



Transnational Eruption: Moroccan Diaspora and Literary Disruption

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This article proposes a comparative reading of two works by writers of Moroccan descent that examine the phenomenon of migration and elaborate on what Ato Quayson has called the “diasporic imaginary.” Written as first-person narratives, Abdellah Taïa’s *Une Mélancolie arabe* (2008) and Saphia Azzeddine’s *Mon Père en doute encore* (2020) approach the migration experience from a gay man’s and a heterosexual woman’s perspective who both experience departures, arrivals, and nostalgic yearnings. Portraying a young man from a poor Moroccan family, Taïa’s fourth semibiographical fictional account tells of the narrator’s fascination for music and cinema that takes him to Paris and Cairo, and his coming to terms with a homosexual identity. Twelve years later, in her eighth novel, Azzeddine amalgamates the autobiographic and the fictional to tell the story of her father who arrived in France in the 1960s. Although the authors cover different geographical and historical contexts, both writers draw upon a common Moroccan heritage, and as diasporans they examine the constraints of diaspora life from different gender positions and through recourse to a variety of genres. While the interweaving of the autobiographical and the fictional in both texts complicate Taïa and Azzeddine’s literary approach towards truth-telling, the interpretive frameworks provided by the travelogue and patriography allow for a heightened reading experience.

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Introduction

How do (im)migrants construct and negotiate their relationships with multiple spaces? When (im)migration is marked by pain and loss, how do they respond to adjustment and resettlement? Writers from the Moroccan diaspora have long raised and reckoned with these questions. From Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs* (1955) written in French, and Anouar Majid's *Si Yussef* written in English, to Abdelkader Benali's Dutch-written *Bruiloft aan zee* (1996) or Najat El Hachimi's *L'Ultim Patriarca* (2009) written in Catalan, several authors of the Moroccan diaspora have put the question of migration at the centre of their literary projects. With regards to the literature of the Moroccan diaspora in French, one year before the end of the French Protectorate in Morocco, Driss Chraïbi wrote his second novel which tells the odyssey of Yalann Waldik, a young Algerian who arrives in Paris and leads a life of poverty and torment surrounded by masses of unemployed North Africans. In France, between the publication of Chraïbi's pioneering novel and 1983's *Marche des Beurs*, which coincides with the publication of *Le Thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* (1983) by Mehdi Charef, a series of Maghrebi authors have devoted their texts to the theme of migration either partially or entirely (Déjeux 1985, 95-98). Literary articulations of migration can also be found in the works of authors of Moroccan heritage associated with Beur and Banlieue literature. If Leïla Houari's *Zeïda de nulle part* (1985) and Mohamed Razane's *Dit Violent* (2006) have received scholarly attention, Tahar Ben Jelloun's work, which covers a time span of several decades, also elaborates on migration, as is the case with the central character of the Moroccan migrant worker in Paris of *La Réclusion solitaire* (1976) and the immigrant's return to the homeland in *Au Pays* (2009). Until now, however, the literary depiction of Moroccan (im)migration through the lens of diaspora has been overlooked.

Une Mélancolie arabe (2008) by the Moroccan writer Abdellah Taïa, published in English translation under the title *An Arab Melancholia* (2012), and *Mon Père en doute encore* by Franco-Moroccan writer Saphia Azzeddine provide rich ground to examine the literary treatment of migration and diaspora. Portraying a young man from a poor Moroccan family, Taïa's fourth semibiographical fictional account tells of the narrator's fascination for music and cinema that takes him to Paris and Cairo, and his coming to terms with a homosexual identity. Twelve years later, in her eighth novel, Azzeddine amalgamates the autobiographic and the fictional to tell the story of her father who arrived in France in the 1960s.

In support of his claim that the "sense of exile, mobility and circulation" is "central to the condition of diaspora", Ato Quayson (2013, 139) illustrates the concept of diasporic imaginary by drawing primarily from texts that have "reflected changes to social formations since World War II and the independence of many nations from the yoke of colonialism" (140). Quayson is of the view that a theory of the diasporic imaginary needs to be articulated around a questioning of "the assumption of the nation-state as the privileged horizon for literary history," the impact of "voluntary and enforced movements of populations [...] on the imagination," and the production of a "model for interpreting literary texts in full view of their grounding in the recursive mobilities of the past and present time" (140). If the "figure of the stranger or that of the one who arrives from a point outside of demarcated social or communal boundaries" (141) is firmly anchored in the postcolonial tradition, "for the diasporic

imaginary, on the other hand, the condition of strangerhood or estrangement is a necessary and inescapable dimension” (142). Quayson also argues that

as a thematic, strangerhood must properly be thought of as occupying a continuum between affiliation/attachment and disaffiliation/estrangement, with different points on that continuum helping to configure a text as either postcolonial or diasporic [...] the condition of strangerhood is by no means the only defining characteristic of the diasporic imaginary. (142)

Yet, arguing that postcolonial literature is predominantly characterized by a “dynamic relationship between the implicit or explicit assertion of the epochality of a particular space (nation, community, society) as providing the dominant horizon for identity and identification”, Quayson adds that, “the oscillatory structure of strangerhood and its problematic relation to spatial epochality is one area that allows diasporic writing both to overlap and to be sharply distinguished from postcolonialism” (142). In view of this, the coupling of Taïa and Azzeddine’s swinging between affiliation/attachment and disaffiliation/estrangement with 1940-2010s France/Morocco’s spatial epochality advances the idea of *Une Mélancolie arabe* and *Mon Père en doute encoré*’s diasporic configuration.

