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Decolonizing Theatre History in the Arab World

The case of the Maghreb

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RÉSUMÉ : Cette contribution vise à soustraire l'histoire des spectacles postcoloniaux arabes à la pensée oppositionnelle en choisissant, tout en s'écartant de l'éternelle fixation du sujet postcolonial sur l'Autre, c'est-à-dire l'Occident, de mettre la focale sur l'auto-colonisation politique et idéologique de l'être arabe et de sa victimisation. Les deux voies disparates empruntées aujourd'hui par les populations maghrébines et arabes comme moyen pour reconstruire une société postcoloniale risquent de les mener vers des croyances essentialistes. Car en choisissant de se réfugier dans un isolement identitaire, elles tournent le dos à l'influence occidentale qui fait désormais partie de notre société. Un patrimoine qui appar-

tient aussi au Maghrébins depuis la présence gréco-romaine au Maghreb. Cependant, en choisissant de s'approprier aveuglément les modèles occidentaux, ils tombent également dans un autre essentialisme qui considère les traditions théâtrales européennes comme un paradigme universel qui devrait être diffusé dans le monde entier, même aux dépens des cultures ancestrales des autres peuples. Le présent article portera sur ces questions, avec un accent particulier sur le Maroc, l'Algérie et la Tunisie.

MOTS-CLÉS : Arts du spectacle, Postcolonialisme, théâtre, Maroc, Algérie, Tunisie

ABSTRACT: My deployment of a Double Critique is an invitation to redeem postcolonial performance history from its interminable oppositional thinking "by shifting the postcolonial subject's fixation on the Other/West to an inward interrogation of his political and ideological self-colonization and self-victimization." The two disparate paths chosen by people of the Maghreb as means to re-construct a post-colonial society, risk to fall into essentializing creeds: in choosing to seek refuge in pastness, they turn their back on the Western influence that has become part of our heritage ever since Greco-Roman

presence in the Maghreb. Yet, in choosing to blindly appropriate the Western models, they also fall into another kind of essentialism which sees European theatre traditions as a universal paradigm that should be disseminated all over the world even at the expense of other peoples' performance cultures. The present article will be around these lines of questioning, with a particular focus on Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

KEYWORDS: Performance arts, Postcolonialisation, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia

Decolonizing Theatre History in the Arab World (The case of the Maghreb)

"Silenced societies are, of course, societies in which talking and writing take place but which are not heard in the planetary production of knowledge managed from the local histories and local languages of the "silencing" (e. g., developed) societies."

(Walter D. Mignolo 2012, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 71)

"The refusal of Western culture does not in itself constitute a culture, and the delirious roaming around the lost self shall never stir it up from dust"

(Abdellah Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine* 1967, Paris: Maspero)

Contextualizing the Debate

The Napoleonic military expedition to Egypt and Syria (1798-1801) constitutes a significant historical moment. It has ever since marked the beginning of a conflicting interplay between modernity and coloniality as its darker side.¹ The 'Molierization' of Arab stages and the desire of the Arabs to appropriate Western models of theater production came as an effect of this interplay. Napoleon's² introduction of theatre was aimed to serve two main objectives: 1) as a means of entertainment for the soldiers and 2) as an agency aimed at changing people's traditions and implementing the French civilizing mission. Indeed, the Napoleonic aspirations echo Karl Marx's thesis on British colonialism and its double mission in a supposedly backward India: "England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia."³ The destructive task led to the breaking up of the native communities and the uprooting of the local industry, whereas the regenerative undertaking pursued the path of modernizing India. The impact on India was so deep that Indians found themselves between two openings: that of the East that refuses to seal off and that of the West that refuses to open far and wide. Moroccan sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi pro-

vides an important critique of Marx's terrifying statement: "the murder of the traditions of the other and the liquidation of its past are necessary so that the West, while seizing the world, can expand beyond its limits while remaining unchanged in the end. The East must be shaken up in order to come back to the West."⁴ Similarly, the introduction of European theatrical traditions in the Arab world was utilized as a means to bring the East back to the West. Thus, theatre in the Arab world was from the start 'deterritorialized', perhaps even trapped in an ambiguous compromise and confronted with the necessity to interpolate between different temporalities, conflicting epistemologies of performance cultures, and discursive structures.

