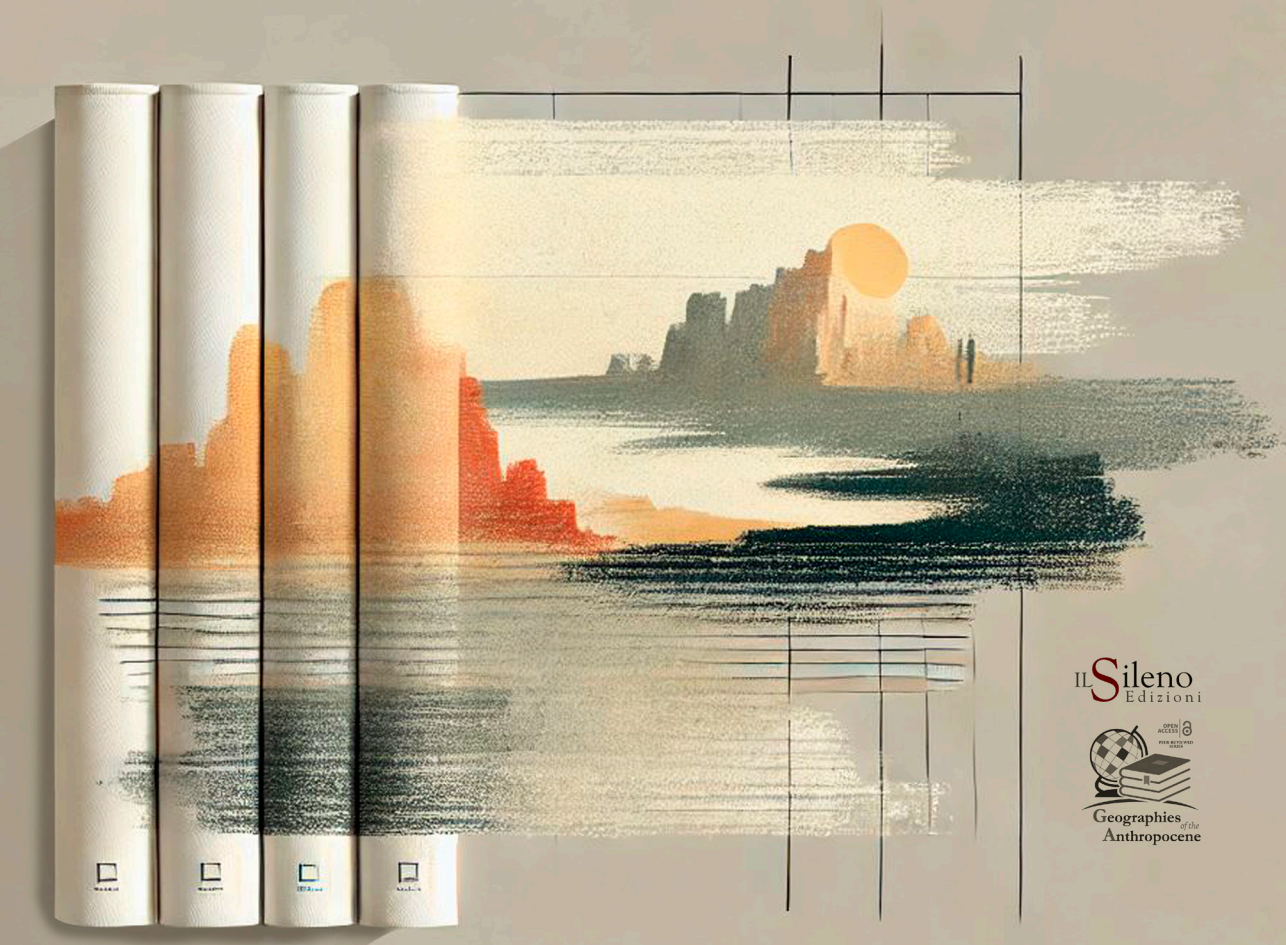
Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

Literature, Geography and The Poetics of Space

Tracing Historical Narratives Across Literary Landscapes



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Geographies of the Anthropocene

Preface by Charles Travis

Sara Ansaloni & Eleonora Gioia (Eds.)

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The book series "Geographies of the Anthropocene" edited by the Scientific International Publisher "Il Sileno" (Il Sileno Edizioni) will discuss the new processes of the Anthropocene epoch through the various worldviews of geoscientists and humanists, intersecting disciplines of Geosciences, Geography, Geoethics, Philosophy, Socio-Anthropology, Sociology of Environment and Territory, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Humanities and cognate disciplines.

Geoethics focuses on how scientists (natural and social), arts and humanities scholars working in tandem can become more aware of their ethical responsibilities to guide society on matters related to public safety in the face of natural hazards, sustainable use of resources, climate change and protection of the environment. Furthermore, the integrated and multiple perspectives of the Environmental Humanities, can help to more fully understand the cultures of, and the cultures which frame the Anthropocene. Indeed, the focus of Geoethics and Environmental Humanities research, that is, the analysis of the way humans think and act for the purpose of advising and suggesting appropriate behaviors where human activities interact with the geosphere, is dialectically linked to the complex concept of Anthropocene.