Quayson’s assertion that “the diasporic imaginary is encapsulated in a set of complex relationships between form, content, and affective economies” and that the elements of place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting are “central to the diasporic imaginary in literature” (148) is of particular interest for the discussion on the Moroccan diasporic imaginary. Quayson emphasises the role played by the dialectical relation between the homeland and the place of sojourn, the close connection between displacement and nostalgia for a lost time and space, and he adds that “[g]enealogical accounting involves questions of ancestry, ethnicity, tradition, and culture and provides a distinguishing past to the person or community” (151). He finds the “stories of the ‘how-we-got-here’ variety” to be one of the defining characteristics of genealogical accounting, along with the production of a “nexus of affiliations”, the expression of a “quest motif”, and the introduction of “a form of ethical imperative that is incorporated into the recognition of the past” (151-152). While each of these features can be observed in Taïa and Azzeddine’s texts, they are approached by the authors through different perspectives and provide insight into the Moroccan and Maghrebi communities in France. In Quayson’s view, it is the author’s interest in “moments of epochality” and adherence to the “trope of the epochal, nation-state inflected or not,” and the “nation-and-narration orientation,” that help understand “the differences between postcolonial and diasporic literature” (153). While he considers that genealogical accounting is “constitutive” (148) of the diasporic imaginary, it is the configuration of elements of place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting that renders possible the positioning of Taïa and Azzeddine’s texts on a spectrum that includes a range of texts that can be “asserted to be strongly diasporic, while others may be only noted as expressing the diasporic imaginary in an attenuated form” (148). Quayson reaches the conclusion that “taking account of the contributions of diasporas to world history is fundamental,” and that literary elaborations on “integrity and discontinuity, attachment and disaffiliation may provide us handy windows for understanding the variegated world in which we live and how to live in it” (154). As such, the variations on the diasporic imaginary developed in *Une Mélancolie arabe* and *Mon Père en doute*

encore can be recognized as valid contributions to the comprehension of the Moroccan diaspora and the world beyond its boundaries.

Abdellah Taïa and *Une Mélancolie arabe*

In spite of the main character's sojourn in Cairo (Taïa 2012, 45), it is the dialectical relationship between France and Morocco that appears to occupy a central position in the narrative as illustrated by Abdellah's migration in 1998 from Hay Salam, a suburb of Salé, to Paris and the one-week stay in Marrakech he later performs as part of an internship (35). The scene in which Abdellah describes the neighbourhood where he grew up provides the reader with insight into the state of precarity in which Moroccan youths live:

The entire Hay Salam neighborhood was taking a siesta. Only the men who sold loosies resisted the urge to sleep. There they stayed at the corner of the *derb*, loyal, waiting, hoping, their small transistor radios tuned to the Tangier station, Medi 1. I loved them. From a distance. I never spoke to them. I found them appealing. They were bad boys. Real tough guys. The damned. The scarred. Every night they drank cheap wine while they listened to their great diva, Oum Kalthoum. I am still in love with them. I can't get them out of my mind. Men around 20 or 30 years old, lean, tough, badly shaven, tender in spite of themselves. I have taken them with me. They are still strong within me. (Taïa 2012, 11)¹

Hence, Abdellah indicates here his feeling of ambivalence, insisting not only on the peripherality of Hay Salam, but also on his own position of marginality, and his sense of estrangement is even more accentuated by the fact that he develops ambivalent feelings, of both admiration and fear towards groups of voiceless neighbours. In his rendering of the local community's precariousness, Abdellah sets up an interesting contrast between the affection he has developed for his male neighbours and the mutism that characterizes the neighbourly relations. By doing so, Abdellah acknowledges his lasting attachment to the manly presence of his childhood's neighbourhood.

The focus on the dialectical tension between Morocco and Paris as principal locations in the narrative also allows for a variety of interpretations, such as the scene in which Abdellah, after a visit to his unrequited lover Javier, describes his wanderings in the streets of Paris:

I just wanted to walk around, breathe in the night alone, walk across the city, the place I came to when I left Morocco to pursue my dreams of breaking into the movies, the home where I found myself happy and sad again and again, found myself still standing with both feet on the ground. It was a direct route. No sidetracks. Blanche. Pigalle. Anvers. Barbès-Rochechouart. La Chapelle. Stalingrad. Jaurès. Colonel-Fabien. Belleville. Nine metro stations on foot. A walk

¹ "Tout le quartier de Hay Salam faisait la sieste. Seuls les vendeurs de cigarettes au détail résistaient à l'appel du sommeil. Ils restaient au coin du *derb*, fidèles, à attendre, à espérer leur petit transistor branché sur la radio de Tanger, Medi 1. Je les aimais. De loin. Je ne leur parlais jamais. Ils m'attiraient. C'étaient des mauvais garçons. Les durs. Les maudits. Les balafrés. Ils buvaient toutes les nuit du vin bon marché en écoutant leur muse, Oum Kalthoum. Je les aime toujours. Je ne les oublie pas. Homme de 20 ou 30 ans, maigres, rudes, mal rasés, tendres malgré eux, je les ai emportés avec moi. Ils sont encore forts en moi" (Taïa 2008, 11).

across Paris. My very own Stations of the Cross, which I followed so that I could finally speak with Javier. (Taïa 2012, 51-52)²

The peculiarity of the scene lies in Abdellah's state of ambivalence, and if the enumeration, in a count-down manner, of the metro stations reinforces the idea of a lengthy and monotonous journey, the introduction of religious imagery with reference to the biblical Calvary indicates that the love affair turns his life into a sacrifice that resembles martyrdom.