The Arabs' appropriation of western models of theatre-making came as a consequence of their abrupt disavowal of native performance cultures along with their own cultural identity.⁵ The colonial enterprise has, indeed, brought about divided loyalties manifested in two mystifying discursive practices that look different but share a slot of essentialism as a major source of epistemic violence. The first stance sees western theatre as a supreme model opposed to its local counterpart that is so often reduced into local performance traditions and pre-theatrical forms. In fact, this position also reproduces the same Eurocentric eclipse, if not exclusion, of other peoples' performance traditions. In this context, the European theatrical traditions are considered as unique models that should be imitated and reproduced. In other words, there is no other theatrical practice but the one that developed in old Greece and re-appropriated by many parts of Europe some twenty centuries later. However, western theatrical models are more than dramatic/theatrical spaces, for they are cultural and discursive ones as well. These historiographical models mostly celebrated in dominant world theatre histories are not homogeneous and subject to the same rules and structures, for they are multifold, heterogeneous, local, and variable from one Western country to another, and most importantly, one European theatrical age to another with all the ruptures and epistemic breaks between them. Borrowing western historiographical models without critiquing their claim of universality and exclusivist tropes amounts to a new kind of colonialism.

The dominant discourse sustained by held by many westernized Arabs falls into another kind of essentialism which sees European theatre as a unique and homogeneous epitome that should be disseminated all over the world even at the expense of other peoples' performative agencies. Lila Abu-Lughod calls these westernized Arabs 'guides of modernity'. Her sharp argumentation runs thus: "a concerned group of culture-industry professionals has constructed of [...] women, youths, and rural people a subaltern object

in need of enlightenment. Appropriating and inflecting western discourses on development they construct themselves as guides of modernity and assume the responsibility of producing [...] the virtuous modern citizen.”⁶ The Europeanization of Arabic performance (*Ta-awrub al-furja al-arabia*) exemplifies the complicity of colonized subjects. Rustom Bharucha’s critique in *Theatre and the World: Essays on Performance and Politics* explains the dangers of such ‘exchange’: “Colonialism, one might say, does not operate through principles of “exchange”. Rather, it appropriates, decontextualizes, and represents the “other” culture, often with the complicity of its colonized subjects. It legitimates its authority only by asserting its cultural superiority.”⁷ There is no exchange in the tradition of going West under colonial corporal conquest of alterity, for such exchange is, in fact, a one way utterance that claims an inherent power. At this juncture we might widen our frame of reference to include Gayatri C. Spivak’s agonistic outcry about the subaltern’s inability to speak, an outcry that is very much contested and misunderstood by many actants in the Postcolonial field. Indeed, “the subaltern can’t speak”, Spivak explains, “means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That’s what it had meant, and anguish marked the spot.”⁸ Exchange requires reciprocity rather than a one-way communication; and this constitutes the Subaltern predicament along with the inability to recover her/his voice. The subaltern’s inaudible cry preconditions the impossibility of communication; and so are the subaltern’s theatre histories that are systematically edited out and reduced to local narratives on archaic performance behaviors. Such silent cry reminds us of Brecht’s *Mother Courage* when confronted with the body of her proper son ... Empowering such voice requires much of what Gramsci calls ‘optimism of the will’ played against the agonistic ‘pessimism of the intellect’.⁹

With the advent of colonialism, the colonial machine eclipsed the differences between Self and Other and forced bipolar opposites such as colonizer/colonized, Western/Oriental, superior/inferior, civilized/primitive, and theatre/pre-theatre. The European subject forcefully made his way to the Others’ space and eclipsed the latter’s voice. The Eurocentric exclusion, then, prevailed within the empire(s). The canonization of the western dramatic and performance traditions were made possible in the colonies by relegating indigenous performance cultures as non-dramas, manifested forms of folklore and formulaic orality, or at best, as pre-theatrical phenomena. Thus the fiction, invoked by the great narrative of Eurocentric historiography in order to assert itself as a founding presence, became reality through various strategies

of containment, appropriation, and dissemination. Such historiographic interventions, despite their positivistic claim of objectivity, were framed within what Mignolo calls “the colonial matrix of power” (coloniality in short).¹⁰