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Art, Politics and Literature: the Formation of Identity Landscapes

4. The Post-colonial Identity in Morocco: Geo-linguistic Experimentation in *Souffles*

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Abstract

The post-independence period in Morocco marked a complex redefinition of national identity, catalyzed by cultural and political upheavals. In this context, the avant-garde journal *Souffles* (1966–1972) emerged as a seminal platform for intellectual and artistic expression. Initially envisioned as a pedagogical tool to counter colonial legacies and redefine Morocco's identity, *Souffles* evolved into a politically charged medium reflecting escalating tensions under King Hassan II's regime. This dual trajectory encapsulates the intricate interplay of identity, resistance, and linguistic experimentation in post-independence Morocco. While existing scholarship often foregrounds the political transformations of this era, focusing on repression and institutional change, this study shifts the lens to the cultural and linguistic dimensions of resistance. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks developed by Abdelkebir Khatibi and Jacques Derrida, with a particular focus on their concepts of *pensée-autre*, monolingualism, and linguistic plurality. Through a comparative examination of *Souffles* and Khaïr-Eddine's *Soleil arachnide* (1980), this paper demonstrates how Morocco's avant-garde articulated a pluralistic postcolonial identity in the making.

Keywords: ***Morocco, Avant-garde, post-coloniality, Souffles, identity***

1. Introduction

The period following Morocco's independence in 1956 marked a complex era of cultural and political redefinition, culminating in significant transformations under King Hassan II. This context fostered the emergence of *Souffles* (1966–1972), a revolutionary cultural and literary journal. Founded by a group of Moroccan intellectuals, *Souffles* became emblematic of a burgeoning avant-garde movement. Initially conceived as a pedagogical platform to transcend the limitations of colonial education and express Morocco's multifaceted identity, the journal transitioned into a politically charged outlet amid escalating tensions under Hassan II's regime. The interplay between *Souffles*' early literary ambitions and its later political instrumentalization encapsulates the precarious negotiation of identity, language, and resistance in post-independence Morocco.

Existing scholarship has predominantly analyzed this period through the lens of political reconstruction, focusing on the socio-political transformations under King Hassan II during the "Years of Lead." Historiographical studies by Douglas Elliott Ashford (1961), C.R. Pennell (2000, 2003), Lise Storm (2007), Susan Gilson Miller (2013), and Brahim El Guabli (2019) explore the growth and affirmation of nationalist movements, the democratization process juxtaposed with centralized authoritarianism, and the redefinition of colonial identity in the post-independence era. While these works provide valuable insights into the political landscape, their focus on repression and institutional shifts often omits a crucial dimension: the interplay between cultural resistance, identity deconstruction, and linguistic experimentation.

In parallel, influential studies by Abdelkebir Khatibi (1983) and Jacques Derrida (1996) have explored language as a site of negotiation, examining how colonial legacies and identity multiplicities manifest in linguistic and cultural spheres. Khatibi's concept of "*pensée autre*" and Derrida's critique of monolingualism underscore the dialogic nature of language and identity formation. These analyses, however, often remain detached from the literary avant-garde movements that actively grappled with these challenges, particularly the subversive potential of artistic production to mediate cultural and linguistic tensions. Integrating these approaches through Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of dialogism reveals the inherently polyphonic nature of language. Accordingly, languages construct themselves through their contact with other languages,

challenging the notion of a unitary or monologic language (Christensen, 2017).

Among the key studies on *Souffles-Anfas*, it is necessarily to mention Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio's *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology From the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (2015). This anthology, which collected and translated all issues of the review into English, has prompted new scholarship exploring its legacy and broader socio-political implications. Von Osten Marion (2016) highlights *Souffles* significance in fostering contributions from visual artists and transnational solidarity movements, whereas Andy Stafford (2023) contextualizes it within a critique of Négritude and folklorism. Anouar El Younssi (2017) underscores its role in sparking an interdisciplinary and transnational movement that sought to rethink literature and national culture while deconstructing various forms of authority. Teresa Villa-Ignacio (2017) examines *Souffles*' rhetorical strategies, introducing the concept of "decolonizing violence" to show how the magazine dismantled state violence and enacted cultural decolonization. Christensen (2017), however, uniquely combines linguistic analysis with *Souffles*' avant-garde ethos, discussing how a growing disillusionment with nationalist and Salafi ideals led Moroccan intellectuals of the 1960s to establish independent cultural journals, with *Souffles* and its Arabic equivalent *Anfas* emerging as the most influential. The author uses the review to explore the emergence of ideas central to Khatibi and Derrida's reasoning, with the aim of linking poststructuralism to postcolonial theory. While these studies provide important insights, they often focus on *Souffles-Anfas*' later revolutionary agenda, overlooking its early pedagogical phase and its nuanced approach to linguistic experimentation.

The purpose of this research is to underscore the journal's early phase as a concrete, albeit unconscious, articulation of the plural and monolingual identity later theorized by Khatibi and Derrida. By situating *Souffles* within the socio-political context of post-independence Morocco, this study highlights its role as a material manifestation of an emergent pluralistic Moroccan identity. Through an analysis of the early works of *Souffles*, particularly Khaïr-Eddine's seminal *Soleil arachnide* (1980), the research proposes a model of identity that is as dynamic and multifaceted as Morocco itself. These texts, marked by linguistic experimentation and poetic innovation, gave shape to a postcolonial cultural identity that resonates with Derrida's *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* and Khatibi's concepts of *double critique*, *bilanguisme*, and *pensée en langues*. By bridging avant-garde literary expression with critical theory, this study illuminates how *Souffles* pioneered a vision of identity as fluid,

evolving, and deeply rooted in Morocco's cultural and linguistic hybridity.