Yet, in line with Abdellah's experience of migration, a sense of nostalgia for a lost time and lost space accompanies his exploration of childhood memories:

From my first life, my first lifetime, my childhood spent being naked, alone naked, sometimes naked in group, just one smell remains, a strong, human, disturbing, possessive smell. It's my mother M'Barka's smell. The smell that comes from her country-girl, slightly overweight body, the one which tells me that she hasn't bathed in a week. A smell that comes from the same place we do. Her, me, Tadla – that small town which the Oum Rabii River runs through. I am with her in her body. Like her, I come from that region, which I have never known. Never breathed in. But through M'Barka, that world of yesterday pulses through me today. (Taïa 2012, 10-11)³

The longing for the native soil carries a significant emotional weight and resonates with Hutcheon's view that "it is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power" (Hutcheon and Valdés 1998-2000, 20). Also, by drawing an olfactory portrait of his mother, Abdellah points to the significant role played by smell as it attenuates the feeling of loss and yearning which results from the inaccessibility of a past time and space. Besides, as much as Abdellah is worried about his health, his concern with weight is exacerbated by the anxiety of aging, and from this perspective the depiction of Abdellah's sense of decay is reinforced by a sense of abrupt and unpleasant surprise:

When I arrived in Paris in 1998, I still weighed 120 lbs. Five years later, in 2003, I was extremely frightened when I discovered on the night of my birthday that my weight had shot up, it was well over 150 lbs. Worse than that, I was just one pound away from 155 lbs! [...] Ho-ly shit! Double holy shit. Old and fat! This time, I was the one who told myself, "Hey, you have to do something, you have to do something fast!" (Taïa 2012, 67-8)⁴

² "J'avais envie d'errer, de respirer la nuit seul, de traverser cette ville où, depuis que j'avais quitté le Maroc poursuivant des rêves cinématographiques, je me redécouvrais heureux et triste, debout et à terre. C'était direct. Pas de changement. Blanche. Pigalle. Anvers. Barbès-Rochechouart. La Chapelle. Stalingrad. Jaurès. Colonel-Fabien. Belleville. Neuf stations à pied. Une traversée de Paris. Un chemin de croix pour parler enfin à Javier" (Taïa 2008, 45-6).

³ "Il ne reste de ma première vie, mon premier cycle de vie, l'enfance nue, seule, parfois en groupe, qu'une odeur, humaine, forte, dérangeante, possessive. Celle de ma mère M'Barka. Celle de son corps campagnard et légèrement gras. Ma mère qui ne se s'est pas lavée depuis une semaine. Une odeur des origines, les siennes, les miennes. Tadla : elle est de ce bled traversé par le fleuve d'Oum Rabii. Je suis avec elle dans son corps. Je suis comme elle de cette région que je n'ai jamais connue. Ni respirée. Mais à travers M'Barka, ce monde d'hier, je l'ai palpitant en moi" (Taïa 2008, 10).

⁴ "En arrivant à Paris, en 1998, je pesais encore 55 kg. Cinq ans plus tard, en 2003, la veille de mon anniversaire, j'ai découvert avec horreur que mon poids avait dépassé largement les 60 kg. Pire, il ne manquait qu'un seul kilo pour atteindre les 70 [...]. Ce fut un choc. Deux fois un

It is also possible to read the degenerating effects of the migration experience through Abdellah's bodily transformation, and this serves also to suggest that it is after several years in Paris that he becomes finally aware of the repellent and traumatic dimension of his own body's transformation and decay.

When aiming to identify instances of genealogical accounting in the novel, Abdellah's initial journey from Morocco to France does not receive significant attention, rather it is succinctly mentioned during the episode in which he observes the metamorphosis of his body five years after arriving in the French capital: "[T]he guy [...] who arrived in Paris ecstatic and deceived, just taking it all in" (Taïa 2012, 68).⁵ Not only does Abdellah describe his ambivalent state of mind, but he also insists on the role played by observation in his tormented discovery of French society. In other words, Taïa's text gives precedence to meticulous observations over considerations relating to the conditions of departure and arrival. A close reading of the text indicates that Abdellah's attention to olfactory experiences is enriched by a consideration of gaze as a privileged source of information. Furthermore, a clear quest motif permeates *Une Mélancolie arabe*, and Abdellah's ambition to break into the cinema industry is central to the narrative. In his quest, Taïa explores the friction between career related aspirations and intimate relationships from the perspective of a newly-arrived immigrant, as happens when he describes the circumstances of his breakup with Slimane:

I could not let my dreams of Paris vanish completely. I was in the city to grow up, become an adult. Be somebody. Make a name for myself. To finally turn my dreams into reality, all the ideas I had about life, about making movies, the dreams I'd be carrying around inside me for so long, for too long. You never understood that. I didn't either, never knew how the dreams were. That they were THE strongest thing of all. (Taïa 2012, 135, capitals in the French text and the English translation).⁶

If the pursuit of professional success is at the origin of Salah and Slimane's feelings of misunderstanding and mismatch, through the fascination developed since childhood for the Egyptian actress Souad Hosni (21) who committed suicide in 2001, cinema also opens a range of work opportunities that take him to Cairo:

I don't know why I went to her grave. But I do know that in the passageways of the immense and magnificent cemetery in ruins, I saw how I would end my days, leaving the earth once and for all. I saw, once again, around me, the Arab world in

choc. Vieux. Gros. Cette-fois-ci, c'est moi qui me suis dit : « Il faut faire quelque chose ! Vite ! » (Taïa 2008, 61-62).