In the context of the Arab World, the religion of Islam has often been inaccurately portrayed by hegemonic theatre historiography as a largely negative force against theatrical activity in the MENA region. Such misleading scholarship has been sustained by Westerners and Arabs beginning with Jacob Landou (1958)¹¹ and continuing through John Gassner and Edward Quinn (1969),¹² Peter J. Chelkowsky (1979),¹³ and Mustapha M. Badawi (1988),¹⁴ among others. provide a particularly important example. When Oscar Brockett’s and Franklin Hildy’s *History of the Theatre* first appeared in 1968 it immediately established itself as the model for world theatre history, and it still retains its aura of authority in the field today. Islam, they claimed was in large part responsible for the absence of theatre in Arabo-Islamic contexts: “[Islam] forbade artists to make images of living things because Allah was said to be the only creator of life ... the prohibition extended to the theatre, and consequently in those areas where Islam became dominant, advanced [i.e. European] theatrical forms were stifled.”¹⁵ This stigmatizing generalization, though inaccurate, is still widely accepted. This view of the incompatibility of Islam with European concepts of these is by no means restricted to Western scholars; one may find many Arab writers on the theatre taking a similar position. The problem is often traced back to the Arabs’ first encounter with the Greek heritage through Syriac translations. This took place during the golden age of the Abbasid’s dynasty (the second century of Islam). Mohammed Al-khozai, for example, argues that by “this time Arabic poetry was maturing; and because of the new monotheistic faith it was unlikely that Arab scholars would turn to what they considered a pagan art form.”¹⁶ At this time Islam was still struggling to make space among other religions that preceded it. Moreover, Greek drama’s celebration of simulacra and conflict constituted a real danger to the newly established monotheistic Arabo-Islamic structure, as well as to the social and political orders. Mohammed Aziza concludes that “It was impossible for drama to originate in a traditional Arabo-Islamic environment.”¹⁷

Much of such historionic interventions are based on a flawed argument produced by some Muslim orthodox scholars, the so-called guardians of Islamic faith. Indeed, the Moroccan Ahmed Ben Saddik (1901-1961) was the first to publish a whole book against theatre: *Iqamatu Ad-Dalili ‘Alaa Hurmati At-Tamtili*, [Substantiating Evidence Against Acting] published first in Cairo in the 1940s, then edited and re-published as *At-Tankilu Awi Taqtilu liman*

Abaha Tamtil [Torturing or killing those who permitted Acting] in Beirut 2002.¹⁸ Ben Saddik, who studied at *Al-Qarawiyyin* and *Al-Azhar*, provided 48 facts against theatrical activity in the edited version, which is based on a manuscript dating back to the 1940s. In his third argument, he even displayed a strong animosity against other enlightened *Fuqaha* who encouraged theatre as a moral institution. Among these is Mustafa al-Maraghi (1885-1945), who was appointed rector of *Al-Azhar* University in 1928 and began a series of reforms, and the enlightened Cheikh Mustapha Abderrazaq (1885-1947), who led *Al-Azhar* between the years 1945 and 1947. Abderrazaq studied in *Al-Azhar* with the renowned Islamic modernist Mohammed Abdu (1849-1905), and taught at the University of Lyon in France. Ben Saddik goes beyond the limits of scholarly debate to call these moderate Azhari leaders “the most ignorant people of their religion.” (41) Ironically, Ben Saddik’s many *fatwās* were ineffective even inside their home city, Tangier, which was one of the theatre centers in North Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Often the assertion has been made that Islam does not allow *Taswir*, the representation of either human or divine forms. In fact there is no passage anywhere in the Qur’an speaking negatively about theatrical or mimetic activity. Abdelkebir Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi discuss this matter extensively in their 1976 book, *The Splendor of Islamic Calligraphy*.¹⁹ The only authority for this injunction they can discover is an unverifiable *hadith* (a saying outside the Qur’an attributed to Mohammed) cited by al-Bukhari which “expresses the prohibition on figurative art straightforwardly: when he makes an image, man sins unless he can breathe life into it.” They go on to assert that “the *fuqaha* [Islamic religious scholars] and the orthodox have twisted the allegorical meaning of the Qur’an the better to impose rules and prohibitions.” According to these authors, “this alleged prohibition was directed against the surviving forms of totemism which, anathematized by Islam, could conceivably reinfiltrate it in the guise of art. The principle of the hidden face of God could be breached by such an image. In one sense, theology was right to be watchful; it had to keep an eye on its irrepressible enemy – art.” Yet in opposition to the widespread view that Islam is opposed to representation, they remind us of an ancient Islamic tradition that the prophet Mohammed “permitted one of his daughters to play with dolls, which are of course derived from the totemic gods. Aicha, the mother of the believers and daughter of Abou Bakr, was married to the prophet “and taken to his house as a bride when she was nine and her dolls were with her.”²⁰ [Our Italics] Moreover, there are numerous examples of drawing both of animals and human, as well as

of figurative sculpture, as, we are told, the eight century Caliph al-Mansur had in his palace.”²¹ Thus, Islam’s presumed opposition to totemism was by no means universal, nor should it be taken as implying a generally accepted condemnation of theatre. In fact, during the colonial period, the first flowering of modern Arabic drama, theatre with very close ties to Islamic history and the Islamic community became in some parts of the Arab world a major weapon in the developing struggle against colonialism.