In the Moroccan context, the historical link between language, identity, and political agency is crucial. Understanding how debates over language use manifested in the past is necessary to comprehend its contemporary applications. Morocco's unique geographical location and rich history have made it an iconic terrain of cultural and linguistic diversity. By the late 20th and early 21st century, linguistic diversity had reached its peak as foreign languages gained significant ground alongside the official recognition of national languages. Modern Standard Arabic, Amazigh, Moroccan Arabic (*Darija*), French, English, and other foreign languages coexist in various domains, from casual communication to media, education, administration, and business. This complex linguistic plurality, a result of historical layers of settlement and occupation, places Morocco as a global archetype of linguistic and cultural diversity. However, this diversity also presents significant challenges, particularly in education and language policy. The debates surrounding the roles of these languages underscore the precariousness of state policy in balancing cultural identity and functional pragmatism. By revisiting the linguistic and cultural debates of the past through *Souffles*, this study provides a deeper understanding of the contemporary linguistic landscape in Morocco, demonstrating the enduring relevance of avant-garde movements in shaping the nation's pluralistic identity.

2. Souffles: the emergence of a Moroccan literary avant-guard

Morocco's independence from France on March 2, 1956, marked the end of the colonial protectorate and the beginning of a complex journey toward nation-building under King Mohammed V. His leadership sought to balance modernization with the preservation of Islamic and monarchical traditions, establishing the foundations of a modern state while navigating tensions over political participation and centralization of power. With the accession of his son, Hassan II, in 1961, the monarchy took a more authoritarian turn. Hassan II's reign, characterized by the repressive "Years of Lead," saw the brutal suppression of dissent, the consolidation of power, and the projection of an image that merged traditional legitimacy with cosmopolitan sophistication (Howe, 2000). Hassan II's embodied the ideal of the modern Arab leader, balancing tradition and modernity. He claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad through the 'Alawi dynasty, reinforcing his legitimacy as a custodian of Morocco's Islamic heritage. Simultaneously, he projected the image of a refined, cosmopolitan statesman—sophisticated, urban, and shaped by a French education, which complemented his tailored, diplomatic persona. The ruler understood that his very survival required a strategic negotiation between tradition and modernity, pursuing policies aimed at stabilizing his regime while addressing calls for reform (Gilson Miller, 2013). Hassan II was able to transform Morocco into a bastion of stability in a volatile area such as the Middle East, laying the foundation for a modern constitutional monarchy. At his death on July 23, 1999, the country had reached a high level of professionalization among the population, including the participation of women, and a dynamic civil society. However, this progress came at the cost of human rights. During this period dissidents were arrested, killed and tortured, newspapers were closed and books banned (Howe, 2000). The political tensions of the 1960s, exacerbated by student protests and strikes, culminated in the assassination of Mehdi Ben Barka, a prominent leftist leader and global figure in the tricontinentalist movement. Ben Barka symbolized resistance to neocolonialism and U.S. imperialism, forging alliances with figures like Che Guevara, Amílcar Cabral and Malcom X, championing anti-colonial struggles. His vision of a global solidarity movement deeply influenced progressive currents in Morocco and beyond, creating an intellectual and cultural environment ripe for new expressions of dissent (Nate, 2020).

The 1960s and 1970s were a transformative period across the Maghreb, marked by intense linguistic and artistic experimentation as countries sought to articulate autonomous postcolonial identities. In the wake of decolonization, intellectuals and artists engaged with the dual challenge of distancing themselves from colonial cultural paradigms while forging a modern aesthetic rooted in local traditions. These avant-garde movements reflected the region's complex negotiation between heritage and modernity, producing a diversity of experimental expressions.

In Algeria, experimentation often occurred on the margins, with poets like Youcef Sebti and Nabile Farès pushing boundaries through fragmented syntax, typographical innovation, and calligrams. The rigid control of cultural production by state institutions like the Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion (SNED) relegated much of this experimentation to underground presses or exile, fostering tensions between artistic freedom and institutional repression. In Tunisia, poets such as Chems Nadir, Hédi Bouraoui, and Majid El Houssi embraced a highly intellectualized avant-garde, experimenting with discontinuous discourse, typographic play, and the blending of Arabic and Berber cosmologies with modern poetic forms. Unlike Algeria, much of Tunisia's literary experimentation unfolded abroad, reflecting the exile and alienation central to its thematic concerns (Sellin, 1986). These movements, though varied in pace and form, shared a commitment to linguistic innovation as a means of expressing fractured identities and the postcolonial condition.

In Morocco, this spirit of experimentation found a pivotal platform in *Souffles* (1966–1972), which catalyzed a brief but impactful period of avant-garde literary production. *Souffles* (in French "breaths" or "inspiration"), founded by Abdellatif Laâbi, emerged as a groundbreaking literary and cultural journal. At the core of the first issues was language experimentation, associated with debates on poetry, art and cinema. The standard Arabic language was in fact considered not only unrepresentative of the local identity, but also as extremely limiting in the size and scope of their readership. The contributors to *Souffles*, including Mostafa Nissabouri, Bernard Jakobiak, and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, belonged to the petite bourgeoisie and had been educated in colonial French schools. This upbringing fostered a profound sense of uprootedness and frustration, as they found themselves more comfortable expressing their art in the colonial language than in standard or Moroccan Arabic (Strafford, 2023).

Initially conceived as a pedagogical literary catalog aimed at overcoming the limitations of formal education and helping individuals find their voices in

their preferred languages, the journal's focus soon shifted outward, addressing broader cultural and political concerns. It positioned itself as a revolutionary vanguard, adopting a Marxist-inspired language and aiming to ignite cultural decolonization by breaking ties with French models and the Arab religious canon to forge uniquely Moroccan artistic and literary forms (Harrison, and Villa-Ignacio, 2016). *Souffles* played a key role in fostering transnational dialogues among writers, artists, and activists across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. It published seminal works by figures like Haitian writer René Depestre, Syrian poet Adonis, and Amílcar Cabral, the leader of Guinea-Bissau's independence movement[1]. The journal also featured revolutionary and postcolonial texts, such as the Black Panther Party's program and the Argentine manifesto *For a Third Cinema* (Harrison, Villa-Ignacio, 2016). These contributions reflected its mission to dismantle colonial legacies and create a space for cultural resistance and renewal. Although its pedagogical aims ultimately fell short, *Souffles* succeeded in catalyzing a dynamic and globally engaged cultural movement.