⁵ "[C]et Abdellah qui débarque à Paris, dans l'extase et la déception, les yeux grands ouverts" (Taïa 2008, 62).

⁶ "Je ne pouvais pas laisser mon rêve de Paris s'évanouir complètement. J'étais dans cette ville pour grandir, devenir un adulte. Devenir quelqu'un. Un nom. Réaliser des projets de films, de vie, portés en moi avec ferveur, depuis longtemps, trop longtemps. Tu n'as jamais compris cela. Et je n'ai pas compris, moi non plus, que ce rêve était plus fort, LE plus fort" (Taïa 2008, 121, italics in the French text and the English translation).

endless fall. As I stood there, I wanted to cry. Sob my eyes out. Go and throw myself off a balcony. (Taïa 2012, 102)⁷

In the Egyptian capital, Abdellah observes the state of precariousness in which Egyptians live, and his quest adopts a collective dimension in the sense that his suffering mirrors the state of degradation of the entire Arab world. The graveyard's decay echoes the collapse of Arab artistic influence, and leads Abdellah to ideate suicidal thoughts.

Saphia Azzeddine and *Mon Père en doute encore*

Through the recourse to a series of non-chronological events in *Mon Père en doute encore* the reader follows Saphia as she unfolds the story of her family by organizing the narrative around her father. The depictions of Mr Azzeddine's journeys put forth the dialectical relationship between Morocco as a homeland and France as a host nation. Born and raised in Figuig in 1940, he reaches Paris in the 1960s then marries Saphia's mother and returns to Morocco.⁸ The family spends ten years in Agadir (37) and then migrates to France:

"[C]'est le cœur bouffi que j'ai quitté mon pays adoré. En juillet 1985 ou 1986. Pour qu'on ait le temps de se préparer avant la rentrée des classes. Par ma mère, à moitié normande, nous étions naturellement français, et pour faire des études, le grand fantasme de mon père, c'était le bon moment pour partir. Ma grande sœur passait en quatrième, ça devenait sérieux. À la Mission française d'Agadir, où nous étions scolarisés, le cursus s'arrêtait après le collège, autant prendre de l'avance, s'étaient-ils dit. (Azzeddine 2020, 39)⁹

It is in consideration of the better schooling opportunities in France that Saphia's parents decide to relocate, indicating thereby that the most significant push factor for their migration is the absence of adequate education prospects for their children in Agadir. Instead of relocating to another Moroccan city that would cater for their educational needs, the parents capitalize on the French citizenship laws that grant their children automatic access to upper secondary education in France. France meets the educational expectations of the family, and their sojourn is also interspersed with regular holiday trips to the homeland: "[D]eux mois par an pendant dix ans. Juillet et août. Mes vacances d'été. Au Maroc, sans jamais dire aux pays comme les autres puisque je ne l'avais pas vraiment quitté dans ma tête. On ne retournait pas à Agadir

⁷ "Je ne sais pas pourquoi je suis allé sur sa tombe. Mais je sais que dans les allées de cet immense et magnifique cimetière en ruine, je me suis vu dans ma fin, en train de partir définitivement. J'ai vu encore une fois le monde arabe autour de moi qui n'en finissait pas de tomber. Et là, j'ai eu envie de pleurer. De crier de toute mon âme. De me jeter moi aussi d'un balcon" (Taïa 2008, 91).

⁸ All English quotes of Azzeddine are my translations.

⁹ "It's with a swollen heart that I left my beloved country. In July 1985 or 1986. So that we have time to get ready before school starts. By my mother, half Norman, we were naturally French, and in order to study, my father's great fantasy, it was the right time to leave. My older sister was getting into ninth grade, things were getting serious. At the French Mission in Agadir where we were enrolled, the curriculum did not go beyond high school, let's get a head start, they told themselves."

au bord de la mer, non, on allait à Figuig aux portes du désert” (112).¹⁰ Interestingly, rather than returning to Agadir, the place the family called home for a decade, it is to the father’s birthplace that the family regularly returns.

On the occasion of a summer road trip to Figuig, Saphia’s attention is caught by her father’s remarks: “Mon père avait investi dans un coffre de toit pour ne pas être assimilé aux immigrés des grandes villes qui rapportaient tout et n’importe quoi là-bas. Non, nous ne sommes pas des immigrés économiques venus en France pour les papiers, nous les avons déjà et nous sommes là par choix” (113).¹¹ As a way for Mr Azzeddine to distance himself and his family from Moroccan immigrants returning to the homeland for the summer, the car roof carrier can be interpreted as a camouflage attempt to signal their membership into a higher social and economic status.