Indeed, modern Arabic theatre has been informed by the previously mentioned Eurocentric claim to the birth and mastery of theatre practice. It has been “over determined from without,”²² transfixed and emptied as well as exploded in the “fetishistic” and stereotypical dialectics of the gaze of the Other. Within the conflict-economy of colonial discourse, the Arabs’ Other was experienced as a stifling burden rather than a diminished and reduced category. Admittedly, this Other presented itself as a transcendental entity. In a related vein, Homi Bhabha argues that “not self and other but the ‘Otherness’ of the self-inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity.”²³ The rhetorical strategy of negation and reductive annihilation has been so often deployed by Western orientalist (French ethnographers in the case of the Maghreb) to designate the Arabs as a cultural Other whose presence is eclipsed and substituted by an overwhelming absence and emptiness so as to justify colonial corporal and discursive expansion. Thus, the West prevailed “within the West and outside; in [the] structures and in [the] minds”²⁴ of the colonized Arabs. In this context, the legacy of reification and auto-reductionism operated as a form of conceptual entail or constraint on the Arabs’ attempts to recover theatrical experience. These instances of reification that were brought about by the colonial encounter caused a rupture between the old tradition and the newly acquired one. The introduction of Western Theatrical traditions in the Arab World took place precisely at this very moment of rupture. The first negotiations of Western dramas represent the phase of duplicating the Western model, though they can be considered double enunciations outspoken by the colonized in order to subvert the surveying model of the colonizing Other. The result is not a return to any illusive authentic state, but a creation of what Homi Bhabha calls ‘thirdness’ as both a ‘desovereignizing’ and ‘aporitical’ space and an openness of ‘binarity’. It is precisely this openness that makes critique an urgent call for transcending the polarities of East/West within a global environment.

Thus, the Arab subject was invited to borrow Eurocentric theatre discourses and to blindly adopt Western theatre historiography via different Western colonial enterprises without realizing, at least in the earliest beginnings, their claim

of universality, their subordination of the political in favor of the poetical, their specific relations to particular peoples, and most importantly, their deployment as parts of the strategy of extending and disseminating the West into non-Western territories. “The influence of the West,” as John Maier admits, “is a burden on all Arabic writers who opt to write in narrative forms invented by and for the west.”²⁵ Theatre practice, then, is among the Western artistic forms that have significantly influenced the Arab intellectual. The burden of such influence is felt through the Arab’s appropriation of the *proscenium tradition* that does not match their cultural structures. The act of borrowing has been justified as one of the different “facets of modernism.” However, such modernism did not develop as a dialectical relationship, or as a result of a conflicting internal economy/ politics; it had been part of the Western desire to contain the Arab’s cultural otherness. It was transplanted in the Arab body from without. Of course, a local intelligentsia enhanced the incorporation of Western models. Paul Bowles, the most prominent American expatriate writer who lived in Morocco for more than fifty years, writes about the predicament of self-annihilation experienced by some Moroccan intellectuals in the Forward to a collection of essays entitled *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue*: “My own belief is that the people of the alien cultures are being ravaged not so much by the by-products of our civilization as by the irrational longing on the part of members of their own educated minorities to cease being themselves and become Westerners.”²⁶ Clearly, this statement by an American who strove to rid his gaze of the masks of difference and who chose to live in a double exile²⁷ reveals the violence of the letter as experienced by the natives. The colonial enterprise produced a native intelligentsia that spoke the same language as the colonizer. Western literary forms, among other things, were thus internalized by the educated elites who were already incorporated within the Western discourse as docile bodies ready to rehearse the colonial text.

From 1847 until the mid-1960s, Arabic theatre could not escape the Western telos as manifested in the European apparatuses of playwriting and theatre making.²⁸ Dramatic texts were ranging from translations and adaptations of Molière and Shakespeare, and embryonic forms of Arabization were attempted – mostly coming from the Middle East as it was far ahead in assimilating Western theatre. Meanwhile, the Arabization of foreign texts (texts written, or rather re-written, with recourse to an alien text) was a common practice. Thus, these were native appropriations of an alien medium though they strove to mirror an inner self, for in borrowing the Western model, “the shape of lives and the shape of narratives” change in the process. This period was characterized by native collaboration through various excesses of self-annihilation and

the othering of the self. Consequently, the western text becomes the model of all writing. Here, again, western logocentrism found its way in structuring and refashioning dramatic writing in the Arab World.