[1] See Issandr El Amrani, "There was Souffles. Reconsidering Morocco's most radical literary Quaterly", *Bidoun*, available at: https://www.bidoun.org/articles/in-the-beginning-there-was-souffles.

3. The Manifesto of Souffles (1966): Towards a Linguistic definition of the Self

In *Souffles*' inaugural publication, conceived as a manifesto, Abdellatif Laâbi outlined the magazine's mission. He emphasized that readers would not encounter a mere dispute between *anciens* and *modernes* but rather a literature capable of addressing a spectrum of curiosities and nostalgias from the past. The manifesto emerged as an ode to language and as a tool to define the "colonial self" beyond the constraints of "otherness." Within a year of its release, Laâbi refined this concept, critiquing anticolonial theorist Albert Memmi and Algerian writer Malek Haddad, who advocated abandoning the colonial language in favor of local languages as part of cultural decolonization (Laâbi, *Souffles* 2, 1966). Beginning with issue 4, *Souffles* expanded its scope to include essays on other humanities disciplines. Despite limited funding, the magazine served as a vehicle for disseminating the works of avant-garde Moroccan artists, such as the Casablanca Group (issues 7-8).

In line with Khatibi's critique, presented in the third issue of *Souffles*, Laâbi denounced the literature produced between 1945 and 1962 as a commodified form of expression, tailored primarily for the French metropolitan audience. This "prostitution" of literature, as he described it, catered to the exoticizing demands of French readers, perpetuating stereotypes of the "Homo Arabicus." Authors often conformed to the expectations of French publishing houses, producing works that romanticized Berber tribes, desert landscapes, bustling souks, and iconic minarets—thereby reinforcing colonial narratives of France's civilizing mission. In contrast, Laâbi advocated for a radical rethinking of linguistic and cultural expression, which he referred to as "linguistic disorientation." This approach, according to Laâbi, could only emerge after navigating the processes of artistic maturity and the eventual decline of colonial literary frameworks (Laâbi, *Souffles* 1, 1966).

Khatibi categorizes Maghrebi writers into two groups, both of which he includes under the term "prostitute literature" due to their strategic appeal to French audiences, albeit for different reasons. The first group, including Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, and Mouloud Mammeri, focused on portraying the social stratifications and minutiae of everyday life in local societies. This approach catered to the exotic tastes of a French readership, reinforcing an Orientalist fascination with the Maghreb as a distant,

picturesque, and fragmented space. However, as the Algerian struggle for independence gained momentum, these writers were criticized for their perceived disconnection from the revolutionary cause, being accused of neglecting the urgent realities of colonial resistance (Khatibi, *Souffles* 3, 1966). The second group, emerging during the Algerian War of Independence, included writers like Malek Haddad, Assia Djebar, and Mourad Bourboune, who aligned their works with revolutionary themes. Yet, despite their focus on the liberation struggle, these authors still targeted French leftist intellectuals, a demographic eager for narratives on rebellion and anti-colonial resistance. Their works, therefore, remained shaped by the expectations of a French readership keen to consume stories of revolutionary fervor. With the end of the war and the stabilization of independence, the global appeal of Maghrebi literature diminished. French leftist intellectuals, previously fascinated by the "rebellious Maghrebi scholar," shifted their attention to contemporary issues, often pathologizing Maghrebi identity and assuming the African question was "resolved" with independence. Maghrebi writers, meanwhile, faced the challenge of addressing their rapidly changing societies through disoriented literary works, reflecting a collective search for meaning in a post-independence context (Khatibi, 1968). While Khatibi's critiques were echoed by Laâbi and reiterated in the introduction of Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio's anthology, there is no quantitative evidence to confirm the specific reception patterns of these works. Nevertheless, the critiques articulated by the writers of *Souffles* remain a powerful denunciation of the Maghrebi literary production that catered to colonial and postcolonial metropolitan expectations.

The review's focus on language aligns with broader philosophical debates about the limits of language in describing reality. Seminal works by De Saussure (1907), Khatibi (1968; 1983), and Derrida (1967; 1996) were pivotal in articulating the disjunction between written language (*langue*) and the poet's inner world (*language*/*parole*). Particularly relevant is Derrida's *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (1996), which confronts the notion of a pure, pre-colonial language, situating French as politically hegemonic in colonial Algeria. Contrary to expectations for a writer shaped by a colonial upbringing, Derrida does not advocate for a return to an originary language. Instead, he describes himself as possessing a single language, an "absolute habitat," where language is considered as both home and exile. Derrida's autobiographical reflections further inform his linguistic critique. His complex relationship with French as a maternal yet foreign tongue elucidates a deeper tension: the inseparability of linguistic exile and creative expression. His French

fluency, tempered by his "French Algerian" accent, became emblematic of alienation and belonging. As he noted, the act of writing reinforced a schism between French literary culture, steeped in tradition and elite transmission, and the lived cultural reality of French Algerians. This fracture is intrinsic to Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which Abdel-Jaouad (2002) interprets as an "unquenchable desire" to expose the interruptions of meaning and identity. Deconstruction, in this light, emerges as an enduring interrogation of non-belonging (*étrangeté*), mirroring the alienation of colonial subjects introduced to French literary heritage. These reflections are not merely theoretical. Derrida's exile from Algeria and immersion in metropolitan French intellectual circles profoundly shaped his critique of language's role in perpetuating colonial power dynamics. Language, for Derrida, is never purely natural or inhabitable; it is always marked by the dislocation of exile and nostalgia, a perspective inseparable from his personal and historical context (Chow, 2004).