Recurring expressions of attachment to the homeland can also be found in the text, as made explicit by Saphia when she writes: “Quand je ferme les yeux, mon enfance m’évoque la douceur du velours. Un cocon où il fait bon se retirer. Une coquille enveloppante d’où l’on ne veut pas partir. Un papa et une maman ronds comme des boussoles dans un Maroc où le temps s’écoulait allègrement plus qu’il ne passait” (43).¹² She portrays childhood as a joyful period in which time is conceived and experienced differently. And if childhood in the homeland is characterized by a sense of security, Saphia’s nostalgic episodes do not only revolve around her family nucleus: “L’anarchie qui régnait sur les trottoirs de mon quartier fut assurément ce qui me manqua le plus une fois arrivée en France. Le bruit avait remplacé le brouhaha. Dans ma nouvelle petite ville bourgeoise de Ferney-Voltaire, tout le monde était d’accord sur les trottoirs” (41-42).¹³ The attention given to the new soundscape illustrates the way in which the occupation of public space differs. With a preference for public squabbles, Saphia underscores the absence of dissent in the public space, and takes distance from her new place of residence by hinting at the social class homogeneity of its population.

Fatherly childhood recollections are also included into the storyline and provide Saphia with opportunities to elaborate on the father’s position towards truthfulness:

Son enfance, il la chérit malgré tout. Il nous l’a racontée des milliers de fois sans se soucier que les versions soient les mêmes. Ça lui importait peu que ce soit véridique, ce n’était pas faux pour autant. L’atmosphère générale était heureuse et, selon ce qu’il voulait nous transmettre au moment où il nous la décrivait, il en

¹⁰ “Two months a year for ten years. July and August. My summer holidays. In Morocco, without ever saying the homeland like others since I had not really left it in my head. We did not return to Agadir by the sea, no, we went to Figuig at the desert’s gates.”

¹¹ “My father had invested in a roof box so as not to be equated with immigrants from the big cities who were bringing back anything and everything over there. No, we are not economic migrants who came to France for papers, we already had them and we are here by choice.”

¹² “When I close my eyes, my childhood reminds me of the softness of velvet. A cocoon where it’s good to retreat. An enveloping shell from which I do not want to leave. A father and mother round like compasses in a Morocco where time was flowing by joyfully more than it was passing.”

¹³ “The anarchy that reigned on the sidewalks of my neighborhood was certainly what I missed the most once I arrived in France. The noise had replaced the brouhaha. In my new little bourgeois town of Ferney-Voltaire, all were in agreement on the sidewalks.”

était le héros ou l'imbécile. Figuig, c'est son New York. Il y est organiquement attaché. (18)¹⁴

As much as Mr Azzeddine shows a loose attitude towards historical truth, the telling of his childhood carries aspects of self-aggrandisement and self-deprecation. In other words, the contradictory childhood explorations allow him to unsettle monolithic constructions of subjectivity, and illustrate the ambiguities of self-creation in relation to truth-telling. Yet, the numerous episodes that relate to his Moroccan childhood serve as a favourable ground for nostalgia, and a strong sense of longing is expressed in the text when Mr Azzeddine remembers his friends in Figuig: "Mon père se souvient avec émotion de l'amitié qui l'unissait à ses copains juifs chez qui il passait beaucoup de temps [...] ils avaient leurs croyances, on avait les nôtres. Tout le reste, on s'en foutait. Je ne me souviens que de leur amitié et parfois je me demande où ils sont aujourd'hui. Ça me ferait plaisir de les revoir" (27).¹⁵ Mr Azzeddine insists on the irrelevance of religious difference in matters of friendship, and in expressing the wish to reunite with his multifaith community he minimizes the differences between Muslims and Jews, and puts instead the focus on the similarities of the multifaith community which used to live in Figuig.

When looking at the forms of genealogical accounting, one of the characteristics of the "how-we-got-here" stories is that Saphia does not delve into the details of her father's first journey from Morocco to France. She focuses instead on his arrival in the capital: "À son arrivée à Paris. Dans le quatorzième arrondissement. Rue Brezin. Pas loin du Café des Amis. À l'angle de la rue Boulard. Métro Mouton-Duvernet" (61).¹⁶ If he refuses to settle with his friends at the workers' hostel (69), the diasporic reunion provides Mr Azzeddine with a strong sense of co-ethnic presence:

Au 5 cité Popincourt, les réveils retentissaient déjà quand il sonna à la porte d'entrée. Il fut accueilli en quinconce, les uns sortaient de la douche, les autres de leur chambre ou de la cuisine commune et tous lui tombèrent dessus. Des rires, des exclamations sonores, des accolades énergiques surgissaient de partout et c'est sans pudeur qu'il recevait ces démonstrations d'amour dont il avait dû manquer à l'aéroport. (66)¹⁷

¹⁴ "His childhood, he cherishes it despite everything. He has told us about it thousands of times without being concerned that the versions be the same. He was not bothered by the fact that it was true, it wasn't necessarily false. The general atmosphere was joyous and, depending on what he wanted to convey when he was describing it to us, he was the hero or the fool. Figuig is his New York. He is organically attached to it."

¹⁵ "My father remembers with emotion the friendship that united him to his Jewish friends with whom he spent a lot of time [...] they had their beliefs, we had ours. Everything else, we didn't care about. I only remember their friendship and sometimes I wonder where they are today. It would be nice to see them again."

¹⁶ "Upon his arrival in Paris. In the fourteenth arrondissement. Brezin Street. Not far from the Café des Amis. At the corner of Boulard street. Mouton-Duvernet metro station."