The Postcolonial Turn and Double Resistance

With the postcolonial turn new modes of writing theatre history from the margin have emerged with an earnest need for inclusion that is often coupled with a desire for subversion. We are constantly reminded of Frantz Fanon's conclusion in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he repudiated the degraded 'European form' and called for something different: "Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe [...] For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man."²⁹ Fanon's reliance on theoretical Marxism, however, soon undermined his oppositional thinking. Unlike Fanon, Dipesh Chakrabarty ends up proclaiming "an anti-colonial spirit of gratitude": "provincializing Europe cannot ever be a project of shunning European thought. For at the end of European imperialism, European thought is a gift to us all. We can talk of provincializing it only in an anti-colonial spirit of gratitude."³⁰ Such spirit attracts our attention to an ambiguous compromise that is complicit with the radical West in its critique of Eurocentric underpinnings of consumerist modernity, along with the coloniality of power as manifested in the hegemonic world theatre history. Obviously, "third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate..."³¹ Meanwhile, Chakrabarty's attempt to interrupt the totalizing thrust of History 1 is immediately caught in a double bind and was soon problematized by Rustom Bharucha in the margins of his seminal essay "Foreign Asia/Foreign Shakespeare". Chakrabarty's "historicist debt to Europe had overpowered his critique of Eurocentricity, so much so that (in my reading, at least) Chakrabarty ends up 'provincializing Bengal'" rather than Europe.

This is precisely where the Moroccan sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi's concept of double critique is effective in problematizing the very notion of the binary opposition West/East: Khatibi's call is similar to Fanon's but his strategy deconstructs rather than reverses the language of Manichaeism. His line of questioning disrupts all sorts of hierarchical definitions of Self and Other, East and West. It is essentially a border-thinking critique that weaves philosophical lines of influence belonging to both East and West. In this context, Walter D. Mignolo also highlights the epistemological potential of

Khatibi's double critique as a form of border thinking, "since to be critical of both of Western and Islamic fundamentalism, implies to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them."³² Thus, by casting the West as the Other, Fanon runs the risk of homogenizing the multifold West into one single entity. Perhaps it is a tactical move on Fanon's part in an effort to counter what he sees as Europe's lack of differentiation of "silent societies" she commonly categorizes as "Third World", "under-developed", or "developing."

Khatibi's call for a *pensée-autre* (an other thinking) is a third path toward decolonization, a double subversion that strives to elude "wild difference"³³. This *pensée-autre* is a way of re-thinking difference and sameness without recourse to essentialist absolutes and "isms"; it is an "epistemic resistance" of all closed systems. The 'Other Thinking' requires a radical rupture to "escape its own theological and theocratic foundations which characterize the ideology of Islam and of all monotheism."³⁴ Meanwhile, it claims to stand on a different ground than both the East and the West; "for we want to uproot Western knowledge from its central place within ourselves, to decenter ourselves with respect to this center, to this origin claimed by the West."³⁵ The transgressive effects of such a critique as a subaltern form of deconstruction are already apparent in its transformation rather than passive borrowing from the radical West.³⁶ "The Occident is part of me, a part that I can only deny insofar as I resist all the Occidents and all the Orientals that oppress and disillusion me."³⁷ It also calls for re-thinking the Maghreb, the home country, and considering it for what it currently is: a container of multiple identities, a sedimental layering of cultures past and present, in permanent flux between moments of conviviality and tragic sublimity. The Maghreb has long been at the crossroads of civilizations, a point of intersection for various encounters, coveted by different powers, notably Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Spaniards, Portuguese, English, Arabs and Turkish. Double critique is a decolonizing archeology that leads to an examination of the binary concepts of East and West, Occident and Orient, and the philosophical, metaphysical, and theological traditions propagated in each domain. This double-edged critique encompasses a deconstruction of critical discourses on performance that used to speak in the name of the Arab world but was informed by a deeply rooted Eurocentrism. In the meantime, the second critique is a reflection on the 'politics of nostalgia' and how the Arabs view their performance cultures. Double critique is an effect of a plural genealogy wherein one stages his/her confrontation of Self and Other, East and West. Khatibi often refers to himself as a 'professional foreigner'. The question, here, is very much related to the location of

exile in any attempt to restore the postcolonial subject to his/her humanity. "A double critique", as Mignolo puts it, "becomes at this intersection a border thinking, since to be critical of both, of Western and Islamic fundamentalism, implies to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them. This border thinking and double critique are the necessary conditions for 'an other thinking'".³⁸