Derrida's project, echoing that of Maghrebi surrealist poets, was to reveal the intricate ties between language, territorial belonging, and community identity. The French language, according to *Souffles'* contributors, needed to be pierced, fragmented, and deterritorialized to represent the colonized self. Laâbi, employing Marxist imagery, prepared his readership for a transformative cultural and political movement, stating: "Something is about to happen in Africa and in the rest of the Third World. Exoticism and folklore are being toppled. No one can foresee what this 'ex-pre-logical' thought will be able to offer to us all. But the day when the true spokespersons of these collectivities really make their voices heard, it will be a dynamite explosion in the corrupt secret societies of the old humanism" (Laâbi, *Souffles* 2, 1966, p. 21). Through this proclamation, Laâbi envisions a seismic shift away from the exoticized and folklorized perceptions imposed by colonialism. He foresees the rise of authentic voices from Africa and the Third World, capable of dismantling the remnants of colonial humanism. According to Laâbi, this process of de-alienation and restructuring, initiated by *Souffles*, ultimately aimed to foster a new, original African-based humanism. This vision aligns with a broader call for a genuine and effective process of decolonization—one that transcends political independence to encompass cultural, linguistic, and intellectual liberation.

Issue 3 (1966) of *Souffles* presented two particularly significant contributions to the discourse on cultural and literary decolonization. Ahmed Bounani's *Introduction to Moroccan Popular Poetry* offered a critical overview of the genre, highlighting the inadequacies of academic studies, particularly in their

neglect of Moroccan oral poetic traditions. He lamented how the transcription of these oral forms often stripped them of their beauty and nuanced meanings, a loss emblematic of broader cultural erasures under colonial academic frameworks. Meanwhile Abdelkebir Khatibi's *The Maghrebi Novel and National Culture* provided a groundbreaking analysis of the relationship between literature and the socio-economic structures of colonialism. Anticipating themes he would expand upon in *Le roman maghrébin* (1968), Khatibi referenced Lucien Goldmann's (1963) assertion of a structural homology between the economic systems of capitalism and the literary form of the novel. Goldmann posited that the novel mirrors the individualistic ethos of market-driven societies, where interpersonal relationships are mediated by commodities and economic interests. Building on this idea, Khatibi argued that the development of the Maghrebi novel from 1945 to 1962 was inextricably tied to the anti-colonial struggle but also shaped by the consumerist demands of metropolitan French audiences. While the Maghrebi novel ostensibly emerged as a vehicle for expressing national culture and resistance, it was predominantly written in the colonizer's language, targeting foreign consumption. This dynamic, he suggested, "blurred" the cultural production of the era, as literature became politicized and entangled with the colonial economy. Consequently, some critics contended, Maghrebi literature lacked authenticity, being neither fully rooted in its indigenous culture nor free from metropolitan constraints. Khatibi's analysis went further to address the psychological and existential toll of this phenomenon. For colonized individuals, the imposition of foreign cultural values fostered an "ontological sickness," as they grappled with a society that was simultaneously imposed and alien. This dissonance, Khatibi argued, profoundly influenced the trajectory of Maghrebi literature and underscored the need for a cultural and linguistic reimagining to achieve true decolonization (Khatibi, 1968).

Khatibi elaborated these ideas in *Maghreb Pluriel* (1983), proposing the development of a "*pensée autre*" (thinking otherwise) to decolonize Maghrebi identity. Rather than defining itself in opposition to Western epistemology or Arab-Islamic theology, the Maghreb, as he envisioned it, was a horizon of thought, celebrating plurality, alterity, and difference. This approach embraced a "double critique," directed at both models, situating the Maghrebi self on the geographical, cultural, and metaphysical margins of being. As we will see in the next paragraph, *Souffles*, in its earliest publications, would exemplify this multiplicity, offering a concrete cultural manifestation of the pluralistic identity Khatibi theorized.

4. From a "Seismic" Literature to an Apocalyptic Literary Being: Souffles 1–11 (1966–1968)

One of the primary objectives of Souffles was pedagogical, as the journal argued that the linguistic dualism in Morocco—the coexistence of French and Standard Arabic in spoken and written forms—had significantly undermined the educational foundations of Moroccan youth. As Laâbi remarked in *Souffles* 4: "It is true that in the colonial context the linguistic frustration of the colonized went beyond the mere coexistence of two modes of expression. It undermined his psyche and depreciated his culture" (p. 70). These tensions, exacerbated during the post-independence period, culminated in widespread strikes over the language of instruction in schools. French was seen as a pathway to modernization, while Arabic symbolized a desire to reclaim Moroccan identity after colonialism, albeit with connotations of backwardness. This symbolism was deeply ingrained in the language policies of the early post-independence government: Arabic was prioritized in the first two years of primary school, but French remained the medium of instruction for mathematics and sciences at all levels until the full Arabization of public-school curricula in 1989 (Dichter, 2020).

