an accent?) that is supposedly "Kabyle."

5. See Farès. I am referring here specifically to the little "allegory" Farès gives us to meditate about on page 32: "It is now that the Kabyle suffers

from an unfathomable malaise: it is what we call the malaise of the fig-tree. There exists even a song one can pronounce with the tip of one's lips to show that one can speak but does not want to be heard. A song so precious and so intimate nowadays! . . . Thus, this song says that "our fig-tree was always invaded by mushrooms" and that "the coming of the people of the plains has corrupted our orchard" and that "if the fig-tree does not speak anymore, it is because its friend, the hedgehog, has been stolen," etc. All of the context (and the rest of this apologue) shows Farès's acute consciousness of what Memmi called the "linguistic drama."

6. The first manner, that, for example, of *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde*, published in 1962. Interestingly enough, this "period" corresponds very well to what Fredric Jameson named "national allegories." I hope to show that the time of production of "allegories" is only a phase. See Jameson 69.

7. Being unable to develop this point within the framework of this essay, I refer the reader to my article "L'exil est mon royaume ou les devenir de Nabile Farès : idéographie et politique."

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