Meanwhile, the subaltern theatre scholar becomes the translator of a body of writings that was "formed elsewhere and whose archeological questions, most of the time, he/she hardly doubts. Frightened by the intellectual production of the West and by a process of accelerated accumulation, the researcher is satisfied with constructing, in the shadow of the western episteme; a second knowledge that is residual and that satisfies no one."³⁹ His/her task is made more difficult and risky. The provincialization of Eurocentric theatre scholarship can only be achieved by recovering the irreducible plurality and age-old interweaving between European theatre with other histories and traditions. How to retrieve such repressed histories and articulate subaltern positions in their name without falling into the essentialist creed of 'wild difference', 'deviant nationalism', or worse, as Chakrabarty puts it, 'the sin of sins, nostalgia', still constitutes one of the fundamental difficulties facing postcolonial historians and critics.⁴⁰ The postcolonial turn requires an evaluation of all different 'Occidents' and 'Orient' that produced us as postcolonial subjects. The two disparate paths chosen by the people of the Maghreb as a means to re-construct a postcolonial society risk relapsing into essentializing creeds: in choosing to seek refuge in the past, they turn their backs on the Western influence that has become part of our heritage ever since Greco-Roman presence in Tamazgha and other parts of what is now the Arab world. This tendency has led some to worship ancestral ways of performing everyday life and, eventually, to a nostalgic quest for an elusive origin. The rebirth of theatrical Pan-Arabism in the late 1960s exemplifies such a painful process of renewal. Arab nationalism, as has mostly been performed on Arab stages, seems to reenact the same violence against its internal others, including the native non-Arabs such as the Imazeghen people in North Africa (also known as Berbers). However, in choosing to blindly appropriate the Western path, they also revert to another kind of essentialism, which sees European theatre as a unique and homogeneous epitome that should be disseminated all over the world even at the expense of other peoples' performative agencies.

Decolonizing Arab theatre historiography from Western 'Telos or Vorhaben' does not mean a recuperation of a pure and original performance tradition that pre-existed colonial encounters, past and present.

Arabocentrism, Tamazighocentrism, Afrocentrism all inevitably lapse into inverted violence and dangerous quests for purity. Does there even exist the possibility of returning to an 'authentic' state? There is no way back to an authentic or pure state, since all locations are somehow contaminated and criss-crossed by various encounters past and present. The Maghreb is made up of so many different cultural and historical influences and one cannot simply turn one's back on any of them. Cultures absorb material vestiges, remnants, echoes, remains and tattoos of a silent history that is quite literally inaccessible until subjected to an archaeology of silence and a process of transcription or translation. Double critique re-evaluates that very landscape and highlights the multiple crossroads and palimpsests of interweaving and underlying acts of arche-writing.

Moroccan theatre, as an exemplary instance of Arab theatre, exists in a liminal space between East and West. It marks a fusion of Western theatrical traditions and the Arab-Tamazegh performance cultures. The hybrid nature of such a theatre form is evident in the way popular performance behavior rooted in performance spaces such as *al-halqa*⁴¹ (the circle) has been transposed from public squares and marketplaces like Marrakech's *Jemaa-elfna*⁴² into modern theatre buildings. *Al-halqa* constitutes a managed environment that stands in stark contrast to the European proscenium tradition. Its audience is called upon "to drift" spontaneously into an area surrounding the performance from all sides. The space required by the *hlayqi* (the maker of spectacle) is not specified, and neither is the timing of the performance. No fourth wall with hypnotic fields is erected between stage and auditorium. The entire marketplace and Medina Gates can be transformed into a stage; the entire circle may serve as performance space, as open as its repertoire of narrative performances, acrobatic games, songs, and dances. In retrieving this performance tradition, theatre in Morocco has become more and more improvisational and self-reflexive, even as this retrieval is negotiated within the paradoxical parameters of appropriating and dis-appropriating the Western models of theatre-making that were introduced to the country at the turn of the twentieth century. The Europeanization of Morocco's performance cultures happened as late as 1913, the year the 'Teatro Cervantes' (its architecture resembles the Berliner Ensemble) was created in Tangier, followed by other new theatres in big metropolitan centers such as Casablanca, Rabat, and Tetouan. The first Arab theatre company visited Morocco in 1923. By the year 1926, Moroccan amateur companies had started performing in Fes, Tetouan, Tangier, and Casablanca. Famous Moroccan political figures of the independence movement not only encouraged this theatrical activity, but