Mohammed V initiated a process of educational "Arabization," promoting Standard Arabic as the primary language to assert linguistic sovereignty and foster Arab nationalism. Yet, this shift disregarded Morocco's cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly marginalizing the indigenous Amazigh languages. The exclusion of Amazigh voices continued until the 2011 constitution, when Amazigh was officially recognized as a national language. *Darija*, spoken by over 70% of the population, remains uncodified and unrecognized as an official language, although its written usage has grown in recent years, especially in journalism, literature, and social media (Miller, 2017). For Moroccan intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s, the debate over a literary national language was largely restricted to Arabic and French. Many writers viewed French as an integral part of their culture and creative expression. It was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the first public advocacy for the valorization of *Darija* began to emerge. This exclusionary focus on Standard Arabic and French left Moroccan youth caught between familiarity with spoken *Darija* and written French but alienated from written Standard Arabic. Moreover, these linguistic policies deeply affected young

Moroccans' ability to master any language. As Laâbi observed: "Even if he was frustrated with his mother tongue, the colonized adolescent still had at his disposal a medium of thought with which he could formulate his revolt and his ideas, and with which he could externalize his personality. After independence, the adolescent lost this imposed medium, but he has not yet reconquered the Arabic language. He is aphasic. His deepest thoughts and personality emerge only in sporadic and imprecise fragments" (Laâbi, *Souffles* 4, 1966, p. 70).

The challenges of Arabization extended beyond linguistic tensions to encompass weak learning outcomes and ineffective methods of teaching Arabic. Instead of addressing policies, curricula, and pedagogies, frustration was often misplaced on the language itself. Arabization faced immense political and systemic obstacles. For example, while Al-Istiqlal, a conservative political party, advocated for fully Arabized education, the monarchy favored bilingual education, viewing French as essential for maintaining communication and exchange with Europe. Removing French entirely risked creating a language vacuum, particularly since high school curricula were not fully articulated in Arabic until the 1980s (Elabbas, 2001). The implementation of Arabization also suffered from critical flaws. The lack of trained Arabic educators led to the recruitment of teachers from the Middle East, particularly Egypt, Syria, and Sudan. However, geopolitical tensions, such as the Egyptian Army's involvement in the "War of Sands" in 1963 against Morocco, resulted in the removal of Egyptian teachers, disrupting the process of Arabization. Further delays occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to unexpectedly high student enrollments in middle schools, which overwhelmed the system. Consequently, the aim of transforming Arabic into a contemporary tool for communication was sidelined, leading to widespread disengagement from the language (Brustad, 2015).

Despite these obstacles, *Souffles* did not seek to determine a single legitimate language for literature or education. Instead, its goal was to reclaim and reconstruct each language as a means of full self-expression, ensuring that linguistic diversity became a source of cultural enrichment rather than division. In particular, the review sought to transcend the stylistic and thematic divisions traditionally associated with language. As Youssef El Kaidi (2023) notes, Moroccan writers in Arabic often found themselves torn between themes of colonial resistance, nationalism, and nostalgia[2], and a manifest desire for

[2] See for reference: Allal El Fassi, Abdelkarim Ghallab, Mohamed Larbi Messari, Mohamed Sebbar, Mohamed Aziz Lahbabi.

the Western model of secular and rational modernity[3]. Conversely, writers who chose the colonizer's language inhabited a geo-linguistic space that was hybrid, fragmented, and layered—situated at the crossroads of cultures, languages, and identities (El Kaidi, 2023). Francophone writers, Marx-Scouras (1986) argues, occupied a position that dissociated literature from nationality: "[t]he Francophone writer is necessarily trans-national, transcending the artifice of national language, literature, and identity" (p. 8). This linguistic materiality intersects with semi-geographies, rendering these writers, in Derridean terms, "exiles of language," fully belonging to space while simultaneously transcending categorization.

The writers of *Souffles* engaged in deliberate linguistic experimentation, enacting what Abdelkebir Khatibi termed a "violence upon literary language." This rupture was manifested syntactically and grammatically through innovative uses of punctuation, space, and form. According to Abdellatif Laâbi (2001), Maghrebi literature in French could only be a "terrorist literature," one that dismantles syntax, phonetics, morphology, and symbolism at every level. Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine encapsulated this approach with his concept of "guerrilla linguistics," articulated in *Poésie toute* (1964), which served as a foundation for *Souffles*' literary techniques. This linguistic violence arose from a fractured reality, where writers felt compelled to destroy language itself to express the schizophrenics linguistic experience of postcolonial Morocco. For Khaïr-Eddine, this violent deconstruction was both a rupture and a return—to a time of oral poetry, where style and technique evoked ancestral modes of expression. Readers were forced to transition from mere reading to listening, reconnecting with an old poetic tradition while simultaneously witnessing the mutilation of the poet's body—the emblem of the formerly colonized subject. Writing became an act of resistance, a seismic activity with corrosive effects, as exemplified in Khaïr-Eddine's *Agadir* (1967). The work, written in the aftermath of the 1960 earthquake, transformed the catastrophe into a symbol of internal fractures, historical violence, and political oppression. For the author, writing was a "*séisme permanent*," a "*violence sismique, dévastatrice et décapante*" (Abboubi, 2023). His ambivalent relationship with Morocco further infused his work, portraying the land as "*humide d'indéfférance*" and "*coupable*" for having allowed itself to be conquered and shaped by external forces (Khaïr-Eddine, 2009).

The complex relationship with his homeland reflects Khaïr-Eddine's

[3] See for reference: Mohamed Zafzaf, Mohammed Berrada, Mohamed Choukri.

personal trajectory. Born in 1941 in Azro Wado (*Pierre-du-vent*), a village in the Anti-Atlas, his early years were marked by familial dislocation. When he was seven, his father moved to Casablanca, and Khaïr-Eddine joined him at eleven, leaving behind his mother, who was repudiated and abandoned in their village. This separation ignited his rebellion against familial, religious, and social authority. In 1965, he chose voluntary exile in France, where he worked as a laborer in the Parisian suburbs. France became the site of his second exile, an ambivalent space of creation and alienation, where he recognized that to be a writer, he had to write from there. Yet, financial constraints forced his return to Morocco in 1979.