¹⁷ "At 5 Cité Popincourt, the alarm clocks were already ringing when he rang the doorbell. He was greeted in staggered rows, some coming out of the shower, others from their bedroom or the shared kitchen and they all fell on him. Laughter, loud exclamations, energetic hugs arose from everywhere and it was without modesty that he received these demonstrations of love which he had certainly missed at the airport."

The sense of community provided by the homely atmosphere does not prevent Mr Azzeddine from being dissatisfied with the squalid living conditions of the Moroccan workers:

[M]on père sut qu'il ne resterait pas là-bas. Il y avait des gouttes sur les murs tellement c'était humide, du vacarme parce qu'il n'y avait pas de portes, des odeurs d'égout dans les sanitaires et des réveils déraillants qu'on avait mal éteints. J'avais la tête qui tournait et le cœur serré en même temps, me dit-il. Je me suis demandé ce que je faisais là. (66-7)¹⁸

In this regard, dirt and smell play a significant role in the characterization of the places of sojourn that Moroccan diasporans inhabit during the process of migration, indicating thereby that the settlement of migrants is complicated by the demanding adjustment to lower standards of hygiene. And if the father's first visit to France receives particular attention, Saphia also reveals the pull factors that motivate the destination choice of her parents:

D'après une riche cliente libanaise de ma mère, s'installer à la frontière suisse paraissait la meilleure alternative pour des gens comme nous. Dans sa bouche de petite snob, ça voulait dire pas très ci mais quand même un peu ça. On allait donc s'installer à côté de Genève, à Ferney-Voltaire, *là où tout ira bien, ne vous inquiétez pas les enfants*. (39; italics in the text)¹⁹

Therefore, it appears that the educational and economic factors are intertwined in the family resettlement project. Of particular relevance is also Azzeddine's staging of the destination decision process. She punctures the seriousness of the event by mocking the wealthy advisor's condescending assertiveness, hinting thereby at the inefficacy of her advisory role in attenuating relocation stress.

Additionally, the episode that depicts Mr Azzeddine's reaction to the 2003 US military offensive in Iraq reveals the nexus of affiliation which he develops with the Arab world:

Mon père souffrait physiquement. Je l'ai vu brisé ce matin-là. Les premiers missiles s'abattaient sur Bagdad [...] avec cette attaque, c'est comme si nous découvrions notre ennemi pour la première fois. La désunion du monde arabe n'était pas nouvelle. Leurs ridicules réunions à la Ligue amusaient le monde entier, on était la risée générale et rien de meilleur ne se profilait. (181-182)²⁰

¹⁸ "My father knew he would not stay there. There were drops on the walls, it was so humid, a lot of noise because there were no doors, smells of sewage in the toilets and derailing alarm clocks that had been turned off badly. My head was spinning and at the same time my heart was tight, he told me. I wondered what I was doing there."

¹⁹ "According to a rich Lebanese client of my mother, settling on the Swiss border seemed the best alternative for people like us. In her mouth as a little snob, that meant not much of this but still a bit of that. So we were going to settle near Geneva, in Ferney-Voltaire, *where everything will be fine, don't worry kids*" (italics in the text).

²⁰ "My father was suffering physically. I saw him broken that morning. The first missiles were falling on Baghdad [...] with this attack, it is as if we were discovering our enemy for the first time. The disunity of the Arab world was not new. Their ridiculous meetings at the League amused the whole world, we were the laughing stock and nothing better was in sight."

If Mr Azzeddine's somatic symptoms can be read as an indicator of compassion fatigue, the depiction of his sympathy with war victims is an occasion for Saphia to draw a vitriolic portrait of Arab institutions. Interestingly, the targeting and mocking of the political leaders' inefficiencies carry also a self-disparaging undertone.

The Question of Genre

According to Svend Erik Larsen, "reading requires a particular definition of the boundaries across which comparisons have to be made in order to produce an adequate comprehension of the text, be it boundaries of circulation, of travel, of characters, of genres, of metaphors, of languages or of cultural values" (Larsen 2015, 334). In keeping with this insight, the reading of Taïa and Azzeddine's texts through different genre frames offers a further basis for interpreting their work. Although *Une Mélancolie arabe* is written in French, in reason of Abdellah Taïa's rootedness in Morocco, further interpretive hypotheses can be explored when considering the "Qur'anic term for travel or journey, *rihla*, which early on also came to denote a travelogue" (Newman 2019, 143). With regard to the *rihla*'s various subgenres *Une Mélancolie arabe* does not appear to share the features of the quest for instruction (*talab al-'ilm*), the pilgrimage (*rihlat Hijaziyya*), the official embassies (*rihlat sifariyya*), or the tourist travelogue (*rihla siyahiyya*) (Newman 2008, 85). Yet, Taïa's text can be associated with more recent travelogues. Reviewing Arabic travel writing of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Daniel Newman writes

The growing body of travel literature produced by those settled in the West addresses the highly complex issues of identity, as well as the politics of displacement, exile, alienation, belonging, and exclusion. The most interesting aspect of these works is the fragmentation of "the Other", as authors negotiate the Western and multifarious immigration spaces. This genre often sits comfortably on the cusp of autobiography and fiction. (2019, 156)

If the first-person narrator gives voice to a mixture of feelings, Abdellah's fragmented sense of self is at the core of the letter written to Slimane:

I renounced all ambition. I renounced films, the one great dream I had since I was a teenager. Because of you, I stopped pretending that I was tough. I took off the masks, all of them, whenever I was around you. The social identity that I started to build back in Hay Salam ceased to exist once you entered my life. Do you realize that? Are you aware of all my sacrifices?" (Taïa 2012, 130)²¹

Pointing to the fact that the chasing of a career in the cinema industry requires strength and camouflage, Abdellah also insists on the imbalance felt during his relationship with Slimane. As he reflects on the dissolution of his romantic relationship, Abdellah hints at the sabotaging way in which his tormenting love affair derailed his identity formation process. For Newman, "[s]imilar to twentieth-century Western travel literature, Arabic travel texts 'as ethnography or social commentary' transcend 'gender boundaries [...] and male and female travellers have written self-reflexive

²¹ "J'ai renoncé à mon ambition. J'ai renoncé au ciné, mon plus grand rêve depuis l'adolescence. J'ai arrêté de m'endurcir pour toi. J'ai enlevé les masques, tous les masques, devant toi. Mon identité sociale que j'avais commencé à construire à Hay Salam a cessé d'exister dès que tu es apparu devant mes yeux. Te rendais-tu compte de tout cela, de tous ces sacrifices ?" (Taïa 2008, 116-117)

texts that defy easy categorisation as autobiography, memoir, or travel account” (2019, 157). Accordingly, the generic categorisation of *Une Mélancolie arabe* is complicated by the fact that the narrator’s name is Abdellah Taïa (23) and that the book cover indicates that this text is a novel. Additionally, in reason of the several trips taken by the narrator, the text can also be associated with travel writing. In addition, as Taïa’s text challenges generic categorisation, the reading of Azzeddine’s *Mon Père en doute encore* through the lens of patriography also allows for the exploration of a range of interpretive hypotheses.

Given the centrality of “monsieur Azzeddine” (224) in the narrative, *Mon Père en doute encore* appears to share several features of what Thomas Couser has termed patriography: “I’ve dubbed memoirs of mothers matriography, memoirs of fathers patriography [...]. Patriography is, obviously, one form of what we now call ‘relational life writing’ – narrative that emerges from an intimate relationship between the writer and the subject and which is thus a kind of hybrid of biography and autobiography” (Couser 2011, 891). The narrative is told from the point of view of Mr Azzeddine’s daughter, Saphia, and the father-daughter relationship occupies a central position in the text. However the indication on the book cover that *Mon Père en doute encore* is a novel leads the reader to question the text’s truthfulness.

Furthermore, on the child-parent relationship in patriography, Couser writes,

[I]t is often written in response to a frustrating or unsatisfactory relationship: ironically, but understandably, when adult children choose to narrate the life of a parent, they usually choose the parent who is less present – physically, geographically, and/or emotionally. And for various reasons, that parent has historically been the father. (891)

In Saphia’s case, the episode of the reflection that follows the argument with the father at the time of his depressive episode is particularly illustrative of the child-parent bond: “Il n’était plus inébranlable. Je retrouvais celui que j’aimais. Et je l’aimais mieux maintenant que je savais qu’il était ébranlable. Il cessa de photocopier tout et n’importe quoi pour ne le faire qu’avec des livres non réédités [...] Il n’allait plus au garage et moi je n’avais plus honte de mon père” (Azzeddine 2020, 175).²² In line with Couser’s view, *Mon Père en doute encore* narrates the life of an emotionally fluctuating parent whose behaviour occasionally triggers a reaction of shame on the part of Saphia. Nonetheless, the daughter acknowledges his role and participation in her overall well-being.

Particularly sensitive to the feminist question, Saphia provides an answer as to the reasons for her father’s feminist leanings:

Ne serait-il pas devenu féministe par « orphelinage » finalement ? Comme une plante coupée à ras qui repoussa vigoureuse, préservée de toutes ces injonctions de mâles dominants essoufflés. Je pourrais laisser cette question en suspens pourtant j’ai la réponse et elle est abjecte. Non. Il n’aurait pas été cet homme-là s’il n’avait pas dû s’inventer. Sa malédiction fut ma bénédiction j’en suis certaine

²² “He was no longer unshakable. I got back the one I loved. And I loved him better now that I knew he was shaken. He stopped photocopying anything and everything and only did it with non-reprinted books... He no longer went to the garage and I was no longer ashamed of my father.”

aujourd'hui et je demande pardon à l'au-delà Papa puisque je ne le regrette même pas. (260-261)²³

Being well aware of the paternal absence at the origin of her father's peculiar attitude towards fathering, Saphia recognizes her father's achievement in raising daughters, and his ability to craft a tailored definition of fatherhood.

Putting forward the idea of a "eulogy-denouncement continuum" on which to position types of Father-Son Auto/Biographies, Martin Redman indicates that "[t]hese texts range from nostalgic eulogies for loved 'Dad', at one end of the spectrum, to bitter denunciation of the monstrous, 'toxic' Father, at the other" (Redman 2004, 130). As such, Azzeddine's text offers a variation of the Father-Daughter Auto/Biographies, and although Saphia's father is still alive at the time of the author's writing, *Mon Père en doute encore* does share features of nostalgic eulogies.