also utilized theatre's intricate subversive potential as a means of empowering the majority of illiterate Moroccan subjects under the Franco-Hispanic colonial administrations. In 1950, the French colonial administration decided to check this progressive theatrical activity in Morocco. During the colonial period, Moroccan theatre generally constituted a theatre of resistance that paid more attention to the political rather than the aesthetic. Professionals were called in from France in order to orient Moroccan theatre toward the direction designated for it by the colonial administration. Thus, André Voisin and Charles Nugue, assisted by Abdessamad Kenfaoui and Tahar Ouaziz, supervised theatrical workshops in the Mamora Center in Rabat. As a result of this theatrical training, the first professional Moroccan theatre company was created under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sports bringing together Tayeb Saddiki, Ahmed Tayeb Laalej, Fatima Regragi, Abdessamad Dinia, Driss Tadili, Mohamed Afifi, and others. In short, the hybrid nature of Maghrebi theatre emerged as a result of cultural negotiations between self and other, East and West, tradition and modernity. It marked a postcolonial theatre located at cross-roads--a continuum of intersections, encounters, and negotiations. The outcome is a complex palimpsest that highlights the importance of cultural exchange and hybridity rather than an essentialist quest for something pure and original. Still, the urge to re-write our theatre history highlights not only the uncomfortable reality of previous dominant histories, but also the political connotations of coloniality.

Notes

1. Walter D. Mignolo admits that "modernity is a European narrative that hides its darker side, 'coloniality'. Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality." Walter D. Mignolo (2009), "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity", in Sabine Breitwieser (ed.), *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism*, pp. 39-49, Barcelona: MACBA., 39.
2. On 22 August 1799, Napoleon wrote an important note to his successor, General Kléber, explaining the imperative of theatre activity: "I have already asked several times for a troupe of comedians. I will make a special point of sending you one. This item is of great importance for the army and as the means of beginning to change the customs of the country."
3. Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India", New-York Daily Tribune, August 8, 1853; reprinted in the New-York Semi-Weekly Tribune, No. 856, August 9, 1853. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm> [last accessed: 04.12.2016].

4. Abdelkébir Khatibi (1985), "The Decolonization of Arab Sociology", in Halim Barakat (ed.), *Contemporary North Africa: issues of Development and Integration*, London: Croon Helm, 12.
5. Abdelkébir Khatibi (1990), *Double Critique*, Rabat: Oukad, 143. My own deployment of Khatibi's double Critique aims at foregrounding what Khatibi has termed "the affirmation of a difference". The first implication of such critique is an attempt to decolonize Western Logocentrism as manifested in the history of dramatic art. As to the second implication, it is affirmation itself as proposed by Khatibi. In other words, the Arabs have their own performance cultures, yet different from the Western traditions of theater making.
6. Lila Abou-Lughod, "The Object of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity", in *World Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, ed. Daniel Miller (London and NY: Routledge, 1995), 191.
7. Rustom Bharucha (1992), *Theatre And The World: Essays on Performance and Politics of Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2).
8. Gayatri C. Spivak (1996), interview with Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, in *Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds. D. Landry and G. Maclean (London: Routledge, 292).
9. "Perssimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will" is Antonio Gramsci's motto. Gramsci is believed to borrow such aphorism from the French writer Romain Rolland (1866–1944) (for further details, see David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
10. Walter, D. Mignolo, "Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity", 42.
11. *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema* (1958), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
12. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama* (1999), New York: Crowell.
13. Ta'ziyeh: *Ritual and Drama in Iran* (1979), New York, NYU Press.
14. *Early Arabic Drama* (1988), New York: Cambridge.
15. Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre* (9th ed), (2003), (Boson: Allyn and Bacon, 69).
16. Mohammed Al-khozai, *The Development of Early Arabic Drama 1847-1900* (1984), London and New York: Longman, 4.
17. Mohammed Aziza, *al-islam wal- masrah* [Islam and Theater] (1987), Riyad: Oyoun al-maqalat, 21-45-211.
18. Ahmed Ben Saddik. *Iqamatu Ad-Dalili 'Alaa Hurmati At-Tamtili*, [Substantiating Evidence Against Acting] (Third Edition) (2003), Cairo: The Cairo Library. The same edition contains the letter of Abdullah Ben Saddik entitled "*Izalatu Al-Iltibas 'Ama Akhtaa fihi Kathirun Mina An-Nass*" (Remove the Confusion about What Many People Were Mistaken). However, there is an extended version of *Iqamatu Ad-Dalili 'Alaa Hurmati At-Tamtili*, yet with a different title, *At-Tankilu Awi Taqtilu liman Ababa Tamtil* [Torturing or killing those who permitted Acting] (2002), Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah.
19. Trans. James Hughes (1976), London: Thames and Hudson.
20. *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2. Book 8. Chapter 551, N° 3311, 716.
21. *Ibid.*, 192.