In his literary corpus, Khaïr-Eddine navigates three recurring figures: the mother, representing biological ties, the motherland, and cultural origins; the father, an oppressive symbol of power, colonialism, and authority; and the grandfather, an idealized and protective image of the ancestral tribal past. These figures are imbued with layers of love, hostility, and nostalgia, as they reflect his fragmented identity and relationship with Morocco's history and geography. As J.C. Burrec describes, Khaïr-Eddine's time in 1960s Casablanca epitomized his restless existence: "Khaïr-Eddine always seemed to be passing through; he never stopped, already wandering to escape life's grasp. He didn't know himself yet, but already his destiny unfolded in soft then sharp lines through the city's meanderings, fierce will, and dormant instincts"[4]. Poetry became his refuge, his "*ethnie réelle*," his "*liberté libre*," and his "*pain de soleils vibrants*." Yet, throughout his career, he remained a "stateless body" inhabiting a wasteland, suspended between exile and belonging.

In *Soleil arachnide* (1969), a collection of Khaïr-Eddine's poems organized by Jean-Paul Michel and published in 2009, an intentional thematic structure emerges, reflecting a gradual shift from seismic writing to an apocalyptic and dreamlike mode. When the poet's message becomes particularly violent, punctuation and empty spaces dominate, compelling the reader into prolonged pauses. This is evident in *Nausée noire* and *Barrage*, where the fragmented style mirrors the physical and linguistic violence Khaïr-Eddine sought to convey. In contrast, when the dimension becomes dreamlike, punctuation and spacing vanish entirely, drawing readers into his unconscious through a stream-of-consciousness style that materializes his psyche. These transitions reflect complex interactions between the unconscious and reality, mirroring

[4] See Issandr El Amrani, "There was Souffles. Reconsidering Morocco's most radical literary Quaterly", *Bidoun*, available at: https://www.bidoun.org/articles/in-the-beginning-there-was-souffles.

the fraught movement from colonial to postcolonial identity. In this dreamlike state, violence subsides almost entirely, offering a fleeting respite. Khaïr-Eddine himself acknowledged this duality in his correspondence with Abdellatif Laâbi, expressing his aspiration to write a novel where "poetry and delirium would be one" (*Souffles* 1, 7-8). This evolution culminates in a *Manifeste* that combines multiple languages and forms, underscoring the journey from fragmentation to synthesis. The *Manifeste* begins with a striking vertical inscription, "*Je ne perds*." The interpretation of these words is left entirely to the reader, who is prompted to ponder the nature of this "loss." What emerges as the loss of the writer's own body and homeland becomes the raw material of his creative expression. One might consider that what he refuses to lose is precisely this ability to transform loss into writing itself. Initially fragmented across the first three stanzas, the text transitions into a prose paragraph, where the poet directly addresses the essence of dreams. Khaïr-Eddine employs punctuation to reflect the creative process, portraying himself as an actor donning a mask. As he describes, "[t]he poem enters my skin and wears it down, expanding its substance until it erodes my body completely" (p. 85). Language, a tool of divine revelation, enters his body, expanding and ultimately dissolving it, enabling the author to rewrite history through the memory of his ancestors. Yet, as the dream ends, the fragmented style reemerges, waking readers to an anthem of a new, democratic nation, led by a metaphorical dead king.

Violence remains central throughout this trajectory—violence against the colonized body, described as occupied, massacred, and "ironed as a shirt," with writing as its sole "habitable" space. This violence extends to language, which Khaïr-Eddine mutilates and rearranges, symbolizing an obstacle to attaining the oneiric state. The body, crawling, vomiting, and scattering, reflects this rupture, trapped by "*chaînes brûlantes*" and "*résine et fer.*" As the text progresses, a shift occurs from individual particularity ("*syllabe par syllabe je construis mon nom*") to collective multiplicity ("*je m'incorpore à ma saignante multitude*"), manifesting a fluid, fragmented identity. The self flows "*hors mon contenu*," like a shrimp navigating laminar spaces at the city's edges, symbolizing marginality and displacement[5]. Through this apocalyptic vision, Khaïr-Eddine and *Souffles* articulate their ultimate project: poetry as a form of divine revelation heralding a linguistic apocalypse. This poetic endeavor fosters a collective socio-agnatic solidarity that, in its utopian form, transcends individuality. Within the dream dimension of writing, plurality finds its fullest realization. As Khaïr-Eddine demonstrates, the plurilingual

[5] See Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, "Nausée Noire", *Soleil arachnide,* 2009, pp. 21-41.

text embodies a "mad jouissance," deploying diverse tools and techniques to articulate *la pensée autre*—a mode of thought that challenges traditional epistemologies. This *pensée autre* seeks to express a new, *present* identity through its use of language, as Jacques Derrida suggests, while simultaneously embodying a collective truth. Following Khatibi's "double critique," it affirms itself against both Western and traditional Islamic models. In its most surrealist expressions, the poetry of *Souffles* becomes the plural manifestation of a collective identity, realized through a surrealist imaginary. Figures such as "*le sang noir*," "*le désert blanc*," "*le lait dans le désert*," "*l'arbre de caroubier*," "*le chameau*," and "*la figue mûre*" synthesize ecological and cultural symbols that intertwine past traditions with new political and cultural meanings.

In particular, the black blood is a recurring figure in this poetic framework, serving as an emblem of identity and resistance that underscores the profound connection between the Moroccan people and their land. This identity-driven reclamation is juxtaposed with images such as *"le désert blanc"* and *"le lait dans le désert"*, which evoke hope and resilience, symbolizing nourishment and depicting the desert as a site of renewal. The idea of life flourishing in the most desolate place finds its most significant expression in the Sahara Desert, a space intimately tied to the Berber roots of the author. Meanwhile, *"l'arbre de caroubier"* and *"le chameau"* represent endurance and adaptability, drawing upon the ecological heritage of the region to signify cultural survival. Finally, *"la figue mûre"* encapsulates the fruition of potential and the richness of a collective memory imbued with sensuality and abundance.

Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, the language employed by *Souffles* is not only polyphonic, but it is amplified in its own multiplicity, through the continuous adjustment of style, punctuation, and conventional meanings with the aim of constructing new images and redefining their significance. Through this intermingling of imaginaries, the ultimate experiment unfolds, language as an instrument of collective voice, multiplied to articulate an identity that seeks its own definition.

5. Conclusion: from "apocalyptic" writing to a legacy of resistance

In the early hours of January 27, 1972, Moroccan security forces launched a sweeping operation across Rabat and other cities, arresting students, intellectuals, and unionists in a crackdown targeting the Marxist-Leninist group Ila al-Amam. Among the arrested were Abdellatif Laâbi and Abraham Serfaty, the editors of *Souffles-Anfas*. What had begun as a platform for literary and linguistic experimentation, rooted in Abdellatif Laâbi's vision of cultural emancipation, had by the late 1960s transformed into a politically charged publication at the forefront of anti-colonial and Tricontinental movements. Starting in 1968, the journal embraced a more militant stance, expanding its scope to include revolutionary tracts, essays on Third World solidarity, and critiques of imperialist structures (Harrison, and Villa-Ignacio, 2016). By 1971, the launch of its Arabic-language counterpart, *Anfas*, marked a pivotal moment, as it directly engaged with Moroccan and pan-Arab audiences. This transformation was compounded by external geopolitical developments, particularly the Arab defeat in 1967, which catalyzed *Souffles*' embrace of a revolutionary language. Over its brief but impactful existence, the journal became a hub for diverse voices, publishing works by figures like Adonis, Amílcar Cabral, and Tahar Ben Jelloun, and addressing topics ranging from Brazilian cinema novo to the Black Power, and Pan-Africanism (Aïdi, 2023). This ideological evolution, however, exposed the tensions at the heart of the *Souffles-Anfas* project. While its early issues championed linguistic hybridity and pluralism—embodying Khatibi's "double critique"—the journal's later turn toward Arabic as the primary medium of expression betrayed these initial ideals. The editorial board increasingly framed Arabic as the language of resistance, rejecting French as a colonial remnant. This shift, while ideologically consistent with its anti-imperialist stance, underscored the paradox of a journal that had achieved much of its influence through its linguistic ideals that conceived language as a medium. This tension is perhaps most evident in the final issue of *Souffles*, where the editors openly acknowledged the contradiction of their position: "Despite our ideological and cultural commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle, our ideals were flagrantly compromised by the fact that we expressed them in a foreign language" (*Souffles* 22, p. 240). In advocating for Arabic as the sole vehicle of cultural and political liberation, *Souffles* effectively abandoned the inclusive linguistic experimentation that had initially defined its vision. This pivot, coupled with

the Moroccan regime's harsh repression, led to the journal's eventual demise. Laâbi was arrested in January 1972, tortured, and sentenced to ten years in prison. After serving eight and a half years and having been removed from the National Education lists, he left for France. Serfaty spent 17 years behind bars before being exiled.

Amid resurging debates about decolonization and linguistic identity, the journal's trajectory provides critical insights. Morocco's ongoing "linguistic drama" –a term used by Hisham Aïdi in the inaugural issue of *Souffles-Monde*– continues to evolve, as reflected in the 2011 constitutional recognition of Amazigh as an official language and ongoing debates about *Darija*, standard Arabic, and French. In 2023, the *Souffles* project was revived in digital form, addressing contemporary linguistic and political challenges. The inaugural issue features essays by scholars like Ali Mouryf, who examines Amazigh identity through the history of education, and Yousra Hamdaoui, who explores pan-African publishing and the circulation of Moroccan literature. These contributions reaffirm the enduring relevance of *Souffles*' original mission: to interrogate identity, foster solidarity, and imagine new forms of cultural and political liberation. As a testament to its time and a beacon for the future, *Souffles* reminds us that the struggle for liberation is as much about reclaiming language as it is about reimagining the self and the collective in a constantly shifting world.

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This volume examines the interdisciplinary nexus of literature and geography through a multifaceted lens, blending theories from cultural studies, narratology, and spatial analysis. Beginning with a systemic understanding of literary geography, the chapters explore imaginative, political, and ecological landscapes, emphasizing their relational and dynamic nature. Contributions analyze the production of place and space, highlighting their role in shaping cultural, historical, and environmental narratives.

Key topics include the interplay between memory, identity, and travel in literary geographies, the cultural significance of territorial disputes, and the transformative potential of ecological narratives in the Anthropocene. Methodological frameworks range from geocriticism and literary cartography to ecocritical and geopolitical analyses. Case studies span diverse contexts, such as French 18th-century travel narratives, Etruscan agricultural practices, and Hayao Miyazaki's ethical landscapes. Themes of power, positionality, and environmental responsibility are examined through postcolonial, feminist, and ecological perspectives, illustrating the creative and critical capacities of literature to reshape spatial imaginaries. The volume introduces innovative concepts, including the cultural critique of geopolitics in avant-garde aesthetics, mnemonic geographies in Jewish narratives, and urban-nature dynamics in Romantic fairy tales.

The contributions underscore the ethical and performative dimensions of literary geographies, revealing how storytelling fosters new spatial understandings and responses to global challenges. By reimagining real and fictional spaces this work demonstrates the transformative interplay of literature and geography in shaping our understanding of history, culture, and the environment.

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