Tzvetan Todorov puts forward the idea that "each epoch has its own system of genres, which stands in some relation to the dominant ideology, and so on. Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong" (Todorov 2014, 200). Hence, one may argue, in accordance with Bawarshi and Reiff, that attempts at identifying the generic features of *Une Mélancolie arabe* and *Mon Père en doute encore* reveal the way in which "genres reflect and participate in legitimizing social practices" and recognize "how generic distinctions maintain hierarchies of power, value, and culture" (Bawarshi and Reiff 2010, 25).

On the correlation between ideology and genre Thomas Beebee's insight is particularly telling because it hints at the function of generic attributions. He writes,

Ideology itself is usually invisible; it is noticeable and perhaps existent only in its interactions with the material world (which includes thought). Ideology is the magnetic force that simultaneously holds a society together by allowing it to communicate with itself in shorthand and pushes society apart by conflicting with people's realities. It is only in the deformations and contradictions of writing and thinking that we can recognize ideology; genre is one of those observable deformations, a pattern in the iron filings of cultural products that reveals the force of ideology. In particular, what makes genre ideological is our practice of speaking of it as a "thing" rather than as the expression of a relationship between user and a text, a practice similar to that identified by Marx as "commodity fetishism". (Beebee 1994, 18)

Therefore, the generic classification of Taïa and Azzeddine's texts is a process marked by the distorting workings of ideology and carries a reifying effect. Elaborating on generic instability, Beebee maintains that, "a text's generic status is rarely what it seems to be, [...] it is always already unstable" (Beebee 1994, 27). Consequently the use of genre as an interpretive device for diasporic texts allows for the uncovering of the ideological interests underlying classificatory operations. Beebee also asserts that "the truly vital meanings of a text are often contained not in any specific generic category into which the text may be placed, but rather in the play of differences

²³ "In the end, hasn't he become a feminist because of his "orphanhood"? Like a plant cut close to the ground which grew vigorously, preserved from all the injunctions of breathless dominant males. I could leave this question open yet I have the answer and it is abject. No. He wouldn't have been that man if he hadn't had to invent himself. His curse was my blessing I am sure of it today and I ask forgiveness to the hereafter Dad since I don't even regret it."

between its genres” (249-250). Not only are the meanings of Taïa and Azzeddine’s texts located in the negotiation and confrontation of various genres, but, as Beebee goes on to argue, “to think of genre as a system of differences, we must obviously focus our attention on the borders between genres, because it is precisely here, in their differences, that genres exist” (257). Beebee supports a comparative approach of genres as a privileged basis from which to access the meaning of texts, and he insists that “most works not only can but must be analysed in more than one generic way in order for their messages to have any effective meaning or value” (265). There is therefore a relation of dependence between, on the one hand, the exploration of Taïa and Azzeddine’s texts through multiple generic lenses, and on the other, the meaning and value of the texts. Accordingly, a comparative approach of the generic affiliations of *Une Mélancolie arabe* and *Mon Père en doute encore* hints at the ways in which control is exercised over the texts, especially through the application of ossified generic taxonomies. In Frow’s view genres are

cultural forms, dynamic and historically fluid, and guiding people’s behaviour; they are learned, and they are culturally specific; they are rooted institutional infrastructures; they classify objects in ways that are sometimes precise, sometimes fuzzy, but always sharper at the core than at the edges; and they belong to a system of kinds, and are meaningful only in terms of the shifting differences between them. (Frow 2006, 128)

Following this line of reasoning, the texts of the Moroccan diaspora are particularly well-suited for the analysis of generic classifications and genre criticism, by reason of their concern with processes of cultural hybridity.

Conclusion

While exploring Taïa and Azzeddine’s texts the reader is led to notice certain patterns of similarities in light of their joint emphasis on displacement. However, the variations on the diasporic imaginary developed in *Une Mélancolie arabe* and *Mon Père en doute encore* can be recognized as unique contributions to the comprehension of the Moroccan diaspora. While the diasporic imaginary in Taïa’s text is articulated around Hay Salam and Paris, Azzeddine’s centers on Figuig, Agadir and Ferney-Voltaire; and if Abdellah’s depictions of France and Morocco are loaded with a sense of gravity, the tragic appears in a more attenuated form in Azzeddine’s rendering of the migration process. The side by side reading of the two texts allows for an identification of further parallels and contrasts such as the ones that relate to the depiction of nostalgia. Interestingly, Azzeddine’s nostalgic episodes characterized by a sense of loss are attenuated by the frequent recourse to humour, whereas Abdellah’s childhood recollections are displayed in a much less humorous light. Both texts depict migration as a process of betterment and the instances of genealogical accounting that can be found in the texts converge in their concern with the fate of immigrants in France. Moreover, if *Une Mélancolie arabe* and *Mon Père en doute encore* provide significant, albeit fragmentary, perspectives on the social, political, cultural, and economic context of Morocco and France, the innovations of Taïa and Azzeddine emerge also from the singular rendering of genealogical accounting. Abdellah centers on the delicate balance between career pursuit and romantic relationships, and Saphia’s narrative focuses on the family’s position of pendulousness. The defamiliarizing juxtaposition of Taïa’s travelogue and Azzeddine’s patriography opens up a range of interpretive hypotheses and provides insight into the situatedness of the Moroccan diaspora.

Although both texts present characters who share an Arab ancestry and lament the state of the contemporary Arab world, the diasporic condition in Taïa and Azzeddine's narratives is also the site of multifarious forms of solidarity.

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