22. Frantz Fanon, in Alan Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* (1996), London: Bay Press, 116.
23. Homi Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon," in the Foreword to Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), London: Pluto Press, xv.
24. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1967), Hammondsworth: Penguin, 193.
25. John Mair, *Desert Songs: Western Images of Morocco and Moroccan Images of the West* (1996), Albany: State University of New York Press, 178.
26. Paul Bowles, *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue* (1984), New York: Ecco Press, viii.
27. 'Double Exile' here refers to the situation of estrangement related to Paul Bowles as an American writer who lived for about 50 years in Tangier, a voluntary exile which had contributed a great deal to his ambiguous compromises.
28. Lenin Ramly describes the first Arabic reception of Western Theatre: "Discussing the French Expedition to Egypt of which he was a witness, Egyptian Chronicler Abdel-Rahman al-Jabarti wrote that the French had constructed at al- Azbakiyya quarter special buildings where men and women would gather to engage in unrestricted entertainment and acts of licentiousness. It was theatre that he was describing. As we get to know later, Egyptian natives would go out of their way to steal a look at what took place inside" (Lenin El-Ramly, "Comedy in the East, or the Art of Cunning: A Testimony on a Personal Experience," tr. Hazem Azmy, 1).
29. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), New York: Grove Press, 312-316.
30. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 255.
31. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History", *Representations* 37, Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories. (Winter, 1992), pp. 1-26. 1-2.
32. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowldges, and Border Thinking* (2012), Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 67.
33. "Let us name 'wild difference', the fake separation which casts the Other into the absolute outside. Wild difference definitely leads to frenzied identities: cultural, historical, ethnic, racial, national... It has condemned the West and made it a captive of hostility." [my own translation] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Double Critique* (1990), Rabat, Oukad Publications, 30.
34. Abdelkébir Khatibi, "Double Critique: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology", in Halim Barakat (ed.), *Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development and Integration* (1985), London: Croon Helm, 14.
35. Abdelkébir Khatibi, "Double Critique: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology", 13.
36. Khatibi's proposition of a thought of difference transcends Hegelian Manichaeisms only to emerge as a deconstructive praxis of difference. It is interesting to note that Khatibi was not only attentive to the diverse trajectories of western critique of its own Eurocentrism, but also developed as idiosyncratic approach across borders. His reciprocal friendship with Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida is evident from Barthes' preface to *Maghreb pluriel*, significantly entitled "Ce que je dois à Khatibi" (What I owe to Khatibi). Also, Khatibi's "La langue de L'autre" is clearly a response to Derrida's "Le

Monolinguisme de L'autre". Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Blanchot are also part of Khatibi's trajectory: « Nous prenons en compte non seulement leur style de pensée, mais aussi leur stratégie et leur machinerie de guerre, afin de les mettre au service de notre combat qui est, forcément, une autre conjuration de l'esprit, exigeant une décolonisation effective, une pensée concrète de la différence ». (We take into account not only their mode of thinking, but also their strategy and their war machinery, in order to put them to the service of our fighting, which is inevitably another conspiracy of the mind, requiring an effective decolonization, and a concrete thought of difference.) Maghreb pluriel (1983), Paris: Denoël, 20.

37. Abdelkébir Khatibi, *La Mémoire tatouée : Autobiographie d'un décolonisé* (1971), Paris, Denoël, p. 106.
38. Walter D. Mignolo (2012), *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 67.
39. Abdelkébir Khatibi, "Double Critique: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology", 16.
40. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History", *Representations* 37, 2-4.
41. *Al-halqa* is a public gathering in the form of a circle around one person or more (hlayqi/hlayqia) in a public space (be it a marketplace, Medina Gate, or a newly devised downtown square). It is a space of popular culture that is open to people from all different paths of life. Al-halqa hovers between high culture and low mass culture, sacred and profane, literacy and orality. Its repertoire combines fantastic, mythical, and historical narratives from Thousand and One Nights and Sirat bani hilal, as well as stories from the holy Quran and the Sunna of the prophet Mohammed along with local, witty narrative and performative forms. The medium of the halqa also varies from storytelling to acrobatic acting and dancing.
42. *Jemaa-elfna* is one of the famous sites of popular culture in Morocco. It is a huge and open square in the city of Marrakech wherein storytelling and other performance behaviors rooted in Moroccan popular culture are practiced as licensed and free oral performances. In brief, the square marks a site of popular orality and ritualistic formulae as well as an archive of Moroccan performance cultures. The square is classified by UNESCO as a site of living immaterial human heritage.